

Grant Task Force Report to Commission-- Planning Proposal

Recommendation: Forward or fund only if corrections/clarifications/conditions can be negotiated.

Legal Applicant: Maine Prisoner Re-entry Network

Application ID: 23AC256724

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

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Cost Reimbursement

Federal Focus Area: Healthy Futures, Economic Opportunity, Capacity Building

Commission Priorities: Public Health

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

Proposed Dates: 09/01/2023 to 07/01/2024

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

	CNCS		Local Share
Operating	45,676		10,600
Member Support	n/a		n/a
Indirect (Admin)	693		4,935
CNCS Award amount	46,369	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	15,535
% sharing proposed	74.9%		25.1%
% 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):

Maine Prisoner Re-Entry Network proposes to develop an AmeriCorps program to serve the state of Maine. It will address difficulties with community reintegration after incarceration that impacts the lives of formerly incarcerated citizens in the AmeriCorps focus area(s) of Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures and Capacity Building. The AmeriCorps federal ARP investment \$60,000.00 will support planning activities carried out in collaboration with the Maine Department of Corrections, the three regional workforce boards in Maine and their WIOA funding subrecipients, the Maine Association of Recovery Residences, several Maine Career Centers, and other community stakeholders. No AmeriCorps members will be needed to execute this plan.

The focus of the proposed initiative will be reintegration into Maine's communities during and following a period of justice involvement. The Welcome Home: Acclimating to Living Life Outside Prison (WHALLOP) program will be an ongoing and long-term support with a focus on increasing resiliency through local capacity building that is rooted in the principle that those who have lived experience with incarceration and have demonstrated success in navigating the various hurdles and stigmas associated with a criminal history are in the best possible position to teach others how to do the same.

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.

Maine Department of Corrections; 3 unnamed regional workforce boards; Maine Association of Recovery Residences; several unnamed Maine Career Centers; Eastern Maine Development Corporation; and Goodwill Industries; state Office of Behavioral Health, State Prisons, Healthy Acadia.

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)	Weak	7.5
Response to Need	Weak	7.5
Readiness for Planning	Adequate	11.25
Expertise and Training	Weak	2.5
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Weak	12.5
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Adequate	18.75
Total		60
Recommend for further review with hesitation.		

Task Force Consensus Score. *The Task Force reviewers assess the additional technical criteria that states are directed to consider by the CFR.*

	Quality Rating	Score
Proposal Alignment and Model		
• Alignment with Funding Priorities	Adequate	13.5
• Serve communities described in 2522.450(c)	Weak	1.5
• Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse	Adequate	2.25
• Potential for innovation and/or replication	Weak	1.5
• Strength of evidence planning process will succeed	Weak	1.5

Preferences from RFA Announcement		
• from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together	Adequate	7.5
• serve, counties classified as 6, 7, or 8 on the USDA rural-urban continuum	Adequate	7.5
• from an organization led by or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities and/or people	Strong Adequate	10
Financial Plan		11.25
Fiscal Systems		
• capacity of financial management system to comply with federal requirements	Adequate	3.75
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial management practices	Incomplete/ Nonresponsive	0
• strength of the sponsoring organization’s financial status/stability	Weak	2.5
Grant Readiness	Weak	7.5
Total Task Force Score		70.25
Peer Review Score		60
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)		130.25

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward or fund
- Forward or fund only if corrections/clarifications/conditions can be 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.

- 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.

Funding is contingent on two conditions:

- A mentor/coach with nonprofit and fund development experience be hired to support development of the organization’s systems and capacity to submit a competitive proposal in the operating grant competition.
- As part of the planning grant activities, the organization consider partnering with a fiscal agent whose human resource and financial management systems have strong and federally compliant performance.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Program Design.

