

Grant Proposal Report to Commission from Task Force

Recommendation: Fund with correction to member performance measure

Legal Applicant: Main Street Skowhegan

Project Name: Main Street Skowhegan

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

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Amount
 Cost Reimbursement
 Ed Award Only

Applicant type: New (no prior AC experience)
 Re-compete (# of yrs: 6)

Proposed Dates: 01/01/2025 to 12/31/2027
 Submitted request is for Yr [1]

Federal Focus Area: Healthy Futures

Commission priorities: Public Health

Local Share Required in Budget: Yes No

Source of Funds detail required: Yes No

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

	CNCS		Local Share				
Operating							
Member Support							
Indirect (Admin)							
CNCS Award amount	\$216,000	Total Local Share (cash + in-kind)	\$99,500 listed in Source of Funds screen				
% sharing proposed	n/a						
% share required	n/a						
Cost-per-member proposed	\$27,000						
max allowed	\$27,000						
Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years:							
	Slot Types Requested						
	1700	1200	900	675	450	300	Total
Slots With living allowance	8						
Living allowance proposed							
Slots with only ed award							

Program Description (executive summary):

Main Street Skowhegan proposes to have 8 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 17.4 percent (1,500 individuals). In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 30 volunteers who will be engaged in and lead community outdoor recreation programming. The AmeriCorps investment of \$216,000 will leverage \$99,500 comprised of \$0 in public funding and \$99,500 in private funding.

According to recent Community Health Needs Assessments, Somerset ranked 15th out of 16 counties in health outcomes and dead last for quality of life. 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. 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%. Add to these data points significant poverty rates and

very high prevalence of ACES (27% of Somerset County high school students reported having experienced four or more ACES (significantly higher than the State average at 21.3%), and it is obvious the situation in Somerset County - of which Skowhegan is the county seat - is dire.

Service locations:

Main Street Skowhegan

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

Outdoor Sport Institute (OSI), Lake George Regional Park, Somerset Woods Trustees, Somerset Public Health, Move More Kid ,REACH After School Program and Teens to Trails.

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

Applicant proposes to deliver services:

Within a single municipality Within a single County but not covering the entire County
 County-wide in a single County Multiple Counties but not Statewide Statewide

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

SERVICE ACTIVITIES

OUTPUT: H4A: Number of individuals served

Proposed target: 1500

OUTCOME: H18: Number of individuals reporting a change in behavior or intent to change behavior

Proposed target: 600

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

OUTPUT: Number of training/development activities that result in increased member skills, knowledge, etc

Proposed target: 8 members

OUTCOME: Number of members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge

Proposed target: 8

CAPACITY BUILDING

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

Proposed target: 5

OUTCOME: Number of additional outdoor recreation activities hosted by volunteers recruited by Member

Proposed target: 17

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

Proposed target: 5

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%)		
The Community and Need	Adequate	6
Logic Model	Adequate	6
Evidence of Effectiveness	Weak	4
Funding Priority and Preferences	Weak	1.5
Member Training	Weak	3
Member Supervision	Substandard	1.5
Member Experience	Adequate	4.5
Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification	Adequate	3.75
Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%		
Organizational Background and Staffing	Weak	9
Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility	Adequate	5.25
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%		
Member Recruitment	Adequate	5.25
Member Retention	Strong	7
Data Collection	Adequate	3.75
Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy	Weak	3
Total		58.25

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

	Quality Rating	Score
Program Alignment (25%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment with funding priorities 	Strong	25
Program Model (10%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve communities described in 2522.450(c) 	Strong	2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal adds to goal of being programmatically, demographically, and geographically diverse 	Strong	2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for innovation and/or replication 	Adequate	1.875
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of evidence program can be sustained over time. 	Adequate	1.875
Preferences from RFP Announcement (15%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From a partnership or coalition whose members represent local organizations working together 	Weak	3.75
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal submitted by an organization led by or primarily supporting or recruiting participants from historically marginalized communities and/or people. 	Weak	3.75
Past Performance (10%)		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can comply with requirements, info consistent with other grant administrator's info, consistent with externally verified past performance 	Strong	2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMPETE ONLY: applicant used member positions 	Adequate	1.875
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMPETE ONLY: used financial resources allocated 	Adequate	1.875
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RECOMPETE ONLY: implemented program effectively 	Strong	2.5
Financial Plan (15%)	Adequate	7.5
Fiscal Systems (15%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity of Financial mgt system to comply with fed requirements 	Adequate	3.75
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of orgz financial mgt practices as evidenced by audits, etc. 	Adequate	3.75
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strength of sponsor orgs financial status/stability per audit, 990, etc. 	Adequate	3.75
Grant Readiness (15%)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start-up plan is detailed, complete, and demonstrates ability to stand up the program on time with resources in place (including staff leadership). 	Strong	7.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applicant's systems, policies, experience, partnerships, leadership support, financial and personnel resources, etc. are fully prepared to implement the program as of the start date. 	Adequate	5.625
Total Task Force Score		81.875
Peer Review Score		58.25
Final Score for Applicant (200 possible)		140.125

