2015 AmeriCorps Partnership Challenge Notice of Funding Opportunities Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

A. General/Grant Application

If an organization has applied for 501(c) 3 status and is waiting for it to be approved, can they find an organization to act as fiscal agent to apply for the grant? Would both organizations' names be on the grant application?

CNCS requires one legal applicant organization. An organization can find a fiscal agent to serve as the legal applicant and if/when the 501(c) 3 status is complete, CNCS can change the legal applicant for the grant application, should it be selected for funding.

How many AmeriCorps members will my program receive?

In your application you must indicate the number and type of AmeriCorps member positions you are requesting based on your program design and desired outcomes. If your proposal is approved for funding, CNCS will determine how many AmeriCorps members will be included in your award.

Does CNCS have a minimum number of MSYs required for application submission?

The Notice of Funding Opportunity does not specify a minimum number of MSYs. However, if you are applying for a single-state program through a state service commission, the commission may set a minimum number of MSYs for their particular state competition. Please check with the commission before applying.

My commission isn't on the contact list posted on your website. Why?

The commission may not have submitted its application submission information yet. The document is updated regularly. Contact information for all commissions is also available here: http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact-us/state-service-commissions/

Does AmeriCorps provide the national service criminal history checks for members and staff?

It is each program's responsibility to conduct the required criminal history checks on covered members and staff and to develop the appropriate protocols for conducting such checks in a compliant manner. You can find more information about the requirement here: http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/criminal-history-check They will also be communicated to you if your application is successful in the competition and you receive a grant award.

If we submit our application to CNCS prior to the July 23rd deadline, can we send the additional documents in at a later time as long as it is prior to the final deadline?

No. If applicants opt to submit to CNCS prior to the July 23rd deadline then all part of the application, including any required additional documents, must be submitted at the same time. Once the application is submitted to CNCS, it is considered final.

Under the Partnership Challenge initiative, CNCS will provide the Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards but the funding to operate the program will come from another sponsoring institution. Given that CNCS will not provide the funding for this initiative, will awarded organizations be held to the AmeriCorps regulations and compliance requirements?

Yes. CNCS has a strong interest in ensuring recipient compliance with the statutory, regulatory, and agency terms and conditions applicable to recipients of awards that only provide Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards. CNCS has an equally strong interest in holding AmeriCorps members harmless in cases of recipient noncompliance where the noncompliance was entirely outside the members' control. Awards under this Notice will contain a special condition which balances these interests by enabling CNCS to require that award recipient fund the members' Education Award, up to its full amount, in cases where the recipient's noncompliance was outside the control of the member and would otherwise imperil the earned value of the Education Award.

Do we have an assigned CNCS Program Officer to assist with questions? Whom should we contact with application questions?

For questions regarding multi-state or Indian Tribes applications submitted directly to CNCS, please call (202) 606-7508 or send an e-mail to americorpsgrants@cns.gov. Questions about single state applications should be addressed to the respective State and Territory Commission.

Should existing AmeriCorps grantees apply for the Partnership Challenge? [updated 7/21/15]

Existing grantees that are proposing adding no cost slots to models similar their current funded program should not apply for the Partnership Challenge. These grantees may request no cost MSY and necessary grant modifications through their AmeriCorps Program Officer for review. To determine if the project you are proposing would be considered similar to your existing grant, please contact your Program Officer.

B. AmeriCorps Members

Can 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.

Are there certain activities in which AmeriCorps members 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 the following activities, referred to as *Prohibited Activities* (see 45 CFR § 2520.65):

- Attempting to influence legislation;
- Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;

- Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- Providing a direct benefit to: (1) a business organized for profit; (2) a labor union; (3) a partisan political organization; (4) a nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (participating in partisan political activities or spending funds on lobbying and grassroots efforts in excess of allowable limits); and (5) an organization engaged in the religious activities described above, (unless CNCS assistance is not used to support those religious activities);
- Conducting a voter registration drive or using CNCS funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services.

AmeriCorps members may not engage in the above activities directly or indirectly by recruiting, training, or managing others for the primary purpose of engaging in one of the activities listed above. Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the activities listed above on their initiative, on non-AmeriCorps time, and using non-CNCS funds. Individuals should not wear the AmeriCorps logo while doing so.