Need and Target Community(ies)

- The narrative was describing an incarceration process and a discussion of theories surrounding what may precipitate crime, rather than providing data on those post-incarceration persons who receive no services/support, or those who receive some support, but eventually return to prison. Very little relevant data provided.
- 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 argument does not demonstrate this element has succeeded or would succeed as described. The community described by applicant refers to individuals in Maine exiting soon to exit or have exited the prison system. Applicant asserts data at a high level of information that is not specific to Maine/Maine residence. Additional data does not add to the argument of specific populations to be served by project. Applicant shares the hierarchy of stress a individual form the justice system may face-many of which operate at a nebulous and high level emotional level. This information while interesting and

may be able to attest across needs is difficult to associate with local data points or outcomes desired by AC programs. The applicant has served many clients that would benefit such a program but has not communicated the consultation of how the program was designed. The applicant clearly communicated current agencies working in services that benefit this population and how this project would more specifically target the need.

Response to Need

- Same concern as above. I did not find a persuasive data-driven presentation as to how great the need is. What, for example, is the failure rate of existing programs, also tied to the recidivism rate. The claim that there is a lack of a holistic approach is entirely believable, but I am uncertain from the presentation as to how this planning grant will remedy that problem.
- 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 argument does not demonstrate this element has succeeded or would succeed as described. While a peer-to-peer model is explored as important to the project the applicant isn't clear on how an AC program or member would be the key resource in addressing the need outlined. The applicant outlines, the program would engage in peer-to-peer model- coaching, mentorship, social relationships and assistance in navigating resources. Similar to case management and a counseling sponsor

Readiness for Planning

- While they are clear about their aim, namely to reduce the recidivism rate in Maine, I am less certain as to how they intend to accomplish this.
- The applicant outlines the programs connection with the federal priorities of healthy futures and local goals of reducing substance use. The applicant currently works with Volunteers and engages them multiple times a year in training. However, does not include the system for documentation of time or outcomes. \ The applicant identified key current staff to take on the current work load and was able to specify the make-up of the advisory committee.

Expertise and Training

- This section might even be substandard, but I have already been critiquing the application severely. I did not find strong expertise in this section. Most of the training referenced is provided by other partners (ex., CIPSS and CCAR).
- The applicant was able to address criteria at a high level, and can address the outcomes of having in the past been through a system of an AC grant so is familiar with the model. The applicant currently has some informal practices and documents that could be modified to accommodate the needs of AC programs and Members but does not currently operate in the formal capacity that would be needed for Ac grant administration. The following criteria was unaddressed : 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

- This is a small organization consisting of a two-person Executive Team and a nine-person Advisory Board. It is also a relatively young organization. What i could not uncover from the narrative was the breadth of their work.
- 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 argument does not demonstrate this element has succeeded or would succeed as described. The applicant is able to speak to the expertise hosted by staff and board members of the program. The applicant discusses its on-going growth and the flat nature of leadership, but is not specific in the link to how the management structure or expertise could make successful this project. The applicant appears to be still developing formal systems and does not address systems for collecting information or reporting.

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 %)

- 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 budget is simple but straight forward and meets the outlined allowable costs.

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 (1) No (1)

Comments:

- The organization seems ill-prepared for the scope of the task they propose to undertake. They seem to lack capacity even for this planning effort or an understanding of what their focus will be. My concern was a suggestion of heavy reliance upon other organizations that already operate in this narrow field to accomplish the planning and implementation. Is what they propose in fact duplicative of existing support services or supplementary to those services. The application lacked a clear statement of how they expect to achieve the holistic approach they are seeking.
- The intention of the program would be to allow the applicant to develop over the year in the areas that are weaker. I think there is enough information to with much technical support and guidance fund the applicant to plan for further programming. The applicant speaks to a specific need that is not being similarly addressed by any other sector and is using a format that is not typically lent to an AC/federal grant model. With more time and resources, I believe the concept could be better tailored to be successful for both parties. The applicant has demonstrated that while they are still growing, and perhaps lack the experience in applying for this format of grant, they excel at relationship building and have many stakeholders and partners that I think could assist in the program success if funded.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- The applicant would benefit from being able to clarify the work they are looking to do in specific concrete terms in activities, outcomes, and data relevant to specific regions. Additionally, as the applicant works through developing formal structures, tools or procedures need to be more clearly outlined and explained.

