

## Frequently Asked Questions: Evaluation

### ***Background***

The following FAQs are intended to explain the evaluation requirements and CNCS's expectations for grantee evaluations. Additionally, we provide information for applicants and grantees to assess different evaluation designs and make some suggestions that can help both grantees and applicants to maximize evaluation efforts.

### ***Evaluation Requirements***

#### **1. Where can I find the evaluation requirements for AmeriCorps grantees?**

The evaluation requirements for AmeriCorps grantees can be found in the AmeriCorps regulations [45 C.F.R. §§2522.500-.540 and .700-.740](#),

A State Competitive or National Grantee is required to submit an evaluation report when recompeting for its third competitive three-year grant. In summary, the evaluation requirements are as follows:

| <b><i>If you are a...</i></b>  | <b><i>The following evaluation requirements apply...</i></b> |
|--|--|
| State Competitive grantee with an annual CNCS grant under \$500,000                    | Internal or Independent Evaluation                           |
| State Competitive grantee with an annual CNCS grant of \$500,000 or more               | <b>Independent Impact Evaluation</b>                         |
| National Grantee with an annual CNCS grant under \$500,000                             | Internal or Independent Evaluation                           |
| National Grantee with an annual CNCS grant of \$500,000 or more                        | <b>Independent Impact Evaluation</b>                         |
| State and National Education Award Program (EAP) grantee, regardless of funding amount | Internal or Independent Evaluation                           |
| State Formula grantee  | Evaluation as specified by your state commission             |

Evaluations of National Direct and State Competitive funded programs must cover at least one year of CNCS-funded service activity.

#### **2. What are the evaluation requirements for competitive AmeriCorps grantees?**

**AmeriCorps National Direct grantees and AmeriCorps State Competitive grantees (with the exclusion of Education Award Program grantees) that receive an average annual CNCS grant of \$500,000 or more** must conduct an independent evaluation to measure the impact of programs (45 C.F.R. § 2522.710). An evaluation is considered ***independent*** if it uses an external evaluator who has no formal or personal relationship with, or stake in, the administration, management, or finances of the

grantee or of the program being evaluated. An *impact evaluation* is designed to provide statistical evidence of the impact of the program compared to what would have happened in the absence of the program (i.e. evaluations that include a comparison or control group). For further information on the requirements for an independent evaluation that measures program impact, see [Q5](#).

**AmeriCorps National Direct grantees and State Competitive grantees with average grants of less than \$500,000, as well as all AmeriCorps Education Award Program grantees**, are required to conduct an evaluation, but may use an internal evaluator rather than an independent one (45 C.F.R. § 2522.710). An internal evaluation is designed and conducted by qualified program staff or other stakeholders, such as board members, partners, or volunteer affiliates. For further information on the requirements for grantees that have grants that average less than \$500,000 annually, see Q8.

### **3. What are the evaluation requirements for AmeriCorps State Formula grantees?**

**AmeriCorps State Formula grantees** are required to complete the evaluation requirements as established by their respective State Service Commission (45 C.F.R. § 2522.710). Applicants for State Formula grants should contact their State Commission for their grant evaluation requirements. Unless otherwise noted, the guidance in this document is for competitive grantees.

### **4. What are the evaluation requirements for single-state programs operating in states or territories without commissions?**

Single-state grantees operating in states or territories without commissions are required to comply with the evaluation requirements for state competitive grantees (45 C.F.R. § 2522.700).

### ***Large Grantee Evaluation Requirements***

### **5. What does CNCS expect of grantees that receive an average annual CNCS grant of \$500,000 or more and are required to conduct an independent impact evaluation?**

If a National Direct or State Competitive grantee has received an average of \$500,000 or more per year from CNCS over the last three years prior to re-competition, they will be expected to conduct an independent impact evaluation by engaging an independent evaluator. The evaluation should provide statistical evidence of how well a program works and what effect it has on service recipients and/or service participants compared to what would have happened in the absence of the program. In addition, high-quality evaluations must be designed to provide evidence of a causal relationship between program activities and outcomes (45 C.F.R. § 2522.700). Grantees must use an experimental or quasi-experimental design. The evaluation method should match the size, scale, and purpose of the program.

An impact evaluation should be guided by measurable and clearly defined research questions that identify the effect of program participation on program service recipients and/or service participants for specific outcomes. The research questions and outcomes should be identified in the evaluation plan.

