

Grant Task Force Report to Commission-- Planning Proposal

Recommendation: Fund the proposal. [Note: There are minor corrections and a clarification needed in the budget.]

Legal Applicant: Haystack Mountain School of Crafts

Application ID: 23AC256345

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

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Cost Reimbursement

Federal Focus Area: Education, Economic Opportunity, Capacity Building

Commission Priorities: Workforce Development

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

Proposed Dates: 08/15/2023 to 06/15/2024

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

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	39,935		16,973
Member Support	n/a		n/a
Indirect (Admin)	608		2,433
CNCS Award amount	40,543	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	19,406
% sharing proposed	67.63%		32.37%
% share required	n/a*		n/a*
Cost-per-member proposed	n/a	*This grant would use the ARP match replacement option to cover the local share, so it is really all AC funds.	

Program Description (executive summary):

Haystack Mountain School of Crafts proposes to develop an AmeriCorps program to serve Hancock County, Maine. It will address workforce development and access to STEM education that impacts the lives of youth and young adults in the AmeriCorps focus area of workforce development. The AmeriCorps federal ARP investment \$60,000 will support planning activities carried out in collaboration with the Haystack Fab Lab. No AmeriCorps members will be needed to execute this plan.

The Haystack Fab Lab holds the potential to positively impact the local community by promoting workforce development and supporting economically disadvantaged youth through STEM education programs. The Fab Lab's mission is to provide comprehensive STEM education training and skill development, which addresses the lack of access to STEM education and training in underserved communities. By leveraging the resources and expertise of the Haystack Fab Lab, a community Fab Lab can deliver hands-on workshops and training programs in coding, computer-aided design (CAD), 3D printing, and robotics. In addition to technical training, the Fab Lab offers a platform for mentoring, coaching, and skill development, which enhances participants' employability and job prospects. This program is well-suited to host AmeriCorps service members to expand and deliver its programmatic mission.

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.

Local schools, job centers, and employers in Hancock County, MIT Bits and Atoms program

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.*

CATEGORY	Rating	Points
Rationale & Approach/Program Design Section (50%)		
Need and Target Community(ies)	Adequate	11.25
Response to Need	Strong	15
Readiness for Planning	Strong	15
Expertise and Training	Adequate	3.75
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Strong	25
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Adequate	18.75
Total		88.75
Recommend for further review.		

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	Strong	18
• Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)	Adequate	2.25
• Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse	Adequate	2.25
• Potential for innovation and/or replication	Adequate	2.25
• Strength of evidence planning process will succeed	Adequate	2.25

Preferences from RFA Announcement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together 	Adequate	7.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum 	Strong	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> from an organization led by or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities and/or people 	Adequate	7.5
Financial Plan	Adequate	11.25
Fiscal Systems		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements 	Adequate	3.75
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial management practices 	Strong	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial status/stability 	Strong	5
Grant Readiness	Adequate	11.25
Total Task Force Score		88.25
Peer Review Score		88.75
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)		177

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward or fund
- 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.

- Minor errors in budget calculation need correction. Clarification of match replacement amount needed given there is a local share entered in the Source of Funds screen. National Service Criminal History Background Checks are not required for planning grants – item can be removed. Indirect cost allocation needs clarification.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design.

Need and Target Community(ies)

- The only reason I haven’t delivered a "Strong" rating is that the target population, while clearly identified as economically disadvantaged youth ages 12-24 in underserved communities, could have been more specifically identified. The application says "many" of the 16-24 population lack a high school diploma or post-secondary education. How many? As another example, the applicant claims that job market participation by the 16-24 population is below the state average. What is that percentage and how far below the average does it represent? This is just fine tuning, I admit, but in my view it would strengthen the application.
- This section of the application responds to all criteria– no omissions or additions. The argument shows this element has had some success or could possibly succeed as described. The applicant outlined its intended community- Deer Isle and surrounding communities. The current job market is heavily affected by climate change and the economic disparity in the community does not lead to diverse work opportunities for young people- some statistics are listed to assert claim While not entirely communicating the “severe or prevalent” it is clear how the applicant would provide a benefit to the local communities. The applicant does not specify any impacted individuals consulted not specific organizations currently working in the sector though has expressed intentions to partner with schools and job training agencies. The applicant outlined their intended demographic of youth but does not specify if or how there would be a system or determining qualifications of “economically disadvantaged” or how no versus low cost would be factored.