What else do you have to say about this proposal?

- Overall, I regret being so harsh in my critique, but I do believe they are not prepared to undertake the planning until more focus is achieved and concrete actions are stipulated.
- The applicant self-identified previous challenges navigating certain aspects of the application and logic model, and could benefit from further support navigating the models, techniques, and tools. It would be my recommendation if funded to encourage the applicant to adjust the budget to accommodate training for staff to become more familiar with formal processes, tools, documentation. The applicant has high degree of understanding for the community they serve, how to build relationships and networks and would benefit in this technical year in having resources dedicated to complimentary skill sets. The proposed project approaches an important and specific need in a holistic model that is difficult to translate into outcomes and specifics, while my overall scoring using the rubric reflects the formal assessment I believe there is room to build on the current opportunity.
- In the context of the application, they say that, in one instance, another organization is providing services to some of the recently released individuals and the applicant would “pick up the slack.” What is not discernable is how many people will they work with, who does what – they are coming into a space already occupied.
- There is a sense the applicant can see a planning outcome but portraying that in a grant applicant format needs development in this applicant. This one did not follow the prompts or provide the information. Can

they develop this ability during the planning grant so an operating grant would make a strong case? Maybe need a coach or technical writer to help them translate what they experience and envision onto paper.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Section A: Proposal Alignment with Funding Priority and Model

- The degree to which the community need targeted by the proposal is aligned with one of the funding priorities stated in the RFP – The proposal falls partially (Thus an adequate rating) into a number of the funding priorities – among those are Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures and commission priority of Public Health. Extent to which the applicant proposes to serve communities described in 2522.450(c). Again an adequate rating since the narrative spent a lot of time on the theory of why people get incarcerated versus spend more about how the program would help support the individuals, 2522,450(c) A severely economically distressed community (Former prisoner re-entry). The extent to which the proposal adds to the AmeriCorps grant portfolio goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse. Here the demographics are incarcerated individuals re-entering society and being looked at for the entire state. The extent to which the proposal could be an innovative use of national service and, if successful, could feasibly be replicated in other parts of the state. If successful, the program and fully developed could be easily portable to other states and serve as an example of integration. The strength of evidence the program planning can be successfully carried out. Here I have given this a weak rating. Understandable this is a relatively a new program that still need a lot of planning and has a very small budget. Understanding the requirements of a National Service program is not fully indicated in the applicant’s narrative or the bookkeeping that also follows.
- The goal is to reduce recidivism, but the application provides little to no data about this target population. How are they being identified to be served? As they serving all who are reentering into the community or just some? Data in terms of post incarceration is lacking. How did they determine this was the need? No rural preference claimed. What about other programs already in place, coaching, mentoring, are they adding to that in some way or developing their own program? How specifically will this money and this program reduce recidivism rates? There are not a lot of formal systems in place, and this is a very small organization with some familiarity of AC. What are the regional workforce boards? Who are they? And WIOA funding recipients, who are they and how do they flow into this work?
- The program’s focus his healthy futures. It also would address economic development and is related to workforce development
- The program is state-wide and the extent to which it would serve distressed communities.
- The program would contribute to the balance of our portfolio by addressing an under-served and marginalized community.
- The program could be innovative in its approach to assisting the reintegration of criminally justice involved individuals into the community through what appears to be a peer mentorship/navigating system. While it is proposed to operate statewide, the extent of the population needing services is unclear. As a result, it is possible, although perhaps unlikely given the limited number of groups operating in this context, that it might serve as a model that others might emulate.
- While the agency is still in the process of developing its first strategic plan, this program fits well within its mission to reduce recidivism in Maine through local approaches to build community and bridge the gap between communities and individuals reentering from the criminal justice system.
- While relatively new, the agency has a developed relationship with important stakeholders and clients within the larger criminal justice/corrections arena and is currently serving clients. • Financial stability is an area of concern given the youth of the organization and lack of information about its financial status given no audit and no detailed 990. During the interview, the agency noted that one of the planning tasks will be to identify funding sources for the program to meet the local share.