Evaluation plans submitted with recompete applications will be reviewed and approved by CNCS. An outline of the criteria relevant to high-quality evaluation plans may be found under [Q21](#).

#### **6. Are large grantees required to conduct an impact evaluation in every grant cycle?**

**Grantees who have fulfilled the evaluation requirements and have completed an impact evaluation** are not required to conduct another impact evaluation in subsequent grant periods until the evaluation is out of date or the program has changed substantially. However, their subsequent independent evaluation activities should build on the findings from the impact evaluation and other evaluation efforts in order to strengthen the evidence-base for their program and make continuous improvements to the program. For example, subsequent evaluation activities may be designed to answer questions that arose during or as a result of past evaluations; conduct a cost-benefit analysis based on the impact findings; examine the relationship between components of the program model and the program's impacts; or test the effectiveness of the program when replicated in new communities or expanded to reach new populations. Grantees are encouraged to work with an experienced evaluator to identify evaluation activities that will build on past evaluation findings and strengthen the evidence-base for their program.

#### **7. How does CNCS calculate the \$500,000 threshold for large grantees?**

When a grantee recompetes for funding, if the grantee has received an average of \$500,000 per year or more from CNCS over the last three years, the grantee will be considered a large grantee and will be required to submit an evaluation plan that will meet the requirements for a large grantee in the next three-year grant cycle. The \$500,000 is based on CNCS funding, not the program's total budget with matching funds.

#### *Small Grantee Evaluation Requirements*

#### **8. What does CNCS expect of grantees that receive an average annual CNCS grant of less than \$500,000, as well as those that receive an Education Award grant, and are required to conduct an evaluation, which may be conducted by an internal or external evaluator?**

Grantees with an average annual grant under \$500,000, as well as those that receive Education Award grants, are required to submit an evaluation that may be conducted by an [internal](#) or [independent](#) evaluator. These grantees are not required to work with an external individual or entity, such as a university or research firm. Instead, internal staff and other stakeholders can serve as the evaluators. Grantees are encouraged to use evaluators with training and/or experience with rigorous evaluations and may use an independent evaluator, if preferred. See [Q1](#) for more information.

In addition, while we encourage these grantees to use the most rigorous design feasible, they are not required to conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation, unlike the requirement for grantees that receive \$500,000 or more. When selecting a study design, grantees should consider the various options and select the design most appropriate for the program. Grantees may opt for a process, implementation, or impact evaluation. However, CNCS strongly encourages grantees to build on outcome data collected through existing performance measurement efforts and implement a design that

includes assessment of program outcomes and a study comparison group, which can help to determine whether outcomes can be attributed to the program.

### *Timing of Evaluations*

#### **9. When should evaluations be completed?**

AmeriCorps grantees must (1) submit an evaluation plan when they recompile for funding subsequent to their initial three-year grant award; (2) conduct an evaluation during the period of their second three-year grant award; (3) submit a report of the findings from the evaluation when they recompile for funding (§2522.730); and (4) submit, as a companion to the evaluation report, a learning memo that describes how they are using the evaluation to improve the program and to inform their program activities in the next grant cycle. Therefore, in order to report on evaluation findings in time for their second recompile applications, grantees should complete the evaluation within five years of their initial grant award. For more information about the learning memo, see Q28.

First time applicants for AmeriCorps funding are not required to submit an evaluation plan with their application and grantees are not required to conduct an evaluation during their initial three-year grant period. However, these grantees are required to submit a data collection plan with their application for their first three years of funding. For more information, see Q27.

It is highly recommended that grantees begin the evaluation planning process during their initial grant period so that they have a strong evaluation plan and are prepared to conduct a high-quality evaluation if selected for funding during a subsequent grant award period. CNCS encourages grantees to proactively use evaluation resources and assistance made available online and through contracted support. Refer to the [CNCS Evaluation Core Curriculum](#) course, Laying the Groundwork for Your First Evaluation, for additional information.

Grantees who continue to recompile for funding beyond their second three-year grant award should continue to submit evaluation plans for the next grant period, as well as evaluation reports and learning memos from their past evaluation efforts, with their recompile applications.

CNCS expects that each subsequent evaluation will be developmentally appropriate for the program's lifecycle and will build on the findings from previous evaluation efforts in order to strengthen the evidence-base for the program and make continuous improvements to the program.