Final Assessment of Application:

- Forward or fund with no corrections/modifications
- 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.

Member Development Output measure is the number of training events but applicant indicates they will measure the number of members. Correct to events.

Peer Reviewer Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Section: Program Design (50 %)

Need

- The applicant provides sufficient statistics to match the program outcomes to the target population both historically and prospectively, although the date of the ACS survey should have been cited. The applicant identifies sufficiently how impacted people were previously engaged, as well as the roles of key partners and community volunteers. To garner more points, at a minimum, the applicant should have: 1) explicitly defined the geographic area served by the intervention (i.e. city only, city and county, etc); and 2) described the roles the community volunteers will have in program delivery and how the propose eight Americorps volunteers will train and support them.
- The local data is recent but I would like to know it's source.
- This narrative scores 'strong' on a community and need grant review because it effectively contextualizes the urgent need for intervention in Skowhegan's underserved populations amidst the backdrop of significant economic growth. By highlighting the disparities faced by marginalized families, such as limited access to quality jobs, affordable housing, childcare, and adequate nutrition, the narrative underscores the pressing need for targeted support. The proposal's alignment with the broader community development initiatives and its focus on ensuring that economic growth benefits all residents, particularly the most vulnerable, demonstrate a strategic and holistic approach to addressing community needs. Additionally, by framing the

proposed Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program as a complementary effort to ongoing revitalization efforts, the narrative emphasizes the program's relevance and potential impact within the local context.

Logic Model

- While the logic model sufficiently identifies inputs, core activities, measurable outputs and outcomes, the application would have received more points if it identified specific knowledge, skills and abilities required of AmeriCorps volunteers to implement the intervention.
- The problems are clearly identified, and as well as the specific activities to provide solutions. the places where activities will take place are also given.
- The Logic table is very clear and concise. The information provided is easy to follow and find.

Evidence of Effectiveness

STRENGTH OF EVIDENCE

- The narrative cites four studies – half of which did not include publication dates – on the importance of outdoor education on helping reduce obesity. This relationship has been thoroughly studied for at least two decades. In addition to use of light weight reference material, without any reference to existing AmeriCorps programs, what is missing from this application is evidence for how this program will result in sustained increased activity on the part of target participants during and after the intervention.
- Sources cited are (peer reviewed?) publications with publication dates given.
- This narrative scores 'weak' on evidence of effectiveness grant review because while it effectively outlines the pressing issues faced by Somerset County, it lacks specific evidence of past or proposed interventions and their outcomes. While the statistics provide a clear picture of the challenges, the narrative falls short in demonstrating concrete strategies or programs that have been implemented or planned to address these issues. Without evidence of effective interventions or proposed solutions, it's challenging to assess the likelihood of success or impact of the grant proposal. Additionally, there's a need for clearer articulation of how the proposed interventions will directly address the identified community needs and improve health outcomes and quality of life in Somerset County.

OVERALL COMMENTS

- Relying on evidence from popular periodicals rather than the abundantly available program specific literature is insufficient to garner an adequate score. Additionally, the use of anecdotal comments from participants, while eye-catching, is insufficient. Instead, a robust discussion of proof of program effectiveness at current scale, using, in part, survey data from the CRM going back to 2019, should have been included.
- The program has also been given participant praise
- The demographics are staggering and alarming, but there are no supporting sources cited in this section.

Notice Priority

- The applicant includes a minimally sufficient number of federal funding priorities and state funding preferences. There is an opportunity to cite the prospective economic and workforce development benefits of the emerging career pathways element of the program and doing so would have garnered more points.
- The activities for participants are within the Healthy Living category and the workforce priority for members is identified as a goal of the program, as well as specific plans being put in place to help members achieve employable skills.
- There is no narrative to this topic. It has only one sentence that references what category this project falls into. More information is needed for this.

