

Operation AmeriCorps Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General FAQs

- 1. What role can CNCS staff at state offices and AmeriCorps NCCC campuses play while the Operation AmeriCorps NOFO is open? Are CNCS staff at state offices and AmeriCorps NCCC campuses available to provide technical assistance?**

CNCS staff at state offices and AmeriCorps NCCC campuses can provide publicly available information about the Operation AmeriCorps competition as well as general information on the structure of AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC projects. However, they cannot provide potential applicants with detailed feedback on specific project ideas or write or review application content.

- 2. Are Operation AmeriCorps applicants required to request resources from all three AmeriCorps programs (AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC)?**

Operation AmeriCorps applicants are not required to apply for all three AmeriCorps programs. Applicants may request resources from one, two, or all three of the AmeriCorps programs. However, applicants are strongly encouraged to consider the unique role that each AmeriCorps program can play in achieving transformative change in their community.

- 3. Should applicants apply through their state service commission or directly to CNCS?**

If your state service commission has opted to participate, you must apply through them. You can find the list of states that have opted in [here](#). If the state service commission in your state has opted not to participate in this competition, you will apply directly to CNCS. In addition, organizations that propose to operate a program in more than one state or territory will apply directly to CNCS and Tribal governments will also apply directly to CNCS.

- 4. May a locality submit more than one Concept Paper?**

Eligible applicants may submit more than one Concept Paper. However, we strongly encourage applicants to ensure that if they submit multiple applications that each potential project is a high level priority of their local chief executive and will result in transformational outcomes.

- 5. May a governmental entity apply and serve as the fiscal agent on behalf of a consortium that includes more than one governmental entity?**

Yes, one governmental entity can apply on behalf of a consortium, including other governmental units, and may serve as the fiscal agent.

- 6. May a non-profit serving as a fiscal agent submit the Concept Paper or does the Concept Paper have to be submitted by the locality?**

The locality must serve as the legal applicant and submit the Concept Paper. A nonprofit could partner with the local government and act as the fiscal agent if the local government decided to structure their project in that manner.

7. May an individual school apply for Operation AmeriCorps or does the legal applicant have to be a school board?

The legal applicant must be a government entity, although individual schools are welcome to partner with a legal applicant.

8. May a University or County extension service apply for Operation AmeriCorps?

A university or extension program may apply for Operation AmeriCorps funding if the University or extension program is a governmental or quasi-governmental organization.

9. May a tribe that is not on a reservation focus their project on the needs of Native American youth in a public school?

Yes, you may define the scope of your project as you wish. Just keep in mind that we're looking for truly transformational impact, so your best choice of target population will be where you think you can make the biggest difference.

10. May a tribal 501(c)(3) on a reservation apply for an Operation AmeriCorps grant?

The lead applicant must be a government entity such as a tribe, however a non-profit could serve as the fiscal agent and partner.

11. May AmeriCorps VISTA members help manage our Operation AmeriCorps project?

The grantee has primary responsibility for management and operation of the project along with providing direct supervision for AmeriCorps State and National and AmeriCorps VISTA members. However, in certain circumstances, AmeriCorps VISTA members and VISTA leaders may help manage a project. Such service activities may include developing and implementing a system to coordinate the Operation AmeriCorps service activities of other AmeriCorps VISTA members, AmeriCorps NCCC members, and State and National members, in addition to community volunteers.

As part of your application, you may request an AmeriCorps VISTA member or a VISTA leader to help manage your project. VISTA leaders are AmeriCorps VISTA members who have already completed at least one year of AmeriCorps VISTA service and are responsible for supporting and coordinating the activities of other AmeriCorps VISTA members on their project.

While an invaluable support to the project supervisor and executive director, VISTA leaders may not supervise, manage, or direct other AmeriCorps VISTA members. They may not fulfill roles designed for the program director, such as selecting or removing AmeriCorps members, certifying timesheets of AmeriCorps State and National

members, signing or administering contracts or other legal documents, nor may they submit fiscal reports. Instead, VISTA leaders support, guide, and coordinate AmeriCorps VISTA members' efforts, and assist VISTA supervisors with matters like recruitment, training, and gathering information for reporting.

Each locality must identify a staff member that will serve as the overall supervisor for the Operation AmeriCorps project and who will be responsible for signing contracts, AmeriCorps member timecards, and other legal or fiscal documents.

12. Please provide an example of an Operation AmeriCorps project timeline.

Applicants must determine when in their Operation AmeriCorps project they want to engage each AmeriCorps program. The below timeline gives a sample of how applicants might engage AmeriCorps State and National, AmeriCorps VISTA, and AmeriCorps NCCC if they want each of these programs to begin their service at the beginning of the Operation AmeriCorps project in their community. However, applicants may decide that it makes more sense for their project to engage particular AmeriCorps programs at different stages throughout the life of their Operation AmeriCorps project.

April:

- Operation AmeriCorps grant is awarded
- Submit AmeriCorps VISTA project plan and performance plan in eGrants
- Submit sponsor application for AmeriCorps NCCC team
- Begin recruiting AmeriCorps State and National members

May:

- AmeriCorps VISTA Memorandum of Agreement awarded, create assignment description for AmeriCorps VISTA members

June:

- AmeriCorps State and National members are on board

June-August:

- AmeriCorps VISTA members are on board (if not in August, next opportunity in November)

September:

- First AmeriCorps NCCC team arrives.