Grantees should refer to the *Notice of Funding Opportunity* for more information about how to submit data collection plans, evaluation plans, evaluation reports and learning memos.

In summary:

| <i><b>If you are applying for...</b></i>      | <i><b>The following must be submitted with your application:</b></i>  |
|---|---|
| Your <i>first</i> three-year AmeriCorps grant | You are required to submit a data collection plan as described in Q21. You are not required to submit an evaluation plan with your application or conduct an evaluation during the three-year period. However, if you |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | are planning to re-compete for funding, it is highly recommended that you begin the evaluation planning process during the first three-year grant period.  |
| Your <i>second</i> three-year AmeriCorps grant                      | You must submit an evaluation plan with your application and are required to complete the evaluation described in the plan during the second three-year grant period.  |
| Your <i>third</i> three-year AmeriCorps grant                       | You are required to submit: 1) a report detailing the results of the evaluation conducted during the second grant period with your application; 2) a learning memo describing how you are using the evaluation to improve and to inform your activities in the next funding cycle; 3) an evaluation plan for the third three-year grant period that will build on the results of the evaluation from the second three-year grant period. |
| An AmeriCorps grant <i>beyond</i> your third three-year grant award | You must continue to submit an evaluation plan for each successive three-year grant period and a report and learning memo with findings from evaluations conducted in previous grant periods with your application.  |

#### 10. How should I implement my evaluation during a three-year grant cycle?

In order to complete a high quality evaluation on time to meet requirements, CNCS recommends the following timeline for conducting an evaluation during a three-year grant period:

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Year 1 | Revise evaluation plan for CNCS approval (if applicable); Hire external evaluator (if applicable); Develop and pilot test data collection instruments. |
| Year 2 | Collect data.  |
| Year 3 | Analyze data and complete evaluation report and learning memo  |

#### 11. What happens if a grantee does not conduct an evaluation that successfully fulfills the AmeriCorps evaluation requirements by the end of their second three-year grant award?

If a grantee has not completed an evaluation that fulfills the AmeriCorps evaluation requirements, they should detail the evaluation activities that they have carried out to date, along with any evidence that they have gathered on the impact of their program when they submit a re-compete application. The grantee should also provide an evaluation plan with their application that details their evaluation activities in the next grant cycle. The evaluation plan should be designed to fulfill the evaluation requirements.

Recompeting grantees should keep in mind that evaluation results and evaluation plans are a required part of the AmeriCorps funding process. If a grantee that is required to submit an evaluation report and/or evaluation plan fails to do so, CNCS will take this into consideration in making funding decisions. CNCS reserves the right to not consider an application that does not include the requisite evaluation report.

**12. My program design has changed so much that it is basically a new program. Am I still required to evaluate it?**

It may not be developmentally appropriate for large grantees to conduct an impact evaluation if the program design has undergone considerable changes. In this case, a large grantee may request an Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA) based on structure. In most cases programs will still be required to conduct an evaluation that is appropriate for the program's life cycle (e.g., a process or outcome evaluation). Small grantees that have changed considerably are still required to conduct an evaluation that is appropriate to the program's life cycle (e.g., a process or outcome evaluation).

When reviewing requests for an Alternative Evaluation Approach as a result of changes in program design, CNCS will assess whether the program submitted for competitive funding satisfies CNCS's definition of "same project" (45 C.F.R. § 2522.340).

A program will be considered the "same project" if CNCS cannot identify a meaningful difference between the two programs based on a comparison of the following characteristics, among others: :

- a) The objectives and priorities;
- b) The nature of the services provided;
- c) The program staff, participants, and volunteers involved;
- d) The geographic locations in which the services are provided;
- e) The populations served; and
- f) The proposed community partnerships

*Alternative Evaluation Approaches*

**13. Is it required that evaluations measure the impact of the primary service activity on the service beneficiaries or the community? May evaluations measure the impact of the program on member development?**

Evaluations must measure the impact of one or more significant program activities, but not necessarily the primary service activity. CNCS strongly encourages grantees to conduct evaluations that will provide rigorous evidence of community impact and demonstrate that the program is an effective means to solve community problems. However, CNCS also recognizes that member outcomes may represent a significant component of a grantee's theory of change. Small or large grantees that wish to conduct an evaluation focused on member outcomes must request an [Alternative Evaluation Approach](#).