Member Training

- The application discusses specific training for the outdoor recreation service tasks to which six volunteers will be assigned. However, there was no discussion of training for the remaining 25% of volunteers, who will

be assigned program support activities such as marketing. Additionally, there was no discussion of how AmeriCorps volunteers will train community volunteers.

- AmeriCorps training is specified as well as additional opportunities for training by local sources and agencies
- This narrative scores 'substandard' on member training grant review because while it lists various skills and career pathways, it lacks specificity and depth regarding the actual training processes and methodologies. The mention of career pathways is promising, but without elaborating on how these pathways are structured, the quality of training provided, or the resources allocated for member development, it's difficult to assess the effectiveness of the program. Additionally, there's a need for clarity on how the mentioned skills and experiences are integrated into the training curriculum and how they align with the goals and objectives of the grant. Providing concrete examples, measurable outcomes, and a detailed training plan would greatly enhance the strength of this narrative.

Member Supervision

- The applicant is proposing a 160% increase in AmeriCorps volunteers from five to 13 without any increase in supervisory capacity. At a minimum, this section should have demonstrated a dedicated 50% of an FTE's time to this supervision task. Additionally, the applicant needed to include a plan to train supervisors. From a business management perspective, relying on the Director of Operations to assist with management activities, presumably in a surge-capacity role, given all of the other activities of the enterprise, just doesn't fly. While scaling up the intervention makes business sense, the management of a 160% increase by using existing resources, just doesn't. It is very, very concerning.
- MSS has experienced supervisors, and supervisors in training.
- This narrative scores 'substandard' on member supervisor grant review because it lacks clarity on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and their capacity to provide effective support and guidance to AmeriCorps members. While the organizational structure is outlined, there's little detail on the specific strategies employed by supervisors to mentor and develop members, or how they address challenges faced by members in their service roles. Additionally, there's limited information on how supervisors assess member performance, provide feedback, and facilitate professional growth. Without clear delineation of supervisory practices and their alignment with best practices in member support, it's challenging to determine the effectiveness of the supervision provided within the program.

Member Experience

- The applicant addresses the issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, reflection and connection in their program adequately.
- The agency is providing a workable living expense, and provides training opportunities for employable skills.
- I could not specifically find this exact section within the application. I would start to read a section and thought I found it, but then the information would be about another topic. Very hard to follow.

Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

- The application addresses the issues member knowledge, as well as program recognition and branding adequately. Discussion of how partners will contribute to the same would strengthen the application.
- I was disappointed that the AmeriCorps name is not included in the project name on the first page, but they do use the AmeriCorps name throughout the rest of the document. The members wear AmeriCorps identification and the events they lead are identified as AmeriCorps events.
- This narrative scores 'strong' on member supervisor grant review because it demonstrates a comprehensive approach to integrating AmeriCorps members into the community and fostering a sense of identity and pride in their service roles. The clear communication of expectations from the initial interview and the provision of orientation ensure that members understand their responsibilities and the significance of their service. Moreover, the visible display of the AmeriCorps logo throughout the host site and at program locations, along with the inclusion of member profiles on organizational websites and social media, reinforces the recognition and value of AmeriCorps members within the community. This cohesive branding

strategy not only promotes awareness of AmeriCorps but also instills a sense of belonging and purpose among members, contributing to their overall satisfaction and engagement in their service roles.

Organizational Capability Overall Rating 25%

Organizational Background and Staffing

- While the applicant has experience managing a smaller-scale version of the program, the question of sufficient supervision, including demonstration of 50% time of an FTE (could be split between staff, but requires documentation of a reasonable plan), persists, dragging down the quality of this application.
- The organization has experienced leadership.
- This narrative scores 'weak' on organizational background and staffing grant review because it lacks depth and specificity regarding the overall organizational structure, staffing capacity, and qualifications of key personnel. While it briefly outlines the roles of the President & CEO, Program Director, Director of Operations, and member team leaders, it does not provide information on the organization's history, mission, or previous experience in running AmeriCorps programs. Additionally, there's limited detail on the qualifications, expertise, and capacity of the staff members to effectively manage and support the AmeriCorps program. Without a comprehensive understanding of the organization's background, staffing structure, and relevant experience, it's challenging to assess the organization's readiness and capability to successfully implement the proposed grant-funded activities.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