Response to Need

- Ultimately, the planning effort is intended to result in a broader provision of existing programs and services related to comprehensive STEM education and training and skills development through the Fab Lab. This scaling up of the Fab Lab offerings will expose youth and young adults training and education in the use of computer programs, digital design, 3D printing, electronics, advanced manufacturing, robotics, and integration, as an alternate pathway to employment and career development. The Haystack Fab Lab has extensive experience in this area and a planning grant would permit the creation of additional partnerships in the delivery of their educational services-- all well described in this section.
- This section of the application responds to all criteria. The argument shows this element has had some success or could possibly succeed as described. The highest resource for the project needed is capacity that could be met through adding AC Members. Having more people/members would allow more partner sites and programs to run concurrently. AC members would be largely the mechanism of delivery of services of the program. Applicant has worked with several local schools that would be interested in continuing to work with applicant and could be a site for the AC members work, though they have not been listed to meet the need on their own. The scope of work proposed to be taken on by AC members is quite robust and potentially overly ambitious for the demographic of AC applicant but could be refined in planning process. Outside of the expertise of the local need from job centers and schools the applicant is the only listed resource of expertise in terms of the resource and program development outlined.

Readiness for Planning

- The Haystack Fab Lab has an existing network of community stakeholders and partners that they will expand upon through this planning process. They propose a community program vision that relies upon their existing expertise in delivering in-classroom instruction, hands-on workshops, internships, after-school programs, and training in the areas cited earlier, all to the end of improving participants' employability and job prospects. They are well-equipped over their 12-year operation to undertake this planning effort.
- This section of the application responds to all criteria. The argument shows this element has had some success or could possibly succeed as described. The applicant's mission and the proposed work of AC members is clear- implementing stem education opportunities. Currently the applicant has limited experience in formal volunteer initiatives- only 2 weeks per year to preform lab maintenance and other facility needs, however the applicant appears to have a database and system that could be adapted in the planning period to meet the needs of the AC program. The applicant will need to- by their own account spend time to develop more criteria and systems specific to volunteers and AC members. The applicant does outline similar models such as internships in another section- though the intention of the internship is shorter and for younger individuals. The lead individuals appear to have robust experience in their field and are both AC alumni- While the applicant outlines their intention to engage the advisory committee and the types of individuals to attend, they do specify who will be there, how they will be recruited or any tool to assess that all voices are represented.

Expertise and Training

- The establishment of the Fab Lab was done in collaboration with MIT in 2011, using MIT's technical expertise, and also relying upon other national models for the Lab's creation. Dr. James Rutter, the Project Lead, offers sound personal expertise and training, supported by Dr. Scott Byrd, a research scientist, staff, and an advisory body of community stakeholders; this lends credibility to their notion that they have sufficient training and expertise overall to conduct the next phase of foundational work to broaden their services.
- This section responds to many but not all the required elements/criteria. Some text is not relevant or does not add to the argument. The applicant and lead faculty outline thorough experience in developing theory of change and logic models and appear to be experts in their field of STEM education. The many initiatives taken on by the applicant demonstrate skill in developing outcomes, outcomes and frequency of activities however does not have experience specifically as it pertains to AC programs members or general volunteers as outlined in the criteria. The applicant alludes to but does not specify the following expertise: Designing

AmeriCorps member training and supervision plans Establishing or negotiating agreements with partners on roles, responsibilities, and commitment of resources. Develop a plan to keep the community and stakeholders aware of AmeriCorps activities and accomplishments Design a system for internal monitoring of program compliance and accountability Establish a protocol for securing the grantee share (match support) for the program.