**14. What if my program can't meet the evaluation requirements as established?**

Grantees may be eligible to apply for approval of an Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA). Alternative Evaluation Approach requests are granted on the basis of program structure, member development, timing and replication of an evidence-based program. Refer to the [Alternative Evaluation Approach guidance](#) for additional information.

*Review of Evaluation Plans and Reports*

**15. What happens if a grantee that is required to submit an evaluation plan or report does not submit it by the due date?**

Evaluation plans and reports are a required part of the AmeriCorps funding process. If a grantee that is required to submit an evaluation report and/or evaluation plan fails to do so by the due date, CNCS will take this into consideration when making funding decisions. CNCS reserves the right not to consider an application that does not include the requisite evaluation report.

**16. What will CNCS do with evaluation reports submitted with grant applications?**

Expert evaluators will assess the quality of the evaluation design and implementation, the strength of its findings and whether the evaluation was conducted in accordance with the grantee's approved evaluation plan. These assessments may be used to inform CNCS's consideration of the selection criteria and for the purpose of clarifying or verifying information in the proposals (45 C.F.R. § 2522.740). Refer to the *Notice of Funding Opportunity* for additional information on how the plans and reports will be used during the review process.

CNCS will provide feedback on required evaluation reports for all applicants.

**17. What will CNCS do with evaluation plans submitted with the application?**

CNCS will review and approve evaluation plans for those applicants that are awarded an AmeriCorps grant. Evaluation plans must be approved by the end of the first year of the three-year grant cycle in which an evaluation is required, or the grant will be special conditioned. In order to be approved, the evaluation plan must demonstrate that the evaluation, if conducted according to the plan, will be of high quality and will meet CNCS evaluation requirements. For further information on the evaluation plan, see [Q21](#).

**18. What will CNCS do with data collection plans and learning memos submitted with the application?**

CNCS may use data collection plans and learning memos to inform its consideration of the selection criteria as outlined in the *Notice of Funding Opportunity*. CNCS will also use these documents to inform training and technical assistance for grantees post-award.

**19. How are evaluation plans and reports used post-award?**

Evaluation plans and reports will be used by AmeriCorps staff when monitoring and supporting grantees throughout the grant term. This information will be used in three ways. First, to identify training and technical assistance needs and support to foster continuous improvement and identify programmatic areas that need attention. Second, to identify and share promising practices and models that merit replication. And third, to strengthen the evidence base for the impact of national service.

Evaluations are a vital tool that can help organizations strengthen their program and their impact. Not only can evaluations measure the impact on participants and beneficiaries, they can provide feedback on the extent to which program implementation aligns with the program model and whether impacts differ for different aspects of the program or different populations. These findings can provide data for improvement, adjustment, and future action. Grantees will have the opportunity to refine their

evaluation plans post-award. CNCS will provide tools and guidance for developing and implementing evaluation plans.

## **20. What happens if a grantee's evaluation shows null or negative findings?**

Evaluation findings are one way that applicants can demonstrate evidence of a program's impact, and as such may be used in consideration of the selection criteria and for the purpose of clarifying or verifying information in the proposals. However, applications with evaluations that show null or negative findings will not automatically be rated as unacceptable. Applicants should use the learning memo to demonstrate how they have learned from the evaluation findings and made program improvements to address weaknesses or unexpected findings. Applicants should also develop evaluation plans for the coming grant cycle that will build on the findings from the previous evaluation and help the program continuously improve. Grantees are encouraged to work with an experienced evaluator or use CNCS evaluation capacity building resources to identify how the evaluation findings can be used as a learning tool.

### *Evaluation Plans*

## **21. What should be included in my evaluation plan?**

Applicants should provide sufficient detail on the evaluation objectives and study methods, as well as plans for identifying a qualified evaluator and an estimated budget, in their application. All grantees will have the opportunity to refine and fully develop their evaluation plan post-award. In order to facilitate approval of evaluation plans, grantees are required to cover the following elements in the evaluation plan submitted with their applications:

- A description of the theory of change, or why the proposed intervention is expected to produce the proposed results;
- Clear and measurable outcomes that are aligned with the theory of change and will be assessed during the evaluation;
- Concrete research questions (or hypotheses) that are clearly connected to the outcomes;
- A proposed research design for the evaluation;
- Qualifications needed for the evaluator; and
- An estimated budget.

