MONTANA COMMISSION ON community service

AmeriCorps State Formula

Grant Review Interview Meeting Minutes

AARP Conference Room

30 West 14th Street Suite 301, Helena, MT

June 8, 2012

Review CommiAttendees: Nan

9:02 Welcome – Jan Lombardi

- Updates: Grant Review Workgroup members James Steele and Adam Vauthier were unable to attend today's meeting.
- Update on Competitive grants: The Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) was fully funded and Montana Legal Services (MLSA) grant is in a pending status. All other applicants were not approved.
    - Nancy Matheson asked if a decision was still needed on the Big Sky Watershed Corps program since MCC was fully funded?
    - Jan confirmed that these applications are separate and a decision on the Big Sky Watershed Corps is still needed.
- Connie Roope with the Jobs for Montanan's Graduates Foundation (JMGF) reported on the decision to dissolve the Foundation. The decision resulted in JMGF withdrawing their application for 2012 Competitive funding.

9:21 Process Reminders- Rebecca Steele

- Rebecca provided an outline of the process for reviewing applications, scoring points scale, and the role of lead reviewers
- Conflicts of interests were discussed among the group, resulting in three conflicts for two applications.
    - Nancy Matheson: Food Corps; Karin Olsen Billings: Graduation Matters Montana; Carol Townsend: Graduation Matters Montana
    - At the request of staff Carol Townsend stated a potential conflict of interest with the Graduation Matters Montana Grant. The review group agreed that Carol had a conflict and should be removed from the scoring of that proposal.
- Rebecca clarified that fixed cost costs grants do not need to provide a budget and explained how this is different than other applications.
    - James Corson asked for clarification regarding the budget for fixed priced grants.
    - Jim Auer explained that match is not reported but assumed, that grantees are assessed strictly on outputs.
- James Corson asked about those grants that do not get approved by the Commission
    - Rebecca confirmed that some programs have other CNCS grants (e.g. VISTA), some of which do not require Commission review/approval.

9:37 Score sheet Reminders - Jim Auer

- Jim explained scale used for scoring each application and reminded group that they need to come to a consensus score within the group. If something is not in the application the information cannot be added through the interview, the interview portion is strictly for clarification of presented materials. Explained how Yes/No questions are scored with either a 0 or 3.

9:41 Montana State Parks AmeriCorps –

- Summary of the Application – Provided by lead reviewer Carol Townsend.
- Scoring Discussion and Consensus -
- Interview Questions; Ken Soderberg and Katie McKeown (Representing FWP)
  - Carol Townsend asked for an explanation of some of the programs that have been implemented thus far?
  - Ken described educational programs including updating trail guides and creating a new arts program at Lewis and Clark Caverns.
- Carol Townsend asked what measures will ensure member and volunteer contributions have a lasting impact?
  - Ken indicated that a primary focus of the program was on growing and retaining volunteers to ensure enduring programs.
    - Nancy asked why a lifelong commitment to service not included as a performance measure?
    - Ken indicated that even though it wasn't a performance measure that is was part of their program design. Ken further described programs targeted at engaging youth in parks.
- Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score: 76/100

9:57 Discussion completed

10:04 Big Sky Watershed Corps (BSWC); -

- Summary of Application – Provided by Rebecca Steele in the absence of James Steele
- Scoring Discussion and Consensus -
- Interview Questions; Jeff Tibery, Brian Wilson, Ann Schwend, and Lee Gault
  - Nancy asked how the connection is being made to provide watershed health in underserved areas of Montana?
  - Ann Schwend discussed the important role of watersheds in rural economies throughout Montana.
  - James Corson asked where watersheds receive their funding for match?
  - Jeff Tibery indicated that most of the funding is often provided by a county mill levy, however other sources include grant funds from varies entities.
- Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score: 93/100
- 10:15 Review completed

10:17 Food Corps;

- Lead Reviewer Summary of Application – James Corson

- Scoring Discussion and Consensus-
- Questions: Crissie McMullan and Cecily Uptown (by phone) – Representing Food Corps
    - James Corson: Why Montana?
        - Crissie indicated that they've been operating in Montana under different venues such as VISTA since 2006 (through Montana Campus Compact). The VISTA members have been laying the ground work in Montana for an AmeriCorps State program.
        - Cecily indicated that they've been looking at the need in Montana especially in rural parts of the state along with potential partners.
    - Karin: What are the ways that you practice inclusion efforts?
        - Crissie indicated that gardens are designed more as classrooms than for production providing greater accessibility. Raised beds are also a common feature to improve access.
    - Carol Townsend: What is the National Center for Appropriate Technology?
        - Crissie talked about the national organization that promotes sustainable energy and agriculture practices.
    - James Corson: Who do you work with at MSU extension efforts?
        - Crissie not through a formal partnership at this time, but coordination is frequent..
- Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score: 84/100
- 10:52 Completed Review