- The applicant mentions diversity in staffing and yet uses the outdated term "disabilities". There is no mention of diversity in the served community nor any discussion of how the applicant will make accommodations for diversity, including physical, in its recruitment of Americorps volunteers, community volunteers, participants or in its intervention.
- The organization has events for veterans, persons with disabilities and has reached out to the Wabanaki Nation.
- This narrative scores 'adequate' on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility and staffing grant review because it articulates a commitment to these principles and acknowledges their importance in building thriving communities. However, it lacks specific details or examples of initiatives, policies, or practices that demonstrate how diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility are actively promoted and integrated within the organization and the AmeriCorps program. While the narrative sets a positive tone and aligns with the overarching values of the grant review criteria, it would benefit from concrete examples or strategies that illustrate how these principles are put into practice and how they specifically apply to the staffing and operation of the Skowhegan Outdoors AmeriCorps Program.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy 25%

Member Recruitment

- The applicant addresses the minimum requirements for member recruitment through its completion of the budget form. The application would have benefitted from a cross-walk of indirect and direct costs and associated activities to the requested budget amount.
- The organization budgets for recruitment, and by providing opportunities for training beyond the Required AmeriCorps training, provide added value to the member experience.
- This narrative scores 'substandard' on member recruitment grant review because it lacks a comprehensive and strategic approach to member recruitment. While it mentions allocating a small budget for posting position descriptions and targeted Facebook advertising, it does not provide details on the effectiveness of these methods or any additional recruitment strategies employed. Moreover, relying solely on word of mouth and free tools may limit the reach and diversity of potential applicants. A stronger narrative would include a detailed recruitment plan outlining various channels, partnerships, and outreach efforts tailored to reach a diverse pool of candidates and ensure a robust applicant pool.

Member Retention

- The application identifies a sufficient number of member retention markers to garner an adequate score.
- By providing opportunities for training beyond the Required AmeriCorps training, provide added value to the member experience
- This narrative scores 'adequate' on member retention grant review because it demonstrates a commitment to investing in member retention through various means. The provision of a living allowance well above the minimum requirement, along with budgeting for training and professional development opportunities, indicates an effort to support members financially and enhance their skills and credentials. Additionally, the mention of career pathways and microcredentials suggests long-term opportunities for members, potentially increasing their likelihood of staying with the program for multiple service terms. While these efforts contribute to member retention, a stronger narrative could provide more detailed insights into specific retention strategies and their effectiveness in retaining members over time.

Data Collection

- The application does not contain any substantive discussion of budgeted expenses for data collection. A single line about spending thousands on a CRM tool is simply insufficient.
- There is budgeting specifically for data collection, and by adding possible rewards for returning surveys it is likely that participant feedback is higher than might be otherwise. Good returns mean better data.
- This narrative scores 'adequate' on data collection grant review because it demonstrates a commitment to data collection and analysis through investment in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The CRM system allows for efficient tracking of program registrations, data capture, survey analysis, and communication with participants. Additionally, the introduction of incentives such as gift card prize drawings for survey respondents indicates an effort to enhance data collection participation. The proposal to conduct an outdoor program/event economic impact study further highlights a proactive approach to expanding data collection efforts and gaining deeper insights into the outcomes and value of the organization's work. However, a stronger narrative could include specific details on how the collected data will be utilized to inform decision-making and program improvement strategies.

Budget Alignment to Program Design

- There is scant discussion on the budget alignment to program design and no discussion of how much, if any, of the matching funds totaling \$99,500, is secured and how much is simply proposed. The word "expects" suggests none of these matching funds is secured. A letter of commitment from entities expected to provide matching funds would go a long way to improving this element of the application.
- I would have liked to see a more specific breakdown of how much money is allocated to each part of the program.
- This narrative scores 'weak' on budget alignment to program design grant review because it lacks specificity and detail regarding how the budget aligns with the program's design and objectives. While it mentions a general increase in budget projections over time and an expectation to match AmeriCorps funding with other sources, it does not provide a breakdown of specific expenses or how they directly support program activities and outcomes. Additionally, there's a lack of clarity on how the budget reflects the program's design in terms of staffing, training, resources, and participant support. Without a clear demonstration of how the budget allocation aligns with the program's goals and activities, it's difficult to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of the proposed budget.

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 (2)

Comments:

- Peer Review suggests that, even though the score is so low the proposal could be set aside, the tech reviewers should consider whether past performance and other criteria raise the score to fundable.