In addition to the *Prohibited Activities* listed above, the following restrictions also apply to the service of AmeriCorps members:

<u>Nonduplication.</u>
Corporation assistance may not be used to duplicate an activity that is already available in the locality of a program. And, unless there is nondisplacement, Corporation assistance will not be provided to a private nonprofit entity to conduct activities that are the same or substantially equivalent to activities provided by a State or local government agency in which such entity resides.

<u>Nondisplacement.</u>

(1) An employer may not displace an employee or position, including partial displacement such as reduction in hours, wages, or employment benefits, as a result of the use by such employer of a participant in a program receiving Corporation assistance.
(2) An organization may not displace a volunteer by using a participant in a program receiving Corporation assistance.
(3) A service opportunity will not be created under this chapter that will infringe in any manner on the promotional opportunity of an employed individual.
(4) A participant in a program receiving Corporation assistance may not perform any services or duties or engage in activities that would otherwise be performed by an employee as part of the assigned duties of such employee.
(5) A participant in any program receiving assistance may not perform any services or duties, or engage in activities, that—
    (i) Will supplant the hiring of employed workers; or
    (ii) Are services, duties, or activities with respect to which an individual has recall rights pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement or applicable personnel procedures.
(6) A participant in any program receiving assistance may not perform services or duties that have been performed by or were assigned to any—
    (i) Presently employed worker;
    (ii) Employee who recently resigned or was discharged;

(iii) Employee who is subject to a reduction in force or who has recall rights pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement or applicable personnel procedures;
(iv) Employee who is on leave (terminal, temporary, vacation, emergency, or sick); or
(v) Employee who is on strike or who is being locked out.

Can organizations set their own rules for selection of AmeriCorps members? [Added 10/23/14]

Yes, a program can make rules about selection based on specific qualities relevant to the program or type of service, as long as the selection rules are consistent with AmeriCorps' eligibility requirements and are not discriminatory.

We are trying to decide whether to have full-time or half-time members. How do we determine the feasibility of the member types to determine what is right for the program? [Added 11/3/14]

This depends on several factors, such as the nature of your program, population served, proposed interventions and specific member activities, etc. The applicant must determine the appropriate member roles and ensure that proposed positions would provide members with the opportunity to serve the necessary number of hours for their slot type while addressing the demonstrated community need(s).

Do members also qualify for loan forbearance?

Under this opportunity, CNCS will provide the education awards. Yes, members have access to the same loan forbearance benefit as other AmeriCorps members.

Do the labor law exclusions available for AmeriCorps members apply?

Yes, members engaged through the partnership are national service participants.

C. Performance Measures/Logic Model

What are AmeriCorps' performance measurement requirements?

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.

What are National Performance Measures?

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.

What is the difference between Priority Measures and Complementary Program Measures?

The National Performance Measures are split into two groups: Priority Measures and Complementary Program Measures. Priority Measures are performance measures that are included in CNCS's strategic plan. Complementary Program Measures are additional measures that are important to AmeriCorps but not included in the strategic plan.

What is a "self-nominated" or "applicant-determined" performance measure?

A self-nominated or applicant-determined performance measure is one in which the applicant identifies the outputs and/or outcomes that will be measured, based on its intervention. This is different from the National Performance Measures, where CNCS pre-determines common outputs and, in some instances, outcomes with specific definitions and data collection methods that applicants must use.

Are National Performance Measures required?

The use of National Performance Measures is strongly encouraged but is not required.

How do I decide if my program should select National Performance Measures?

If the National Performance Measures align with your program's activities, then CNCS strongly encourages your participation. The National Performance Measures Instructions provide definitions, requirements and guidelines that will help you determine which are right for you. These instructions can be found on the NOFA webpage.

What is an aligned performance measure?

An aligned performance measure is an output paired with an outcome. Most of our National Performance Measures include aligned measures, but in some cases you may need to create your own aligned applicant-determined outcome.

How many performance measures should I propose?

Each program should have at least one aligned measure (composed of an output and an outcome) reflecting its primary intervention. It is appropriate to have additional aligned performance measures for other significant components of your program. Performance measures reflecting non-primary activities should not be included in your application and will not be reported to CNCS, although you might still collect the data for your own purposes.

