

# AmeriCorps Grant Writing Tips & Tricks

## AmeriCorps Montana Grantmaking - How it Happens & Key Terms

### Notices of Funding (often referred to simply as “Notices”)

- **NOFO:** NoFo: Notice of Funding Opportunity, amount of funding may be unknown/not appropriated.
- **NOFA:** NoFa: Notice of Funding Available, amount of funding is known and may be limited.

### Types of Applicants

- Single-state applicants must apply through the AmeriCorps Montana Notices administered by the Prime Grantee, the Governor’s Office of Community Service (GOCS).
- Multi-state applicants (National Directs), apply directly to AmeriCorps and consult with GOCS.
- Tribes may apply to GOCS or AmeriCorps directly.

### AmeriCorps Montana Funding Streams

- **Competitive Funding**– Based on annual, federal appropriations. Organizations apply through GOCS for review, ranking, and recommendation for funding prior to being submitted to AmeriCorps for nationwide competition and final determination of funding. Application process typically occurs in the fall.
- **Formula Funding** – Based on an annual, state population-driven allocation of funds. Organizations apply through GOCS and awards are recommended by the Grant Review Workgroup. The Commission on Community Service then approves applications for submission to AmeriCorps, the federal agency, for final funding determination. Application process typically occurs in the spring.

### Types of Applications

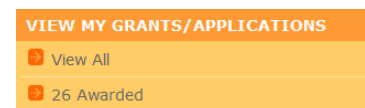
- **New** - organizations proposing a new project.
  - **Note: organizations with a history of prior AmeriCorps funding who are starting a new application may have to request GOCS initiate an application with AmeriCorps prior to entering data into eGrants (45 CFR 2522.340). This also applies to organizations applying for an operating program after having received a planning grant.**
- **Continuation** - organizations applying for years 2 or 3 of a 3-year grant cycle.
- **Renew/Recompete** - organizations whose 3-year grant cycle is expiring and are applying for a new 3-year grant cycle.

### Creating an Application

Applications are created within eGrants using the “Creating an Application” section in the lower left corner of the home screen.



Previously awarded applications can be renewed or continued from the Awarded Applications menu on the right side of the eGrants home screen.



App. Type	Creation Date	Status	
New	08/05/2021	Awarded	view   amend   continue Select a Report <input type="text"/> <input type="button" value="GO"/>

## Grant Narratives: Think Through Before Writing

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Complete applications contain these elements:

Narratives (Think through “Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?”)

- Executive Summary
  - Follow the template (pretty please). That is all you have to do.
- Program Design
  - Why, What, Where: community needs in words and numbers.
  - How: Intervention, Evidence Base (Tier & Quality), Notice Priority, Member Experience.
- Organizational Capability
  - Who & How: Org Background & Staffing, Member Supervision.
- Cost Effectiveness & Budget Adequacy
  - State what is in the budget that addresses specific info in the Notice – align budgets and narratives.
  - Review the budget narrative as printed from eGrants. All calculations must equal the Total (CNCS + Grantee shares). Watch for rounding errors.
  - The total in the “Source of Funds” field must match the total in the budget narrative EXACTLY.
- Evaluation Report & Plan (if applicable)
  - What & How: what year is my program and what is required for an evaluation plan/report?
  - Use the Evaluation Plan Template.

Logic Model

- Program design in a table.

Performance Measures

- Outcomes, results for people and places.

Budget & Budget Narrative

- Calculations and alignment with performance & org policy.

Authorization, Assurances, & Certification

- Authorized representative, fine print is real.