- To date, leadership of the organization has been stable. However, core executive staff is fairly small. • The agency proposes to include many of the groups it has existing relationships within the planning process. The anticipated members of the Planning Team are outlined in their proposal.
- While the agency was initially all volunteer and continues to use volunteers, it does not have a formalized volunteer management system.
- Given the agencies relationships with various stakeholders, it appears likely that the potential partners in planning and implementing the program will be able to work together to refine the program and clarify exactly how it will be organized and implemented.

Section B: Preferences from RFA Announcement

- Proposal is from a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together to implement a common approach to a community problem. – This rated adequate to weak but the organization does have a few common partnerships noted in the write-up such as the Department of Corrections, Eastern Maine Development Corporation and Goodwill Industries. There appears to be little community support at this point and the focus of prisoner re-entry network has fallen to the applicant. Preference for rural-urban has been rated as adequate since this will be a statewide program and the preferred counties are in the state though not a focus of the applicant of one of the preferred counties. I have rated the Proposal is from an organization led by or primarily supporting historically marginalized communities and/or people strong since the leadership comes from the community they are trying to serve and understands the issues they are trying to address.
- The applicant has strong partnerships and experience with the identified population.
- The proposal is not from a partnership or coalition, although the program itself if implemented may have elements of such in its design. While it may have a presence in the designated rural communities, it is not clear that it would. It is from an organization led or supporting historically marginalized communities.

Section C: Financial Plan

- I have rated this section adequate but could have been convinced to go weak since there are several errors in the budget such as Travel costs, Admin/Indirect costs calculations, Fringe costs calculations. The applicant also said they were going to use ARP funding but also shows an additional Grant for funding to meet the match. The budgeted amounts look reasonable though supplies may be a little low.
- Fairly basic financial plan. More questions about the applicant's capacity, expertise, formal systems to implement this grant. May need a high level of technical assistance.
- Budget seems to be appropriate to the effort.
- • Some minor errors need to be corrected
- • Sewall Foundation Grant is IDed for local match (which may not be required?)

Section D: Fiscal Systems

- From the Operation and Financial Management Survey responses the organization meets the criteria for handling and complying with Federal requirements for accounting for public grant funds. However, it has not had an audit done and it has only a postcard 990 – meaning funding is less than \$50,000. I could not ascertain the financial stability of the organization.
- They have not been through an audit. Fiscal seems fairly basic.
- It's hard to evaluate the agency's fiscal management systems absent information from an audit or financial review. They indicate that they can comply with accounting requirements and are currently managing and MDHHS grant and have apparently had/have a USDOJ grant, so it appears they can adequately manage and account for grant funds

Section E: Grant Readiness

- The applicant appears to have strong partnerships throughout the state.
- Based on the lack of information in the application, it seems that the agency is actually entering into a pre-planning stage. The exact nature of the program they are proposing is not detailed; the information

supporting need (which I don't question), isn't very specific to Maine, and the intervention is unclear with no data about program models, effectiveness of interventions, etc. I would very much like to support this effort because of the well-known issues associated with recidivism and the population they propose to serve (and would be open to doing so), it seems that this might be a higher risk proposal than the other two planning grants we are reviewing. Similarly, it is likely that staff would have to spend more time working with this group.

- The organization still communicates to their board verbally as stated in the interview. There appears to be very little written documentation or requirements to do so. It does look like they issue quarterly narratives on their other Grants. The organization needs a lot of support to prep to be able to manage AmeriCorps members. Volunteers to date are managed by the individual project managers but with a small volunteer pool this may work for them at this point. Consistent volunteer management across the organization was not mentioned. The strategic plan was not developed at the time for this review, though the objectives and desired outcomes were mentioned in the narrative. This is a relative new organization and these deficiencies would be expected as they grow and get these systems in place.