CNCS will review and approve evaluation plans for all applicants that are selected to receive a grant. Evaluation plans must be approved by the end of the first year of the three-year grant cycle in which an evaluation is required, or the grant will be special conditioned. Evaluation plans will be reviewed to ensure that all necessary plan components (listed above) are present in the plan; that they are described in sufficient detail to be sure that the evaluation is likely to meet requirements if well implemented; and that resources have been allocated appropriately to ensure successful implementation. CNCS will provide tools and guidance for developing and implementing evaluation plans.

When fully developed, an evaluation plan must include the following components:

- I. Introduction
  - a. Program Background and Problem Definition
  - b. Overview of Prior Research

- II. Program Theory, Logic Model and Outcomes of Interest
- III. Research Questions to be Addressed in the Study
- IV. Study Components
  - a. Evaluation Design, including a rationale for the design selected, an assessment of its strengths and limitations, and a description of the process and/or impact assessment components
  - b. Sampling Methods, Measurement Tools, and Data Collection Procedures
  - c. Analysis Plan
- V. Institutional Review Board (IRB) Clearance (if applicable)
- VI. Evaluator Qualifications
- VII. Reporting Results, Timeline and Budget

For more information about evaluation plans, refer to the [CNCS Evaluation Core Curriculum](#) course, “How to Write an Evaluation Plan.”

## **22. What should I do if I need to change my approved evaluation plan?**

Consult with your Program Officer if you believe you need to change your approved evaluation plan. Significant changes to your research questions or evaluation design may require you to amend your grant.

## **23. Are AmeriCorps grantees required to submit evaluation instruments to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)?**

No. These requirements apply only to Federal Executive Departments and agencies, branches of the military and other establishments of the Executive Branch of the federal government. While not required, CNCS encourages grantees to pursue institutional review board (IRB) clearance for evaluations collecting data from human subjects. IRBs are tasked with reviewing evaluation and research plans to ensure that researchers protect the rights of subjects participating in the planned research. IRB clearance may be especially important if grantees seek to publish their work in academic journals. IRBs may be associated with universities, localities (e.g. a local government or school district), or independent research firms.

## **24. How much should I budget for evaluation?**

The cost of evaluations vary widely and will depend on the type of study design, the size of the study, the level of expertise and experience of the evaluator, and data collection expenses. The more rigorous the level of evidence the evaluation is designed to provide or detect, the higher the evaluation costs are likely to be. For example, random control trials (RCTs), which use an experimental study design, tend to be more expensive than other evaluations, but also tend to yield the highest level of valid and rigorous evidence. Keep in mind that evaluation costs tend to be driven by the type and amount of data collected. For example, an evaluation collecting a large amount of new data from beneficiaries will typically cost more than an evaluation collecting a smaller amount of new data, or than one that uses existing or administrative data. For more information about budgeting for evaluation, refer to the course entitled, “Budgeting for Evaluation” on the [CNCS evaluation resources page](#).

**25. How do I budget for evaluation given that costs may vary considerably across each year of a three-year grant?**

CNCS allows grantees to carryover evaluation funds from year to year. Consult with your Grants Officer for more information.

**26. Where can I locate an independent evaluator and what should be the selection criteria for choosing one?**

Universities are good sources for evaluators. Peers and state service commissions may be able to provide recommendations or a list of college and university contacts that have evaluation expertise. National conferences, such as those hosted by the Association for Research on Nonprofits and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and other nonprofit organizations can also be excellent sources for referrals to evaluators. There are many entities dedicated to conducting program evaluations and these typically have the breadth and depth of expertise and resources to carry out rigorous evaluations. The American Evaluation Association website provides a list of research firms/evaluators available by state.

Evaluator qualifications are critical to a successful evaluation that will improve the program's level of evidence. Here are some criteria to consider when selecting an evaluator:

- Years of experience
- Successful completion of similar types of evaluations for similar social service programs
- Experience in evaluating similar types of programs in similar settings
- Capacity and/or access to other resources necessary to manage the scale and scope of the evaluation (e.g. staff has the time to commit to the project; the organization has the resources to collect and analyze breadth of data needed)
- References from previous clients
- Absence of investment in the program to be evaluated; independence is essential to avoid potential or perceived bias on the part of the evaluator.

