

Grant Continuation Report from Task Force

Recommendation: Require program to address changes in operation under Continuation field, modify slots to eliminate minimum time slots, modify outcome targets and measurement tactic, and fix budget errors before Commission meeting. Changes due back to staff by close of business on 12/15/2020. Staff to share with Task Force members so draft recommendation to board can be confirmed before 12/18/2020 meeting.

Legal Applicant: Learning Works

Program Name: Aim High AmeriCorps

Category: AC Formula
 AC Competitive
 Other Competition

Type: Planning
 Operating
 Fixed Price
 Ed Award Only

Year in Grant Cycle: Year 1 Year 2 Year 3

Continuation Dates: 9/1/2021 to 8/31/2022

New Resources Requested for Continuation: Funds and Slots

	CNCS	Local Share	% change from 2019 year
Operating	166,299	248,714	<-> 0%
Member Support	105,848	88,000	↑ 02%
Indirect (Admin)	14,142	56,078	<-> 0% (Note, budget calculation of FICA + indirect weren't updated.)
TOTALS	\$286,289	\$392,792	
% sharing proposed	42%	58%	
% share required	45%	55%	
Cost-per-member	\$14,365		

Total AmeriCorps Member Service Years:	19.93	Slot Types Requested*						
		1700	1200	900	675	450	300	Total
Slots With living allowance		4		20				24
Slots with only ed award							28	28

*Task Force Reviewers do not support the slot request. The 300-hour terms have never been adequately filled, even in 2018-2019 year. The task force recommends a reduction in slots and corresponding MSY unless the grantee makes a strong case for converting the little-used 300-hour positions to terms of 900 hours or more.

Program Description (executive summary from grant application):

LearningWorks proposes to place 52 AmeriCorps members who will provide 1:1 and small group tutoring for low-performing and economically disadvantaged elementary school students in four schools in Portland and Westbrook, ME. Members will serve 380 low-performing students; of these, 320 will improve their academic performance in reading and/or math and 320 will increase their positive behavioral and/or emotional engagement in school. Members will also leverage 50 community volunteers who will provide students with additional academic and social-emotional support. This program will concentrate on the CNCS focus area of Education - K-12 Success. The CNCS investment of \$283,005 will be matched with \$392,792 including \$56,000 in public funding and \$80,202 in private funding.

Service locations for the 2019-2020 year (no change in sites proposed):

- East End Community School
- Talbot School
- Howard C Reiche Community School
- Saccarappa School

Performance measures: Year 1 ran from 2019-2020 and completed in August 2020. Year 2 is underway. Task force reviewers support the output targets set for year 3 but require the outcome targets be reconsidered and a more realistic means of measuring student improvement be identified. The pandemic has disrupted both learning and teaching in ways that are not likely to change until the third year of this grant is 50%-75% complete. To demonstrate effectiveness, the program must change how it shows the academic support impacted students. Addressing this issue is a condition of forwarding the continuation proposal to CNCS.

Measure	Year 1 Target	Year 1 Accomplished	Year 2 Target	Year 2 to-date accomplished	Year 3 Proposed Target
Service Output ED1A: # of individuals served	380	170	380	First quarterly report due January 2021 for the year that started Sept 2020	380
Service Outcome ED5A: # of students with improved academic performance	320	Could not measure	320		320
Service Outcome ED27C: # of students with improved academic engagement or social-emotional skills	320	Could not measure	320		320
Member Development Output: # of program training and other formal development activities that result in increased AmeriCorps member skills, knowledge, and abilities related to the service assignment	4	16	4		TBD
Member Development Outcome: # of AmeriCorps members demonstrating increased competency in skills or application of knowledge.	52	21	52		TBD
Capacity building Output: # of community volunteers recruited by AmeriCorps members or program	50	37	50		TBD
Capacity building Output: hours of service contributed by community volunteers who were recruited by AmeriCorps members or program	50	100	unk		TBD
Capacity building Outcome: # of additional direct service activities completed by volunteers recruited AmeriCorps members.	50	24	50		TBD

Operating performance summary:

- RECRUITMENT/ENROLLMENT – use of positions awarded to program for program year 1 (2019-2020)

Service Term	Awarded slots	Used Slots	% of enrollment
Full Time	4	4	100%
One Year Half Time	20	12	60%
Quarter Time	4	2	50%
Minimum Time	23	4	17.4%
<i>Overall</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>43.1%</i>

- The 2nd year is the one just underway. So far enrollment is 100% for Full time, 70% for half time, and 4% for Minimum time. The program eliminated all quarter time positions from its year 2 design.
- COVID disruption to school operations significantly impacted this program in the 2019-2020 year. Its service activities were completely in-person and, while many eventually adjusted to online, the overall school operating changes hindered the program. It should be noted that not only was their ability to engage students affected but also their ability to gather any data related to improvement in academic performance.