If I select National Performance Measures, are there specific outputs and outcomes I am required to use?

Yes, in most cases there are specific requirements for outputs and outcomes as well as data definitions and collection expectations. Please read the Performance Measures Instructions carefully.

Do the AmeriCorps members in my program have to be directly providing the service counted in the National Performance Measures?

The National Performance Measures selected by an AmeriCorps program should reflect the expected result of the AmeriCorps program activities. The AmeriCorps members do not have to interact directly with the beneficiaries of the service, but they must provide direct support that makes the

program‘s results possible. One exception is when the AmeriCorps members are providing organizations with capacity building services.

Can I count the same people in more than one National Performance Measure output?

Read the Performance Measures Instructions carefully. Unless otherwise specified, the same individuals may be counted more than once across different Measures for different services (interventions) they may be receiving. However, programs cannot count the same individual more than once within any one specific National Performance Measure. For example, if you helped the same individual both prepare for a disaster and then respond to a disaster, you may count that individual in both DS1 and DS2.

Can two or more National Performance Measure outputs have the same outcome?

It depends on the program model. If the program model represents a continuum of care/services where participating leads from one level of service to another, then it makes sense to create an aligned measure of multiple outputs that lead to a single outcome. If there are two completely different interventions that lead to the same outcome, those should be reported with each output/outcome as their own aligned measure.

Can one National Performance Measure have more than one outcome?

Yes. There may be more than one desired outcome for a single output. Aligned measures should only be configured this way if it is expected that all of the individuals counted in the output will potentially achieve the outcome indicated. If the outcomes are resulting from different populations being served, there should be multiple outputs.

Where do I find a copy of the webinar that helps applicants walk through the new performance measures module?

This tutorial, http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/performance-measurement/egrants-performance-measures-module-americorps, guides users through the new eGrants performance measures screens. It demonstrates how to complete the pages in the new performance measure section of the application. The tutorial also includes some program specific content information as well as shows users how to create an aligned performance measure for their chosen primary focus area and intervention.

What is a theory of change?

A theory of change is a theory for how an intervention can address or solve a stated problem. A theory of change articulates a problem, a proposed intervention, and the change (outcomes) that is expected to result from delivering the intervention. Underlying the theory is a set of assumptions, supported by evidence, about why the intervention is likely to lead to the outcomes. A Logic Model means a well-specified conceptual framework that identifies key components of the proposed process, product, strategy, or practice (i.e., the active “ingredients” that are hypothesized to be critical to achieving the relevant outcomes) and describes the relationships among the key components and outcomes, theoretically and operationally.

Do all members have to work on the exact same activities or can the activities differ slightly, if they are all working toward the same performance measure targets?

As long as the activities in which the AmeriCorps members engage are consistent with your program's Theory of Change and align with the performance measure instructions for the National Performance Measures you wish to use, the activities do not have to be exactly the same for all members.

Is there a preference for having applicants use national performance measures to the greatest extent possible? [Added 10/23/14]

Your performance measures should be consistent with your program's theory of change. If the national performance measures align with your program design and your theory of change, you should use them.

D. Sampling

Under what circumstances is it ok for grantees to use sampling?

In performance measurement, sampling presents a tradeoff because it does not allow us to count all of the individuals who demonstrated the desired change (outcome) we are trying to measure. Methodologically speaking, sampling is appropriate as long as the grantee has a solid plan for ensuring that its sample will be representative. Practically speaking, we would want grantees to use sampling only when they are able to make the case that it is unrealistic to collect data from the whole population.

When would CNCS not allow sampling?

CNCS will not allow sampling when it is reasonable to expect a grantee to collect data from the whole population. CNCS will also not allow sampling if the grantee's sampling frame is not sufficient or if the grantee's methodology will not result in a representative sample.

How does a grantee set targets and outputs when it is planning to sample?

In most cases the grantee should be able to set targets based on the population as a whole. If a grantee's sampling methodology is sound and results in a representative sample, then the program can extrapolate their results to report on an outcome for the population as a whole. For example, a program reports an output of 1000 children served. The program selects a representative sample of 200 children. Of these, 180 students (90%) demonstrate the desired change. In this case, the program could report an extrapolated outcome of 900 students.