In planning for an evaluation, grantees should identify the qualifications required for the evaluator and then assess potential evaluators on the extent to which their previous experience and training provide them with the background necessary to meet those qualifications. When selecting an evaluator, grantees should also consider any potential conflicts of interest. For example, there is potential and perceived conflict of interest if the evaluator played a role in designing the program, or if the person supervising the evaluator is connected to the program in some way. Finally, CNCS offers additional advice on hiring an external evaluator in our Core Curriculum class on the topic, "Managing an External Evaluation".

Grantees must follow all applicable federal and state procurement regulations when hiring an external evaluator. Refer to 2 C.F.R § 200.317 – 200.320 for more information.

***Data Collection Plans and Learning Memos***

**27. What should first-time applicants include in their data collection plans?**

Grantees in their first three years of funding are required to submit a data collection plan for CNCS feedback. Plans should address:

- How the grantee will develop a data collection system for performance measurement
- How the grantee will use performance measurement data (including process data) to improve its program in the first three years of funding

The purpose of the data collection plan is to ensure that grantees are developing data collection systems that will allow them to collect high quality data for both performance measurement and evaluation. CNCS may also require grantees to submit data collection instruments that will be used to collect performance measurement data.

## **28. What should be included in the learning memo?**

The learning memo must include:

- A short summary of key learnings from the evaluation
- An explanation of how the program will incorporate key learnings into its strategy, design or implementation
- An explanation of how these changes will improve the program
- A discussion of how learning from the evaluation may inform next steps in the program's long-term research agenda

### *Other Questions on Evaluations*

## **29. What is the difference between performance measurement and evaluation?**

According to the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) performance measurement and evaluation glossary, performance measurement is "the ongoing monitoring and reporting of program accomplishments, particularly progress towards pre-established goals" (glossary, pg. 3). Evaluations, on the other hand, are "individual systematic studies conducted periodically or on an ad hoc basis to assess how well a program is working" (GAO glossary, pg. 3). While performance measures track whether a program has met its objectives, goals, or targets, program evaluations analyze a wider range of information, including important contextual information on the program, beneficiaries, and the external environment, than is feasible to track on an ongoing basis (GAO glossary, pg. 3, 4).

Performance measurement and evaluation both include systematic data collection, and performance measurement data may be included in analysis conducted for an evaluation.

For example: a reading tutoring program identifies the need and a theory of change for addressing that need, e.g. students are reading below grade level and the tutoring program can help them achieve reading success. The program develops performance measures and identifies a primary outcome to measure their ability to address the need, e.g. the primary outcome is to have students reading at or above grade level by the end of one year. The program tests students' reading ability as part of their *performance measurement* activities and gathers evidence of the extent to which the students who participate in the tutoring program improve their reading ability and are reading at grade level after one year. The

program then designs an *evaluation* that will allow them to compare the outcomes for the students who participate in the tutoring program with a similar group of students that does not receive the tutoring services. By comparing the outcomes for the two groups, the evaluation can determine whether the students' improved reading skills can actually be attributed to the tutoring program and not to other factors, such as regular reading improvement or classroom instruction. The greater the capacity of the evaluation to control for the differences between the students who receive tutoring and the comparison group and their experiences (outside of participation in the tutoring program), the stronger the case can be made that the improvement in tutored students' reading ability, when compared to the other group, was the direct result of the tutoring program.

Additional information on how evaluation differs from performance measurement can be found in the AmeriCorps regulations [45 C.F.R. § 2522.700](#).

**30. Are multi-site grantees expected to perform a multi-site evaluation and compare findings to national data?**

CNCS recommends that multi-site grantees evaluate a representative sample of operating sites, if not all of the sites. If a sample of sites are selected, the evaluation results should articulate how the results can be generalized to the other sites, and describe any key elements in variation (e.g. operations, size, type of location, program activity) among the included and excluded sites. The most important factors are that the sites chosen for evaluation are appropriate within the context of the evaluation design and methodology, and can serve as a representative sample for all of the program sites.

**31. For grantees, including multi-focus intermediaries, that serve as umbrella organizations for many different types of service activities (e.g. support mentoring, health, public safety, and environmental programs), what should they evaluate?**

Several factors may be considered in deciding which type of service activities should be evaluated and how they should be evaluated. For example, grantees may want to focus on the primary service activity. In addition, grantees should consider program maturity, preliminary evidence of effectiveness, and the feasibility of conducting a high quality evaluation for the different types of service activities. Grantees that support multiple types of service activities are not required to evaluate every activity and may want to work with their evaluator to determine what to evaluate. Grantees may want to evaluate elements of the program's theory of change that are common to all the service programs, such as volunteer leveraging, capacity-building results or the ways in which AmeriCorps members add value to operating sites or service locations.