- The grantee has not changed the use of minimum time slots in this grant cycle. They had expected the changes from the 2016-2019 grant to this 2019-2022 grant would result in full enrollment of all slot types. In light of this unchanged factor, the task force reviewers do not support renewing the minimum time slots. The grantee has the option to change those to more intensive positions; otherwise, the reviewers recommend a reduction in the MSYs that are associated with the minimum time slots. This would reduce the CNCS share.
- **Retention:** Overall retention rate last year was 86.4%, below the national requirement of 90%. The slot specific retention is below.

Service Term	Filled slots	Left early	Successfully completed	% retained
Full Time	4	0	4	100%
One Year Half Time	12	2	10	83.3%
Quarter Time	2	0	2	100%
Minimum Time	4	1	3	75%
<i>Overall</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>86.4%</i>

Compliance:

» Program operation

Member record reviews for the 2019-2020 year found no instances of noncompliance. Through the IPERA federal review, a \$0.43 repayment was required on an invoice. Staff have been very stable with no changes which helped in terms of compliance. They have been very cooperative and tolerant of the 3-year-long OIG audit which turned into an assessment at the last minute. The extensive review turned up no instances of non-compliant background checks on staff or members nor did it find instances of questionable member activities, supervision levels or other operational concerns. The OIG has settled on questioning the method the program used to document the value of the time teachers contributed to the program as well as its method of giving value to the dedicated classrooms it has for operating in each school. LearningWorks has taken steps to eliminate future opportunities to question these costs and made more explicit the type and quantity of assistance school districts are expected to provide the program.

In the face of COVID, the program suspended activity in mid-March but eventually made the transition at the start of May to providing services virtually and continued through end of the program year. This fact is not reflected in the applicant continuation narrative but is confirmed by Commission staff monitoring the program.

» Program Finances and Agency Fiscal Issues

- The LW audit for fiscal year ending June 30, 2020 states there are no weaknesses, deficiencies, nor instances of noncompliance with regard to internal controls.
- Overall the audit cited no findings or questioned costs.
- A note for the Training Officer to discuss with the agency leadership comes from the audit. Given this program records over \$500,000 of in-kind match and has a policy on recording in-kind for volunteers, this audit text is of concern:

IN-KIND DONATIONS

LearningWorks received contributions of professional services which is recorded in contributions and in expense as donated services. The donated services totaled \$120 and \$250 for the years ended June 30, 2020 and 2019, respectively.

The Agency also receives contributions of volunteer services in its English Language, YouthBuild Alternatives, After School and Aims High programs, but does not record volunteer hours in its financial statements due to the difficulty of estimating a value for them.

- Because it is well known that the OIG is recommending that CNCS recover over \$1 million in expenses it believes should be disallowed, this note comments on that report finding. The full amount cited is half grant funds paid to the program and half in-kind match. Under federal law, any match that is found not to qualify is not recovered itself but could mean the grant dollars need to be repaid. At issue is how LearningWorks

documented and valued the in-kind contributions of school districts. The OIG disagrees with their method and, upon consultation with an external expert, the documentation of teacher time does have a flaw that has been rectified. The amount of time and its value needs to be documented more often during the year. However, the value of the classroom space dedicated to LearningWorks for members to meet with students is on solid ground according to everyone except the IG which is applying criteria related to transferring ownership of space to a situation that is comparable to leasing space. The recommendation of the OIG to CNCS to recover the large amount is not the final result. After publication of their report, the process moves to resolution which is controlled and executed by CNCS.

- As previously mentioned, LW has been proactive in taking steps to prevent future reviews from questioning the existence and value of these essential resources. (All were described in the original grant application so the roles of educators are clear.) Site agreements with the school districts specify what the districts will provide in terms of space, educator time, and other staff supports. The value of these contributions is being documented more frequently.

Other comments:

- The program did pretty well last year given the changes in school operation. They made no modifications to their application. We can be flexible but it seems there should be information on how the program has modified the service program to continue operating in the current environment.

Task Force Review Summary:

Task Force Continuation Recommendation	Authorize Proposal	Modify: Increase	Modify: Decrease	Deny Request
Budget	X based on slot changes			
AmeriCorps MSYs and slots			X	
Performance targets	X Outputs		X Outcomes	
Operating plans	X			

Conditions of recommending continuation support:

- » The continuation narrative provided no information on the modifications the program made when schools switched to remote and hybrid schedule operations. The grantee must provide this information. In doing so, it should address how interactions with students and teachers changed, how member supervision was altered, and how the team of AmeriCorps members changed their routines as a result. The original proposal for service activity is obviously not viable but no information is offered to give confidence that service is continuing in an effective manner. The continuation narrative should address what changed for current operation and what they expect operations will be like for the start of the year under consideration (Year 3). Other operational changes (fiscal, policy, match documentation, staffing, summer/non-classroom activities) should be addressed as well.
- » Decrease the number of slots.
- » The continuation budget narrative CNCS total and the CNCS request in the executive summary do not match.
- » The budget budget appears to have been replicated from the prior year with only the increases in living allowances entered as new amounts. Consequently, the indirect calculation as well as the calculation for FICA on member living allowances are incorrect. Both need to be corrected.
- » The Source of Funds section is not filled in. This needs to be corrected.