11:08 <u>Great Futures Corps</u>;

- Lead Reviewer Summary of Application, Nancy Matheson
- Scoring Discussion and Consensus
- Questions: Krista Solomon and Brian Dennis (Representing Great Futures Corps)
    - Nancy: What is the special role that AmeriCorps members have in relation to other volunteers within the Boys and Girls Clubs?
        - Krista indicated that some of the clubs lack in resources to establish volunteer's models. Brian added that AmeriCorps would be more reliable and could help establish learning models at clubs that lack the infrastructure.
    - Carol: The application talks about pending grants therefore how do this impact the required match?
        - Krista indicated that they have secured all the required match and pending grants would provide additional funding.
    - Carol: Clarify the clubs formula for impact and using existing tool on a broader level?
        - Krista indicated that members will amplify the effectiveness of these programs, some clubs have yet to implement programs so members would help establish. Members will be at clubs with the greatest needs and bring clubs to same levels as other clubs.
- Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score: 77/100

- 11:30 Completed Review

11:30 Break for Lunch

12:08 <u>Graduation Matters Montana AmeriCorps</u>

- Lead Reviewer Summary of Application, Nancy Matheson
- Scoring Discussion and Consensus
- Rebecca clarified that a request had been submitted to adjust match levels to meet requirements of the University of Montana.
- Eric Cardella added that while the reported budget would show only 24% match the actual budget would reflect a 50% match as was provided to the commission.
- During the scoring the grant reviewers decided to wait and score three questions until the question and answer portion of the interview. The three questions are as follows:
    - 1) Page 3, #5 convincingly link four major elements within the program design?
    - 2) Page 5 #2 Show that they have secured the financial and in-kind resources?
    - 3) Page 7, #1 Did the applicant provide evidence of their ability to meet match?
- Jim reminded reviewers that they do not want to use outside information in their decision making process
- Questions; Deb Halliday and Eric Cardella (Representing Graduations Matters Montana)
    - Nancy: How are the sites being selected?
        - Deb indicated that all schools were initially eligible and that they reviewed the need within the schools that expressed interest.
    - Nancy: How are volunteers involved in the program?
        - Eric indicated that the program will help connect schools to community volunteers.
    - What kind of site supervisors fill these roles:
        - Eric indicated that it varies from school to school depending on where the member is serving. Each School provided a letter of intent but they did not include the letter separately with their application.
    - James – Provide evidence of your ability to meet the financial and in-kind resources?
        - Eric indicated that they received letters of intent from the schools and that the schools were identified within their application.
    - James – Is the match requirement the same for every school?
        - Deb indicated that schools were given two options which were explained in the letter sent to the schools.
    - Nancy – Who at the schools committed these resources?
        - Eric indicated that it was the administrators or superintendants that committed the resources.

- James - Did the application provide evidence of their ability of their match?
    - Eric indicated that this was addressed on pages 22-23
- James – Where does the application talk about the communities that the schools are located?
    - Rebecca indicated that this is located on pages 3-4.
- Nancy: Describe the Montana Campus Corps relationship with OPI and how does this relationship work within the application?
    - Deb indicated that OPI is a partner whose primary role will be assisting with programming. OPI received a planning grant where they determined that they did not have the capacity to manage the grant. The Montana Campus Corps program was a good fit because of their ties to higher education.
- Nancy: Does OPI have performance measures that they must report on as part of the Graduation Matters program?
    - Deb indicated that they choose only those performance measures that they could obtain data from the schools and then worked with MTCC write the measures.
- Nancy – The application talks about youth but then mentions graduation rates. Which age are you targeting?
    - Deb indicated that it varies from school to school. Each school had indentified certain needs and within the program there are age appropriate strategies. Some of their performance measures focus on specific age groups while others are more general.
- James requested that the group revisit Section II Question 1 regarding the experience of staff.
    - The review group agreed that this score should be raise as the applicant has extensive experience in managing AmeriCorps grants

- Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score: 69/100
- 1:03 Completed Review
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1:15 <u>Justice for Montanans Project</u>

- Lead Reviewer gave Summary of Application; Rebecca Steele provided a summary in absence of Adam Vauthier. She mentioned that the program is in "pending status" with CNCS therefore the recommendations will have difference options/scenarios pending the outcome.
- Scoring Discussion and Consensus
- Questions; Brittany Weiss and Alison Paul (Representing MLSA)
    - Karin– How do you plan to include persons with disabilities, both as member's people being served?
        - Alison indicated that they provide reasonable accommodations for both. In terms of services, they don't duplicate existing legal programs focused on individuals with disabilities.
    - Nancy - Within the performance measures section it identified "rural" as a geographic focus, please explain.