Organizational Capability.

Organizational Background and Staffing

- Haystack itself opened in 1961 as an international craft school. Their Fab Lab has twelve years under their belt in STEM education and training. They have scientists externally and internally with whom they work to shape the Fab Lab offerings. They have experience, knowledge, capacity, and will to extend their reach to positive ends.
- the argument shows this element shows high levels of success or highly likely to be successful. The applicant outlines the extensive experience in the area of the project and appears to have the needed staff to engage in planning. The challenge of the applicant currently operating seasonally seems to present a pressing challenge but could be worked through during the planning process. The applicant does appear to be early in the planning of the program.

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 %)

- I see nothing out of the ordinary in this presentation
- This section of the application responds to all criteria The argument shows this element has had some success or could possibly succeed as described. The budget is simple but straight forward and meets the outlined allowable costs. I would be curious for the applicant to expound on what the workshop supply fees are as it amounts to over 5% of the budget-however the information as is adequate.

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 (2) No (0)

Comments:

- They have a history of doing what they propose to do on a broader scale. They have excellent expertise in the STEM education and training field. They have identified the need for youth and young adults who are economically disadvantaged in Hancock County, and an existing network within which to work as they plan for expansion. They have lined up the need to conduct asset-mapping, building upon their network of stakeholders, furthering their STEM education programs, creating evaluation tools, and conducting comprehensive strategic planning. They have a vision, the means to make a difference, a population in need, and the capacity to reach their goals.
- While the applicant does seem to currently lack expertise or readiness in executing an AmeriCorps program they appear to have the needed to staffing, program idea and partners to execute planning effectively if funded. Given more time, technical assistance and funding, concerns around program could be addressed during this planning phase.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- The proposal was very clearly presented. I did not have a lack of clarity at any point in reading the application, only a desire for more specific information in certain instances.
- Some of the more technical aspects would be helpful to clarify but does not preclude them from success if funded. It would be useful for the applicant to more specifically identify some the process used in identifying partners, students, or stake holders for their committee. Creating or choosing a specific metric or system of

determining “economically disadvantaged” or how the selections are targeting the key populations aside from geography would be useful, additionally clarifying skills in specific terms if AC would help moving forward.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- This is a strong proposal that we should most definitely support.
 - The applicant clearly has a deep expertise in the education and STEM Programing and impressive ties to initiatives in the education space. While the applicant has experience as an Alumni, it seems important to center the volunteerism and AC elements moving forward, or more specifically expounding on the internship program as a starting place. The consultant appears to be on a limited basis, and otherwise is being taken on by current staff with many other responsibilities- perhaps expounding on other supports would be advised
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Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Section A: Proposal Alignment with Funding Priority and Model

