servemontana
GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

19 October 2011

2012 AmeriCorps State Technical Assistance FAQ

This FAQ contains information pertaining to the 2012 Montana AmeriCorps State Competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process. AmeriCorps State Grants are funded by the federal Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) through the Montana Governor's Office of Community Service (OCS).

Applicants and interested organizations should submit all questions in writing to Rebecca Steele (resteele@mt.gov) at the Governor's Office of Community Service. All questions and answers will be posted publically in this FAQ on the ServeMontana website at http://serve.mt.gov/?page_id=2960. Questions will be dated with the most recent added to the top. Please read through the entire FAQ before submitting additional questions.

10.19.11

Question: During the Performance Measurement Training Call, on slide 28 Tips, you discussed using the Strategy to Achieve Results section to describe the PM. On the call you stated a 4,000 character limit but in the application instructions Attachment C Steps 11A and 9B list a maximum of 500 characters, which is correct?

Answer: CNCS originally stated there would be 4,000 characters for the Strategy to Achieve Results section but published the instructions with the lower count (500). We asked CNCS for clarification and they have advised applicants to fully explain each PM within the Narrative as external reviews do not see the PM section and to keep the Strategy to Achieve Results section to 500 characters.

10.18.11

Question: On 10.7.11 the question was asked, "are program directors or staff required to attend the National Conference?" The answer was there are no regulations requiring programs to attend the National Conference but section C.1. Staff Travel, in the application instructions, state, "We expect all applicants to include funds in this line item for travel for staff and site staff to attend… including… the Annual Grantee Meeting in Washington DC in the fall." Are we required to enter travel for CNCS conferences?

Answer: CNCS confirmed this requirement is for direct grantees (state commissions and national directs). AmeriCorps State Programs or Subgrantees are not required to attend or budget for CNCS sponsored trainings. CNCS will look at clarifying this section going forward.

10.17.11

Question: Can you clarify when letters of intent are due for State Formula funding?

Answer: The AmeriCorps State Formula timeline is in draft status and could be changed due to when CNCS releases the Formula Funding Notice. As it stands, if the notice is received on time the Montana Letter of Intent will be due March 21, 2011.

Question: Is the Consultation Form for multi-state programs due on November 4, along with State Competitive applications?

Answer: Montana does not have a set due date for the multi-state consultation form we defer to CNCS guidelines; "Consult in a timely manner with the State Commission of each state in which the organization knows it will operate prior to application submission."

Thank you for your questions, we look forward to reviewing your proposal!

Question: Do all members have to be tied to the same output?
Answer: Members do not all have to be tied to the same output, for example you can have two performance measures for a program and half of your members could work on say an education measure and the other half on a veterans capacity building measure. When entering the performance measure into eGrants you should select how many MSY are attached to each measure.

Question: If all members are functioning under the same output, do they need to report on the same outcome?
Answer: Not all MSY assigned to the output are required to report on the same outcome but you cannot attach fewer MSY to the outcome. If you have two outcomes and only half of the MSY report on each the demonstrated impact will not be as strong as if you had all members reporting on the same outcome.

Question: Do all members need to provide the same dosage?
Answer: There are no requirements for all members to provide the same dosage. Each member can have an independent position description explaining their service in detail.

10.14.11
Question: Do fixed-amount applicants need to provide MOUs or documentation of previous fundraising efforts? If so, can you provide an example of what type of documentation is substantive enough?
Answer: Fixed amount grants will be required to supply MOUs and documentation of fundraising activities.

For documentation of MOUs, any organization listed in the narrative as a contributor of match (cash or in-kind) to the grant should provide a signed letter, on the contributing organizations letterhead, stating the resources they intend to contribute to support the AmeriCorps grant.

Documenting past fundraising efforts depends on what you state in the narrative will be done to support the grant. If you state that bake sales will be a method for developing cash match for the grant, provide some kind of evidence that your organization has been successful in raising funds through bake sales. If the AmeriCorps program will be supported through other grants you can provide award letters from those grants.

Question: We are just finishing up our first fiscal year and coordinating our audit. It is unlikely that we will have our audit findings available by Nov 4. Can you provide a recommendation of what an "equivalent" would be that would satisfy this requirement?
Answer: Some sort of communication between the auditor and your organization indicating that the audit is ongoing and that management letters are not yet available will be sufficient to meet this requirement.

Question: There seems to be conflicting information in the instructions as to how we should submit the application. Is it due, via email, to OCS on Nov 4? Or via eGrants? If eGrants, Montana does not appear as an option under "Commission AmeriCorps State Fixed Amount Grants FY 2012". Should we select "Commission AmeriCorps State FY 2012" and proceed with questions as a fixed-amount applicant?
Answer: The application should be submitted via eGrants by Nov. 4, all other materials are due via e-mail. We will open the "Commission AmeriCorps State Fixed Amount Grants FY 2012" application.