        - Alison indicated that all of Montana is considered rural by standard of most grant applications. Members also frequently go on "circuit rides" where they provide services to rural communities.
    - Carol – How do the services you provide work in rural places where access to computers is limited?
        - Alison indicated that more people are online then you might think. Also, they partner with court houses and libraries for computer access. They've found that the most cost effective resource is on-line. Smart phone applications are also being developed for the program.
        - Brittany indicated that AmeriCorps members travel to remove areas to assist people as well. Alison mentioned that they are working on a survey right now in Native communities regarding access to resources.
- Lead Reviewer Announces Final Score 80/100
- 1: 45 Completed review

1:45 Discussion on Scoring question #2, page 6 regarding cost per MSY, Jim Auer

- Big Sky Watershed received a 3 while MT State Parks a 2, both had similar cost per MSY. The question was raised whether they want to adjust the scores.
    - Karin stated she felt it was dangerous to go back and review scores, that it would open a door that shouldn't be.
    - The workgroup reviewed their previous comments from both score sheets
        - State Parks – consistency
        - Big Sky Watershed – reasonable, cost effective, can meet and exceed
    - Based on comments the Grant Review Workgroup felt they were justified in keeping the scores as they were 3 for Big Sky Watershed Corp and 2 for Montana State Parks

2:05 Break

2:15 Process Reminders (Jan)

- Process has been reviewed and confirmed by the Department of Administration.

2:28 Executive Director Recommendations (Jan)

- Staff and Grant Review workgroup ranking was identical. Jan presented the recommendations and rankings. – See handout, XXXXX
- Karin asked if requesting supplemental funds was difficult. Jan indicated that we requested supplemental funds this past year and this process was not difficult.
- Carol: When would we receive supplemental: Jan indicated that it's difficult to know for certain other then say that was received is last year in September.

2:35 Grant Review Workgroup Discussion / Final Ranking and Recommendations

- James Corson: Provided that he supports the recommendations presented.
- Karin: Asked if we could adjust or revise the figures? Jan said the recommendations were provided for discussion purposes and that the group is welcome to adjust.

- Carol –Provided that she supports the staff recommendations.
- Nancy – Asked if we change the recommendations by adjusting the MSY. Jan indicated that adjusting the MSY is an option to changing the recommendations.
- Karin – Can we ask the grantee if we can adjust their MSY?
- Rebecca indicated that last year we made some adjustments but that funding any program at less that 10 MSY was not an ideal outcome.
- Karin – Expressed her concern with the current process whereas not enabling enough communication between grantee and grantor.
- Nancy – How is the Formula allocation work in Montana? Can we anticipate more funding in the future?
  - Jan indicated that based on Montana's population that it unlikely that we will receive more funding.
- James –Shared with the group about cuts that happened last year to the RSVP program and the impact of the cuts. AmeriCorps is facing challenges in DC and it's important to maintain what we currently have.
- Nancy – How does sustainability get factored into decisions and eventually is the goal to rotate programs out?
  - Jan indicated that it depends and that it varies from program to program.
- Karin – Expressed her concern that the two education applications were not included for funding within the recommendations. She added that it does not go well for the children in Montana. Also, she asked what kind of commentary they should mention to the board regarding the decisions made today?
- Carol – Provided that each application must stand on their own which is why we need to respect the process as it pertains to grant making.
- Rebecca - Indicated that the group needed to leave today with a recommendation for the Commission.
- James reiterated his comment from before about approving staff recommendation and
- Carol seconded the proposal to accept the staff recommendation.
- Nancy- Asked if someone would explain to the Commission the difficulties the Grant Review Workgroup faced due to funding scenarios (MLSA's pending Competitive application). Jan indicated that she would address during the Commission meeting.

3:00 Public Comment

- Eric Cardella – Thanked the Grant Review Workgroup for their due diligence during the Formula funding process.
- Brittany Weiss – Thanked everyone on behalf of MLSA and sorry for the troubles with their pending Competitive application.
- Jono McKinney – Expressed his gratitude as well during a difficult process. Also, provided that we are seeing a significant change in Montana national service community. It is important to create a clear picture of what the National Service community does and how it differentiates from the services provided by community volunteers.
- Crissie McMullan – Thanks and they are looking forward to being part of the Montana portfolio. Provided that education is part of their program design by improving test scores and tutoring children in places such as Box Elder.

- Katie McKeown – Thanks. Added that there organization is dealing with tuff economic times and the AmeriCorps program has been very valuable.
- Heather Margolis (Director with Montana Education Partnership) – Encourage group to visit sites and talk about National Service to their peers.
- Sarah Sadowski – Thanks and appreciated comments by Jono and others. Expressed importance of using formula funds to be creative to met needs in Montana.

Jan – Reminder about Commission meeting on 6/15/12

3:17 Meeting adjourned

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