- Regarding the degree to which the community need targeted by the proposal is aligned with one of the funding priorities stated in the RFP – The Haystack Fab Lab as stated in the overview would focus on promoting workforce development and support economically disadvantage youth through STEM education programs and to ensure project sustainability and long term impact for the communities served. This aligns the program with the National Service focus areas of Economic opportunity, Education and state focus area of Capacity building.
- To the extent that the program serves the communities described 2522.450(c) in the area served received a rating of adequate due to the small area served. Though the program stated it would be rolled out county wide (Hancock County), it has focused on the Blue Hill Peninsula/Deer Isle and local surrounding area. Concern is how they classified economically disadvantaged youth 16-25. What percentage is that of the total community it plans to serve. They could have made a better case with the addition of statistics in the proposal.
- Similarly, to the extent to which the proposal adds to the AmeriCorps grant portfolio goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse. The project received an adequate. From the write up in the project proposal could be an innovative use of national service and, if successful, could feasibly be replicated in other parts of the state as well as nationally as mentioned under readiness for planning. In regards to the strength of evidence the program planning can be successfully carried out. The proposal stated under Service History that Haystack has been working closely with the target population and community stakeholders for over 10 years, so they know the challenges and opportunities. Under program experience was stated that the Haystack Fab Lab provided comprehensive educational workshops and capacity-building initiatives for the economically disadvantaged youth residing in Deer Isle and the Blue Hill Peninsula. Also stated that the relationship between Haystack and MIT's Center for Bits and Atoms has been a valuable resource for the project since the founding of the Haystack Fab Lab in 2011. This collaboration has fostered strong ties with the broader Fab Lab community, with Haystack hosting MIT graduate students, post-doctoral students, and professionals each year to collaborate on educational programming. So with strong relationships already established a path for a successful program could be established.
- There appears to be a core of strong leadership. Haystack's Technology Director, Dr. James Rutter, will serve as the project's lead staff. Haystack's Fab Lab Community Assistant (Phoebe Zildjian) will also play a key role in the planning project. Finally, an external consultant, Dr. Scott Byrd, will play a major role in the planning project and assist Haystack with developing the necessary systems to facilitate an AmeriCorps Service project. And under Staffing - a significant strength of Haystack's staff is that there is a lot of experience and technical knowledge related to developing and running community-based programs like the one described in the proposal. Haystack also has a core administrative staff and is a small organization that can work closely with each other efficiently and effectively. The organization also has experience with other federal

programs and reporting requirements which is also a plus. In particular they mentioned a NOAA - MARINE DEBRIS & PLASTIC RECYCLING INITIATIVE. In 2021, Maine Sea Grant and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts received funding from Maine's Department of Environmental Protection to develop a system for recycling plastic waste from the aquaculture and fishing industries. The budget narrative look good and the only concern was a lack of trackable volunteer times and positions.

- Would like to have seen more information on who is being served and how they plan to identify these youth.
- The program is directly aligned with the VM priority of workforce development.
- Hancock County qualifies as a distressed area per staff report;
- The focus on stem learning and high-tech fabrication is something new to our grant portfolio and appears to be potentially quite innovative; although the program is potentially similar to some other mentorship programs we have sponsored, it is unique in a number of aspects. At the same time, this does not seem to be the type of program that could be easily replicated elsewhere in Maine, at least on a short-term basis, given its reliance on a high-tech lab and highly trained STEM leadership.
- The proposal is aligned with the mission of the agency, particularly its Fab Lab and its effort to expand involvement in the local community.
- The organization has strong relationships with local schools, businesses, and related groups and is tied in to a national fab lab network. Currently offers a high school internship program and after school program.
- Haystack is exceptionally well funded and financially stable with a large endowment. Given this, local share should not be a problem.
- Although the organization has a small staff, it seems to be generally stable and the organization has the ability to cover for staff turnover and the ability to quickly recruit replacements.
- The staff lead for project planning has been working closely with a group of stakeholders who will be the basis for the advisory committee to work on this project.
- Haystack has some experience with volunteers; however, that experience is in a quite different context primarily involving short-term volunteers coming to campus to prepare the site for sessions. It also has some experience with high school interns. Volunteer management is an area that will require some work to build on what systems and procedures are currently in place.
- Haystack staff appear quite well prepared to engage in the planning effort. The role of the various partners will be an area that has to be developed as the planning proceeds.

Section B: Preferences from RFA Announcement

- The proposal is from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together - The planning grant will evaluate and utilize an existing community Fab Lab managed by Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, which has the potential to offer hands-on workshops, mentoring, and apprenticeship programs in a variety of STEM topics. The Fab Lab is well-positioned to work directly with community stakeholders on real-world projects that are contextually relevant, benefiting the youth as a more engaging learning opportunity, as well as a resource to community organizations and businesses to help solve problems. The project team will work with local schools, job centers, and employers to identify services and skills that can be integrated into the Fab Lab, aligned with the needs of the communities. Part of this planning work will research barriers and challenges around STEM education and workforce development. The planning team will work closely with a group of stakeholders to identify essential skills to be integrated into mentoring programs at the Fab Lab. The campus is located on Deer Isle in Hancock County with the idea to spread the program through Hancock County with the AmeriCorp support. Under Overview - The Haystack Fab Lab holds the potential to positively impact the local community by promoting workforce development and supporting economically disadvantaged youth through STEM education

