

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

1. You must submit your complete application in eGrants no later than 4:30 PM on Wednesday, November 4, 2015. If you experience technical difficulties with eGrants, please contact their Help Desk immediately and get a ticket number. Phone: 800-942-2677 and Web: <https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask>
2. Serve Wisconsin must receive **all** of your additional documents in a sealed envelope in our office no later than 4:30 PM on Wednesday, November 4, 2015. It doesn't count if it was received by our mail room, by the front desk, or is lost in transit, so make sure that you get these to us on time. You may drop off your documents to us personally between the hours of 7:00 am – 4:30 pm. Use the checklist on page 13 of the application instructions if you are a New or Recompete applicant, and page 19 if you are a Continuation applicant. This will help ensure you don't miss anything! <http://www.servewisconsin.wi.gov/Documents/AmeriCorps%20Funding/16-17RFP/2016-17%20Application%20Instructions%20and%20Attachments.pdf> Staff will notify the contact person listed on the Notification of Intent to Apply via e-mail as soon as your document packet is received.
3. Your proposal cannot exceed 15 pages, which includes the SF-424 Facesheet (18 pages if you are applying for a multi-focused intermediary, School Turnaround AmeriCorps or Next Gen AmeriCorps). Please print your application to ensure that it does not exceed this page limit—we will not review any pages over the limit.
4. Your Logic Model may not exceed 3 pages as it prints from eGrants. Please print your logic model to ensure that it does not exceed this page limit—we will not review any pages over the limit.

2016-2017 WNCSSB AmeriCorps*State RFP Questions and Answers

Please review all of these Questions and Answers, which will be updated frequently, to see if your question has been answered below.

A. General AmeriCorps Questions

A1. What are the general qualifications of AmeriCorps members and how does recruitment work?

Programs set their requirements based on program design. So, for example, if you had a program for teachers, you would want to make sure they are licensed in Wisconsin to teach. The requirements from CNCS are: 1. Must be a citizen, national, or legal permanent resident; 2. Must be at least 17 years old (for most programs); 3. Earned a GED or HSED or are working toward one of the two; 4. Pass Criminal History Background Checks (no registered or required to be registered sex offenders and no convicted murderers).

Most programs promote their program throughout the year, but most recruitment takes place in Spring/Summer. You would be responsible for recruiting, enrolling, and managing your members.

A2. In what types of AmeriCorps training will members need to participate, and when/where are they?

All members must be given an orientation by the program which cover the basics (AmeriCorps, National Service, member contract, etc.). In Wisconsin, they must also receive conflict resolution and citizenship training. You would be responsible for creating and conducting these trainings, so you can host them wherever you want. Obviously, orientation should happen at the beginning of service, but other training should be at appropriate times during the service year.

A3. What types of AmeriCorps reporting and training would be required for the applicant?

Serve Wisconsin AmeriCorps programs submit progress reports (based on their Performance Measures and other reports) and financial reports on a quarterly basis. We provide a new Program Director orientation and other trainings throughout the year. We require you to include \$2000 in your budget for staff to attend CNCS-sponsored training, which will likely be a Regional National Service meeting held somewhere in the Midwest in 2017.

A4. Does the [living allowance] get paid by AmeriCorps directly to the members or are the funds disbursed to the sponsoring agency who then makes the payments?

The living allowance paid to AmeriCorps members (required for all full-time members, optional for less than full-time) is paid by the organization administering the program. It's included in the program budget, and can come from CNCS funds and/or Grantee Cash Match. Please see the Budget Instructions in the Application Instructions and Attachments.

B. Minimum Requirements

B1. The 20 AmeriCorps member minimum is new this year. Will Serve Wisconsin accept a proposal from an organization requesting fewer than 20 members?

No, the 20 member minimum is a CNCS requirement for proposals, and so we will not accept proposals seeking fewer than 20 members in the competitive cycle. *Updated Answer (10/1/2015): If a program wants to engage fewer than 20 AmeriCorps members per year, please contact the RFP Manager at jessica.kessler@wisconsin.gov. This might be allowable; however, your application will not be eligible for competitive consideration, and there is no guarantee that it will be funded with Formula funds.*

B2. Can the 20 member minimum be any slot type? Is there a Member Service Year (MSY) minimum?