13. What are National Performance Measures and how are they applied to Operation AmeriCorps?

CNCS has established six Focus Areas: Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families based on the priorities included in the Serve America Act. Within these Focus Areas, as well as for Capacity Building, CNCS has created National Performance Measures in order to aggregate the results of similar programs and demonstrate the impact across our agency programs and initiatives. AmeriCorps programs must have an

aligned output and outcome that reflects the program's primary intervention and aligns with the program's theory of change.

14. How can we best use AmeriCorps NCCC teams in our project?

When planning how to use Operation AmeriCorps resources over the span of two years, consider how the infusion of a team of 8-12 AmeriCorps NCCC members can provide you an intensive human resource to accomplish a portion of your overall desired outcome. You can plan on a one-time surge of people power or schedule several teams at key times throughout the two year grant. AmeriCorps NCCC teams typically serve for 6-8 weeks.

15. What are the key components of a quality AmeriCorps NCCC project?

AmeriCorps NCCC projects must address compelling community needs, have clearly stated and well planned tasks and objectives, have demonstrable, measurable goals, engage all team members in meaningful service throughout the project, provide opportunities for member growth and development, involve the community throughout the project and have a plan for sustainability after the team completes its service.

16. How long do AmeriCorps VISTA members serve?

The AmeriCorps VISTA term of service is 365 days.

17. May AmeriCorps members take the place of current staff or volunteers at my organization?

No. AmeriCorps members may not displace staff or volunteers at your organization, nor may they perform any services or duties that would supplant the hiring of employed workers.

18. Are there certain activities in which AmeriCorps members and staff cannot engage?

Yes. While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or CNCS, staff and members may not engage in advocacy, voter registration or similar partisan political activities. A complete list of prohibited activities (as outlined in 45 CFR § 2520.65) is available [here](#). AmeriCorps VISTA members have additional restrictions including no outside employment; and their assignment must have a focus specifically on capacity-building activities with the purpose of supporting efforts to fight poverty.

19. What does Cost per MSY mean?

Cost per MSY stands for Cost per Member Service Year and represents the cost to CNCS for each member in your AmeriCorps program. One MSY is the equivalent of one full-time term of service (1700 member service hours). The cost per MSY is calculated by dividing the total amount of CNCS funds requested by the total number of MSYs requested. For example, if the application requests \$10,000 in CNCS funds and 10 MSYs,

then the cost per MSY is \$1,000. The cost per MSY does not include child care or the cost of the Segal Education Award a member may earn.

20. What are the match requirements for the AmeriCorps State and National grant part of the award?

If your concept paper is accepted to move on to Step 2 of the process you will be asked to submit a budget that will include at least 24% match for the AmeriCorps State and National part of the project. We will provide detailed guidance and technical assistance if your Concept Paper is selected.

21. Can the grant budget include administrative costs?

Yes, your grant may include administrative costs, and if your Concept Paper is approved, we will walk you through that process as part of Step 2.

22. How do I ensure that I'm aware of any changes or new information?

The best way to ensure you get emails to inform you of changes or new information is to check these [Operation AmeriCorps FAQs](#) for additions on a regular basis.

FAQs for State Commissions

1. Are state service commissions allowed to apply for Operation AmeriCorps funding?

Yes, state service commissions may apply as the prime grantee that will then subgrant to the governmental entity running the program.

2. May a state service commission operate an Operation AmeriCorps project?

No, state service commissions are not allowed to operate or manage an AmeriCorps State and National program. However, state service commissions are allowed to sponsor AmeriCorps VISTA members and help manage AmeriCorps NCCC members. In most cases we expect that if a state commission applies as prime applicant, their subgrantee (the city, county or other government entity) will serve as the sponsor for the AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC members in addition to operating the AmeriCorps State and National program.

3. How will a state commission that decides to opt-in manage their review of submissions in eGrants?

There is a two-step application process for Operation AmeriCorps. In Step 1, applicants will submit a concept paper of 10 pages or less that describes the program design. In Step 1, state commissions that opt in to participate in Operation AmeriCorps will conduct their own review of Concept Papers outside of eGrants, prior to the deadline. Either the state commission or applicant(s) that they approve from their state may submit the concept paper in eGrants.

If a state's applicant(s) advances to Step 2, then the commission will establish a prime application with the approved sub(s) submitting their full application(s) to the commission per the regular AmeriCorps State process. The Step 2 application in eGrants will look like the screens commissions are used to using.

4. What will happen if an application in a state where the commission has opted in is submitted directly to CNCS without commission review?

We encourage state commissions that are opting in to let potential applicants know about your review process and deadlines. CNCS will make it clear through our website, TTA calls, and other communications that applicants must apply through their state commissions in states that opt-in.

We recognize there is a chance that some applicants from opt-in states may apply directly to CNCS without going through their state commission. CNCS will monitor eGrants and share updates with commissions about applications from their states. We will provide a list of letters of intent that are received shortly after the letter of intent deadline and an updated list five days before the final deadline. In addition, CNCS will share a final list of concept papers with state commissions within one day after the January 13 submission deadline. We will provide 10 days for commissions to review any new concept papers that they did not have the opportunity to review previously.

5. For commissions that opt-in to the competition, can CNCS provide commissions with notification of the letter(s) of intent received?

Yes, we will provide Commissions that opt in with a list of letters of intent as soon as possible after the deadline.

6. For those commissions that opt-in to the competition, if they choose to, could they do their review AFTER the concept paper deadline (within the 10 days provided by CNCS) and make any changes to the application(s) and notify CNCS of the applications the commission is putting forth for consideration?

We expect that you will run your process prior to the deadline. The purpose of the ten day review period is only to review the small number of applications that were submitted directly to CNCS outside of the state review process. We are encouraging State Commissions to submit as many quality Concept papers as possible.