programs. The Fab Lab's mission is to provide comprehensive STEM education training and skill development, which addresses the lack of access to STEM education and training in underserved communities. By leveraging the resources and expertise of the Haystack Fab Lab, a community Fab Lab can deliver hands-on workshops and training programs in coding, computer-aided design (CAD), 3D printing, and robotics. And Under NEEDS and Target Communities - This proposed AmeriCorps program aims to address the economic challenges faced by Deer Isle and the surrounding rural communities of Hancock County in Maine. These challenges arise due to the shifting climate's impact on the fishing industry, a lack of workforce diversity, and inadequate STEM education for the upcoming generation of skilled professionals. This program will provide skill building and workforce development opportunities, focusing on economically disadvantaged youth in underserved communities to counter the effects of historical and systemic inequities. The goal is to break the poverty cycle and foster economic stability and growth within these communities.

- Have they considered partnerships with higher education (community colleges)?
- The proposal is not from a partnership or coalition, although the program itself if implemented may have elements of such in its design. It is not from an organization led or supporting historically marginalized communities. It is located in Hancock County.

Section C: Financial Plan

- All of the above criteria were mostly met in the proposal- All amounts seemed to correspond to the more detailed explanation, however the calculation for CNCs and Commission indirect is off from the amounts I came up with (\$420.12 for commission and \$1680.47 for CNCs using the RFA). All looked to be allowable. I can only assume these are funded from ARP funds so a direct match of the grantee share is not needed. (\$10,000 in Kind match versus program grantee match of \$19,406) There is a 30% match which is needed for ARP funding (actually 32.27% Match) of the Grantee to CNCs funds. Budget is simple and straight forward
- Budget seems to be appropriate to the effort. • Local share will be in-kind personnel and equipment costs.

Section D: Fiscal Systems

- For the first statement - The capacity of the sponsor's financial management system to comply with federal requirements for accounting for public grant funds as evidenced by Operation and Financial Management Survey responses – I rated this as adequate – Even though the organization is familiar with handling federal grants (2021, Maine Sea Grant and Haystack Mountain School of Crafts received funding from Maine's Department of Environmental Protection to develop a system for recycling plastic waste from the aquaculture and fishing industries) and the reporting necessary with those grants they have not established Standards for use of Federal funds. The strength of the sponsoring organization's financial status looks strong and the audit report was clean- no findings. The 990 agrees with the audit. The organization looks to have strong financial backing.
- The agency's finances are extremely strong. The only area that may not be as strong relates to federal grant management. The grant experience discussed in the interview was a grant from NOAA where Haystack is a sub-grantee, and that grant is still active and has not been completed. I anticipate the agency will have no problem adjusting to AC's requirements, but direct federal grantee experience was not indicated. Section

Section E: Grant Readiness

- The agency will be building on some of its current efforts with local educational institutions. It appears to have a strong network of stakeholders. Staff responsibilities seem clear and some staff have previous AC experience.
- Chose adequate for this statement, since in section 2 of the Essential Practices of Volunteer Management several (14) elements were only partially implemented and 8 elements were not being done at all. In section one there was a strong indication of the organization's ability in financial systems, leadership support and partnerships to make the organization successful in the Planning Grant. In the statement made in the narrative- the program will be able to leverage existing relationships and over 10 years of work and have the

potential to design and implement a unique program that may serve as a model for other communities in Maine or rural communities in the United States. Also in the narrative it stated that the service member would also conduct a community asset mapping and needs assessment, meet regularly with community stakeholders, participate in stakeholder group meetings and brainstorming sessions, generate reports and findings from field research and observations, research other models of community engagement from other organizations, and help with creating a program manual with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This should also in-compass the section 2 deficiencies of volunteer management.