Yes, the members can be of any slot type (i.e., they do not all need to be Full-Time members—1 MSY). There is no MSY minimum.

C. Continuation Funding Questions

C1. We plan to make a change in our PMs going into year 3 and will reference our Logic Model, which was submitted in Word prior to the eGrants template. Will reviewers have access to it? How should we proceed?

Continuations with no changes to the logic model do not need to submit or enter a logic model in eGrants. A Continuation with a change to the logic model will need to enter the logic model in the eGrants application.

An applicant would need to determine if a change merited logic model revision. Some logic models have specific targets included and we understand those may vary and the actual targets may change in a grant year. Changes to the performance measures should be completed in the performance measures section of the application and also noted in the Continuation Changes section of the application.

As it relates to this question, I think you first need to determine if the changes to your PMs would result in a substantial change to the logic model, such as program design. It doesn't appear that changes to targets would require a change. If your logic model would need substantial changes, you will need to first enter the revised model into eGrants, then explain those changes in your Continuation Changes narrative. If it doesn't and you just need to make changes to your PMs, you can do that. They have your logic model on file and can refer to it if necessary.

D. Performance Scoring

D1. If we have a year in the past three [calendar] years we weren't funded, will you go back 4 years to get 3 years of performance?

No, Serve Wisconsin only looks at the last three calendar years of performance, so we will be looking at your performance in the 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15 program years.

D2. Is performance composite over those 3 years, or is each year's data considered independently?

We combine all of the performance data for each criteria over the three calendar years. This gives us an average of your performance for that period.

E. eGrants Questions

F. Program Questions

F1. What is the difference between Education Award Programs (EAP) and Competitive Programs?

EAP programs receive only \$800 per MSY (not member...this is the full-time equivalent) enrolled. That means that 100% of the operating costs, member support costs, etc. must come from the organization. This is typically only feasible for organizations that run a program where members are receiving college credit for being in the program (such as a teacher education program) or a program utilizing very small slot types and not providing members a living allowance.

F2. May a program have more than one CNCS focus area?

Yes, a program may address more than one CNCS focus area, but you need to identify which is the Primary Focus Area and which is the Secondary Focus Area.

G. Fiscal & Budget Questions

G1. Does the maximum cost per MSY of \$13,730 include the overhead and administrative costs?

The maximum cost per MSY is the sum of your entire Federal request (administrative/indirect costs included) divided by the number of MSY (not members) your program is requesting.

G2. Do in-kind contributions from a project sponsor such as office, furniture, computers, phone and internet service, supplies, administrative overhead, etc., count towards the 24% match requirement?

Yes, in-kind contributions can count towards the 24% match requirement as long as they are not being matched for any other grants.

H. Serve Wisconsin/Wisconsin National and Community Service Board & CNCS Questions

H1. What is the typical reimbursement time for a Cost Reimbursement program?

This is dependent upon your timeliness of submitting periodic (monthly or quarterly) expense reports. Once you submit them (usually by the 20th of the following month), the WI Dept. of Administration has up to 30 days to pay.

Frequently Asked Questions from Prior RFPs

Eligibility & General AmeriCorps Questions

FAQ 1. Are schools and school districts eligible to apply for AmeriCorps*State funding?

The following entities are eligible to apply: public or private nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and other community organizations; institutions of higher education; government entities within states or territories (e.g., cities, counties); labor organizations; partnerships and consortia; and Indian Tribes.

If your school/school district is part of the state board of education, it is classified as part of a government entity, and thus eligible to apply.

FAQ 2. Are the minimum and maximum living allowances stated in the RFP (pages 21-22) flexible? If we provide more match, can we have a higher living allowance than the maximum?

No, these amounts are set by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and are not flexible. A full-time member must be paid a living allowance of at least \$12,530 and a maximum of \$25,060. Members serving in any term less than full-time do not need to be paid a living allowance; however, the maximums still apply.

FAQ 3. What is a “significant” number of participants aged 55 or older in an EnCorps program?

There is no guidance from CNCS on what constitutes a “significant” number of participants aged 55 or older. Applicants should be prepared to make their case as to why they consider whatever portion of the program that engages this type of member to be significant if it is not inherently apparent in the program design.