Question: What are the progress report requirements for fixed amount grants?
Answer: Fixed amount grantees will have the same twice annual Progress Report requirements as cost reimbursement grants.

Question: Will fixed amount grant applicants be required to provide total budget values on the Letter of Intent? Will a detailed budget be required?
Answer: Yes, fixed amount grant applicants are required to provide an estimated budget total in the letter of intent. No, fixed amount grants will not be required to submit a detailed budget.

Question: Does a program that is has been previously funded through a formula grant, but new to applying for competitive funding; need to complete the Readiness Self Assessment (Attachment C)?
Answer: No, only programs that have never been awarded a grant through the Montana Commission on Community Service, either Competitive or Formula, need to complete the Readiness Self Assessment.

10.12.11
Question: When entering the performance measure value can you enter a percentage?
Answer: Yes, percentages can be entered but the percentage sign will not be included. The percentage will be explained within the performance measure itself.

Question: Have the Governor's Office of Community Service and the Corporation for National and Community Service been in contact regarding the Capacity Building measures and their need for indirect service?
Answer: Yes

Question: What is the definition of youth in regards to mentoring in the priority measures?
Answer: Per CNCS, considering youth as up to 22 or 25 if it fits the programs needs is fine. For example a Youth Corps has members up to 25, and sometimes (many times) the members themselves are both the delivers of service and the recipients.

Question: EN1 measures energy efficiency after weatherization and looks for energy use to be significantly improved. The definition of significantly improved is very high when looking at a 40 year old trailer compared to new energy star homes. Can the target for significantly improved be modified?
Answer: Per CNCS, the 15% increase in the outcome is not supposed to be unit by unit but could be an overall or average measure. Their contacts n weatherization confirmed that 15% was a pretty reasonable target, but again if it wasn't for one 40 year-old trailer; it would be more than reasonable for a newer home, so it should average out.

Question: How do you align performance measures around volunteer generation?
Answer: To align volunteer measures, the volunteers must have a defined role and the outcome needs to be attached to their position description. If general volunteer recruitment is your primary focus and the volunteers are not focused on one project your performance measure may just consist of an output and in that case you would need a second aligned measure.

Question: Is it ok to have both attitude and behavior change outcomes for the same output?

Answer: Yes, we strongly encourage applicants to focus on behavior and conditional changes; if you want to include a change in attitude as extra information you are welcome to.

Question: Can there be multiple outcomes for one output?
Answer: Yes, an output can have more than one outcome.

Question: Are performance measures now just outputs and outcomes?
Answer: Yes. An aligned performance measure connects the applicant's mission, theory of change, output, and outcome, with the outcome relating back to the mission and all information supported with relevant data.

Question: Measuring change in children's behavior can be a challenge to track due to getting permission. Do you have any suggestions?
Answer: When writing your performance measures look at what data is available and what you can measure. Build a relationship with the school and agency to gain access to the information you want.

Question: Member development is still valuable and it is a different kind of evaluation. How do we include this information?
Answer: The Corporation is developing measures for member development and until they are published CNCS has asked applicants to include member development within the narrative.

Question: Does the intervention need to be explained in both the performance measure and the narrative?
Answer: Yes, the performance measure should be fully explained in both the narrative and within the 'Strategy to Achieve Results' Section of the performance measure. This includes explaining the intervention in detail, again in both places. It is key to use both areas as the external reviews will not receive a copy of the performance measures.

Question: May I start entering things into eGrants or do I need to wait until we have been invited to apply following the Letter of Intent?
Answer: Yes, programs can start entering their application into eGrants. If an applicant is not asked to continue based on their Letter of Intent and Readiness Self Assessment, the Governor's Office of Community Service will remove the application from eGrants.

10.7.11
Question: Will the focus areas and expectations for Formula funding be the same or similar to Competitive?
Answer: Yes, the Formula Montana Expectations and CNCS Focus areas will be similar to Competitive.

Question: Are program directors or staff required to attend the National Conference?
Answer: There are no regulations requiring programs to attend the National Conference.

9.23.11
Question: How much detail is needed in the "Strategy to Achieve Results" section in eGrants?

Answer: The "Strategy to Achieve Results" section should contain enough detail that the performance measure can be understood without a reviewer reading the narrative. When printed the performance measure page should be able to stand alone. The narrative and strategy section should both explain:

- community need (backed with data),
- investment (member actions),
- frequency of activity,
- performance measurement targets,
- and the specific goal that ties back to the community need.

Thank you for your questions, we look forward to reviewing your proposal!