**32. Are organizations that receive CNCS funding from more than one type of funding (i.e. AmeriCorps State, AmeriCorps National Direct, VISTA, or Social Innovation Fund) to fund more than one program required to conduct separate evaluations for each program?**

Organizations are required to evaluate each of the programs in accordance with the evaluation requirements of the CNCS program that funds that program. Depending on the characteristics of the organization and programs, it may be possible for the grantees to develop a single evaluation design capable of assessing more than one program. In addition, it is possible that part of the evaluation requirements may be covered if one or more of the programs have been included in a national or a statewide evaluation. If an individual program receives more than one type of funding, grantees may

work with their state service commission and/or CNCS program officer to determine if a separate evaluation is required.

**33. How does the language in [§2522.710](#) of the regulations, which states that CNCS may “supersede these requirements with an alternative evaluation approach, including one conducted by the Corporation at the national level,” apply to the evaluation requirements?**

CNCS’s Office of Research and Evaluation undertakes national evaluations. State or National grantees who participate in these evaluations may meet the evaluation requirements through their participation. CNCS will notify grantees of such national evaluation efforts as they emerge. We encourage programs to participate if invited to do so. Due to resource constraints, most CNCS evaluation studies will focus on certain types of programs. For example, CNCS may be interested in conducting a study of mentoring programs, and only a nationally representative or random sample of programs conducting these activities may be asked to participate in the study.

If a program participates in a national evaluation conducted by CNCS, that program may be exempt from the requirement to provide an internal or independent evaluation for the next grant cycle if the evaluation provides findings that fulfill the grantee’s evaluation requirements. The program should describe its participation in the national evaluation when presenting their evaluation plan for that grant cycle. Results must be disaggregated by program to ensure consistency across the entire national portfolio, although those individual results are not always made public, due to confidentiality constraints. Nevertheless, the program is required to submit its evaluation results as part of their re-compete application in order to meet the evaluation requirement.

**34. Where can I access additional information on evaluation?**

Additional evaluation resources, including the CNCS Evaluation Core Curriculum, are available on the [CNCS website](#).

**35. How can I get additional help to build our evaluation capacity?**

National Grantees should contact their CNCS Program Officer for referral to technical assistance and other resources. State subgrantees should contact their State Commission.

*For State Commissions*

**36. Does participation in a statewide evaluation fulfill the evaluation requirements?**

If a program participates in a statewide evaluation, that program may be exempt from the requirement to provide an internal or independent evaluation for the next grant cycle if the evaluation provides findings that fulfill the grantee’s evaluation requirements. The program should describe its participation in the statewide evaluation when presenting their evaluation plan for that grant cycle. Results must be disaggregated by program to ensure consistency across the entire state portfolio, although individual results may not be made public due to reasons of confidentiality. Nevertheless, the program is required

to submit its evaluation results as part of its re-compete application in order to meet the evaluation requirements.

**37. Is a state commission required to submit the evaluations for its formula programs to CNCS?**

No. However, CNCS is very interested in developing best practices in evaluation design and implementation. If a state commission has an example of a strong evaluation from a formula grantee that they would like to share with CNCS, we encourage them to do so.

**38. What role should AmeriCorps Program Officers play in the development of state commissions' evaluation policies?**

State commissions are expected to establish their own evaluation policies for their formula portfolios. They are encouraged to confer with their CNCS program officer when developing the evaluation policy.

**39. When a commission submits a former formula program to CNCS as a state competitive application, is the application required to include an evaluation plan and/or report?**

If the grantee has never received competitive funding, the grantee is not required to submit an evaluation plan or report in the first competitive grant cycle but is required to submit a data collection plan for their first three years of competitive funding.

If the grantee has received competitive funding in the past, requirements are determined as follows:

- If the grantee has received at least three years of competitive funding in the last five years, an evaluation plan is required.
- If the grantee has received at least four years of competitive funding in the last five years, an evaluation plan and an evaluation report are required.

CNCS recognizes that some grantees move from competitive to formula and back again. Commissions are encouraged to develop evaluation requirements for these grantees that will keep them on track to meet competitive evaluation requirements.