B. RFP Content Questions & Additional Documents

FAQ 4. Why are the point values doubled on Appendix A: Application Peer Review Form from the points listed in the RFP?

The reason why the point values are doubled on the Peer Review Form is because they only review half of the proposal (the Program Design). We keep the values equivalent to CNCS, but in order to get to 100 total points, we have to multiply these points by 2. The one exception you will note is in the points assigned for evidence base—we spread these out more evenly to give applicants a better chance of getting points in this section.

FAQ 5. Are there any rules on the type of referencing they want in the narrative (APA format, etc.), particularly in our evidence base section?

CNCS does not have any rules on citing sources. You have a very limited amount of space, so you should provide only as much information as would be needed to find the article, website, report, etc. you are referencing, including name/source and year. More specific guidance about citing reports that will prove the evidence base of your intervention can be found on page 14 of the RFP.

FAQ 6. Are the organizational capacity and budget adequacy sections part of the 15 page limit?

The 15-page limit includes:

- SF-424 Facesheet
- Executive Summary
- Program Design
- Organizational Capacity
- Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

It does not include the evaluation plan, logic model, performance measures, budget, or budget narrative. Please see page 12 of the RFP for more information.

FAQ 7. If we are using the same Federal match as last year, do we need to resend our approval letter?

Yes, all documents on the additional document checklist must be submitted by the deadline (November 4, 2015 @ 4:30 PM Central) even if you sent them last year and are a Continuation applicant.

FAQ 8. Do we refer to your agency as “Serve Wisconsin” at any place we might mention you throughout the grant application?

Yes, you can refer to us as “Serve Wisconsin”—CNCS is most familiar with this name, and it’s shorter than the Wisconsin National and Community Service Board.

FAQ 9. Can we create an additional logic model that can be sent with our additional documents?

No, you will enter your logic model directly in eGrants. We won’t review anything that is not requested in the instructions or additional document checklist. Please remember that your logic model cannot exceed three (3) pages as it prints from eGrants.

Continuation Applicant Questions

FAQ 10. If I request an increased cost per MSY, will it put my continuation funding at jeopardy?

No, requesting an increase in CNCS share or an increased cost per MSY wouldn’t jeopardize your chance for continued funding. At worst, CNCS would deny your request and you would need to remain at your current funding level or cost per MSY. This is why a detailed rationale for an increased request is required.

FAQ 11. What if our Competitive funding isn’t continued?

We don’t know of an instance of this happening, but if it does we will use the Formula Funding Process to assess whether or not you will be funded through Formula. This will include being eligible (being a nonprofit registered in the State of Wisconsin) and meeting the 80% performance threshold based on the last 3 complete years of performance data. The Committee and Board may also consider your peer review score from the year you were competitively funded and your program’s fit in Wisconsin’s portfolio.

FAQ 12. The application instructions for Continuations states that the page limit for the Continuation Changes field is 6 pages as the pages print from eGrants. Is this page limit just for Year 3 continuation changes, or does it also include year 2? (Application Instructions & Attachments – page 17)

This page limit is for both Years 2 and 3, so you may need to edit or remove some of the old information from Year 2 changes. Make a note in Year 2 that you removed or abbreviated certain sections.

Application Instructions

FAQ 13. To whom should letters of recommendation or endorsement be addressed?

General letters of recommendation (up to 2) can be addressed to Serve Wisconsin.

Letters of endorsement/commitment for the Governor/Mayor Initiative, Memoranda of Understanding for the Multi-Focus Intermediary, and letters of commitment from partner schools for School Turnaround AmeriCorps should be addressed to you as the applicant, since they are pledging their commitment to be part of your consortium/initiative. These will be part of your additional document packet, due in the Serve Wisconsin office by 4:30 pm on November 4, 2015.

FAQ 14. Do I create a system account or individual account for our organization in SAM?

You will create an individual account.

FAQ 15. If we present what we believe to be “moderate evidence” but the reviewers decide it is not enough evidence to merit the points, will we lose all points for that section?