- There is a fundamental mismatch in growing AmeriCorps volunteers by another 160% without the applicant dedicating 50% of an FTE to supervision.
- The proposal is clear, the outcomes evidence based, and the staff has necessary experience.
- The current leadership, made up of two individuals, the Executive Director and Director of Operations, appears to have full-time jobs managing a board of directors, four staff, five current AmeriCorps volunteers, 12 committees and 100 community volunteers and associated initiatives, along with implementing policies and procedures and handling grant acquisition and administration. The current organization does not have the capacity of a 50% FTE position to adequately manage a total of 13 AmeriCorps volunteers as presented in this applicant.
- This is a strong proposal overall.
- The applicants project aligns with the mission of the category.
- Overall, this is a great project and concept. Details are missing in the proposal narrative.

What elements of the proposal are unclear?

- What is unclear is how much of the local funds are secured.
- Source of funds section does not indicate which funds are secured and which are proposed as directed by instructions.
- The last category of the evaluation form, not the proposal.
- Majority of the application was very hard to follow. The information was sprinkled everywhere and you needed to hunt for it. It could have been better formatted.

Task Force Review Notes and Appraisal Summary:

Proposal Alignment and Program Model

- Strongly agree that the program is aligned to serve communities with its programming, and believe that this model is a good example to be used around the state, for example in Washington County for Healthy Futures. Adequate/good that this model can be sustained, from evidence of how it's done in the past years. They could be better with demographically and geographically diverse - outside of Somerset county.
- The program addresses the areas of Healthy Futures and the Commission's, Public Health and Workforce. Skowhegan meets the definition of a distressed community. While the program is similar to several other AC programs that relate to outdoor education, the program is in a geographic part of the state that has not had a significant AC presence. In addition, the program is attempting to serve a much broader demographic than other outdoor programs which often focus primarily on school age residents. As noted, the program is not particularly innovative given its similarity to several others (except perhaps in the range of the demographics it is attempting to serve) but it clearly has the potential for being replicated elsewhere in the state. The program is well aligned with the mission of its sponsor in that it grew out of a community-wide planning program that emphasized economic development tied to the natural environment. Skowhegan sees the potential economic advantage of its natural setting and this outdoor program complements that effort by introducing more residents to the local outdoors. As an on-going program, relationships are in place with various stakeholders and related organizations in the community, and it appears there is interest in further developing them. Staff of the program, while limited, have been involved for some time and are very familiar with AC requirements. Similarly, the program has experience in the use of volunteers.

Preferences from RFA

- Strong partnerships with many local organizations such as Fedcap, local nature groups, schools, libraries, community centers - I think they are on the right track with this to be successful - healthy partnerships, Adequate/good for recruiting participants - on social media, bulletin boards, word of mouth - but could be better with more participants -and also could branch out more to other counties.
- The program is not from a partnership or coalition, although it does work closely with a number of other organizations; while it is not lead by historically marginalized individuals, it does attempt to serve them through its programs. Skowhegan is in a rural county.

Past Performance

- Human Resources, Financial Resources, and implementing the program effectively are all adequate/good. No red flags to suggest otherwise.
- Downtown Skowhegan has been effectively operating a rural AC program for a number of years and has shown the ability to meet all program requirements and goals. The organization also has experience with other grants and has worked to enhance its abilities to meet all grant requirements.

Financial Plan

- Reviewed the auditors, peer reviewers, and staff reports, and did an overall review.....all financials are adequate, and look basic to succeed. Need to keep up with creative fundraising, and good ideas in future years. Looks good now.
- Sources of funds are identified; however, a significant portion of the match is anticipated from grants that are pending and not yet confirmed, although many of them are from entities that have been supportive of the program in the past. When asked what the backup plan is, the agency director indicated they could call on operating funds; however, that source might be limited.

Fiscal Systems

- Reviewed the auditors, peer reviewers, and staff reports, and did an overall review.....all financials are adequate, and look basic
- The only element that downgraded this area from strong to adequate is the overall financial status of the organization, which operated at a small loss for 2023. At the same time, the organization does have a bit of a cushion in fund balance and is actively seeking additional revenues. My one related concern is that the agency appears to be pursuing several new initiatives and major grants. Should a number of these be successful, it may place a strain on agency management and supervision.

Grant Readiness

- I chose adequate for both 26 and 27 of grant readiness
- The start up plan mirrors the applicant's prior experiences with the AC program. Given the organization's success in running prior programs, I'm confident that they should have no problem with the new award. A final comment: I thought several of the peer reviewers were overly harsh in their evaluation of the proposal. Given our history of success with this proposal, I would strongly disagree with the suggestion that it not be funded.