The reviewers will determine the evidence base of your proposal based on the criteria listed in the RFP. While they may or may not agree that your evidence is as strong as you propose, you will not lose all of the points for that section if they find your evidence base to be lower. They will give you the appropriate number of points based on the evidence provided.

eGrants Questions

FAQ 16. I started my application in eGrants, but can't find it.

If you're sure you've started a new application (or have continued an existing application), from the Home page under "View My Grants/Applications" select "View All". Scroll through all of your applications to find the one that was created most recently. If you still can't find your application, please contact the eGrants Hotline (800-942-2677 or <https://questions.nationalservice.gov/app/ask>).

FAQ 17. The RFP states that proposals cannot exceed 15 pages (including the SF-424 Facesheet) as they print out from eGrants. What are the page margins and font sizes for eGrants so we can work on it in Word?

The page margins, fonts, and line spacing are not easily identifiable; however, the following will give you a good idea as to how many pages your application will be once you enter it into eGrants.

Margins: Top (1.56"), Bottom (1.0"), Left (1.0"), Right (0.65")

Font: Georgia, 11 point, 1.5 line spacing

Note: You MUST review your application in eGrants prior to submission to ensure that none of your application is cut off. We will not review materials over the page limit.

FAQ 18. If we have only received Formula funding, do we select Yes or No to the following question in the Program Information section of eGrants? “My organization has previously received an AmeriCorps State and National Grant . . .”

You will select “Yes” because you have previous funding history with your State Commission (Serve WI).

FAQ 19. How do we fill out the funding/demographics portion of our eGrants application, specifically yes/no questions?

This is a unique flaw in eGrants—there are no check boxes in the section where you will note that your AmeriCorps members will wear AmeriCorps logo every day, that AmeriCorps members will create and deliver elevator speeches, and that the AmeriCorps logo will be proudly displayed on the front page of your website. To indicate **YES** in any yes/no question that doesn't have a checkbox, enter **1**. To indicate **NO**, enter **0**. Please note that these questions aren't asking for how many members will wear their service gear or how many websites the logo will appear on—it's simply asking if you will do these things. Remember, those are requirements of receiving AmeriCorps funding. **(Note: This may now be fixed for the 2016-2017 application.)**

The rest of the funding/demographics section should be self-explanatory. Make sure that the numbers you enter for your request, match, and others are the same as on your SF-424 Facesheet, budget, and in your narrative.

Funding Decisions

FAQ 20. What will be the soonest we would hear something back from CNCS regarding whether our proposal was funded or not?

CNCS has a target date of May 13th to notify us as to whom they will fund competitively. As soon as we know who is and is not funded competitively, we will begin the Formula selection process. This will involve Serve WI staff looking at the pool of applicants and determining at what level we can and will fund programs. We make our recommendation to the Program Evaluation & Development Committee (likely in late May) who then make their recommendation to the full Board at their meeting (likely early June). Based on these recommendations, you may be asked to revise your application. CNCS sets a date for state commissions to submit their Formula applications—this past year it was June 26th.

FAQ 21. We are looking to put together our Host Site application and other programmatic things in February/March so if funding is approved, it will give sites plenty of time to recruit members, etc. How much do you think we should accomplish prior to funding decisions?

This a great idea. It's understandable that you do not want to put too much effort into recruitment of host sites and members before you're sure you have funding, but it will only help your program and your host sites if you're able to get the word out that the opportunity may be available in August/September. It's up to you to determine how much time you have to put into next year's recruitment, but it will help to start early.

FAQ 22. Will the presentation to the Program Evaluation & Development Committee in December decide whose projects then get sent to CNCS for competitive funding?

That determination is mostly based on your average peer review score, past performance, and getting a complete application and additional document packet submitted on time. This is why it's so important to be timely and thorough in your submission, and to make sure to answer each portion of the narrative in full. The Committee will take your presentation and staff recommendation into consideration, but they rarely stop an application from going forward if they've met the minimum requirements.

FAQ 23. Who assesses the points for Organizational Capability, Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy?

Serve Wisconsin staff looks at your entire application and may request technical changes to any part, including Organizational Capability, Performance Measures, Budget, etc. CNCS reviewers score your proposal based on all of the criteria—a total of 100 points, with point values described in the RFP.