## AmeriCorps Grant Writing

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General Tips

1. Read, rest, think, then read again! Look for changes. *Make sure you read the Notice you are applying to, as this Notice is incorporated into your subaward contract by reference.*
  - Read the Notice (Hint, changes from prior years are typically highlighted in another color).
  - Read the Application Instructions, Mandatory Supplemental Information, and Performance Measure Instructions.
2. Start writing and budgeting as early as possible in a creative way that works for you.
  - Draw pictures, write poems, make program and budget notes throughout the year.
3. Program and financial staff should meet regularly, especially during the application process.
  - Performance based budgeting leads to mission capability and accurate coding.
  - Application narratives should flow and align with the budget.
4. Use the Technical Assistance Period to ask questions and point out errors.
5. Tell a story, explain the need, how AmeriCorps service is the solution, and how service benefits contributors.
  - Speak the truth and stick to the facts.
  - Describe how your organization is already working in the issue area.
  - Weave together performance measures, data collection and evaluation.
  - It’s not all technical writing, so be creative!

## Tips from the Notice

1. Use assessment criteria in the Notice to gauge the length of each narrative. Give more narrative length for sections with higher point values than those with lower or no associated values.
2. Make it easy for reviewers to find responses to sections and review criteria.
  - Don't start with a blank page. Create an outline using the subsections and Review Criteria.
  - eGrants limits formatting (no bullets, italics, bolds, underlines, etc.). Implement any formatting you can, such as:
    - Using all-caps text for Review Criteria subsection headings (e.g., EVIDENCE TIER, NOTICE PRIORITY, MEMBER EXPERIENCE, etc.).
      - Narrative field headers (e.g., Executive Summary, Program Design, etc.) are automatically populated by eGrants, so do not waste space on them.
    - Indent paragraphs by using the spacebar, as you cannot use the Tab button in eGrants.
  - Start sentences with the Review Criteria key terms and/or bullets listed in the Notice.
    - Example: "The program will recruit AmeriCorps members from the geographic or demographic communities in which the programs operate by..."
3. Use in line citations in the format of your choice ([APA](#), [MLA](#), [Chicago](#), etc.) to support the evidence. Don't waste space on a bibliography or hyperlinks, they will not be reviewed.
  - Use current evidence, preferably from the last 6 years.
  - When selecting evidence, read the Evidence Base and Evidence Quality review criteria and Mandatory Supplemental Information carefully.
  - Use evidence to support need, intervention, and anticipated outcomes. How are proposed grant activities known to make a change in people, places, or needs in the State Service Plan?
4. Strive to understand evidence and evaluation reports. Use the [AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange](#) and [Meta-Data Glossary](#), Mandatory Supplemental Information, and other authoritative resources.
5. The Notice sets the standard for page limits, as determined by eGrants.
  - Draft the grant narrative in a word processing program and then copy and paste into eGrants. Note that pages from word processing likely do not reflect pages in eGrants.
  - Each narrative field has an unknown character limit. Be concise; the narrative may be cut off after saving.
  - Certain components of the Notice have page limits (e.g., Application and Logic Model) as printed from review tab "Print Application for Federal Assistance." Words beyond the page limits will not be reviewed.
  - Review the Application print out for paragraphs that end in a one- or two-word line; make those paragraphs more concise to eliminate a line of narrative.
6. Follow Notice instruction on the way to title, name, and submit all required additional docs.
7. Think like a reviewer. If possible, engage an outside person to read and score with tools (e.g., Scoring Matrix).
8. Strive to hit "Submit" at least one day early.
9. Communicate with GOCS so we can serve you! Our success is interdependent.
10. Review the Print Application for Federal Assistance and clean up as needed.
  - Search (ctrl + f for windows, command + f for MAC users) for "¿." This tends to result from a formatting error for apostrophes. This can also be completed in the narrative pop-up boxes.

## Understanding your Audience

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### GOCS Review Process

GOCS convenes grant review workgroups to review all types of single-state applications.

- Workgroups typically consists of 1 to 2 GOCS Staff, 3+ Commissioners, and 1 Community Volunteer.
- GOCS staff compile grant review binders with all applications.
- Each reviewer completes individual scoring of all application materials and additional documents.
- At the workgroup meeting, reviewers come to consensus scores. All applicants are present.
- The workgroup produces a ranking and funding recommendation based on consensus scores. The recommendation is presented to the Commission for approval.
- After approval, the score sheet, feedback, and application are returned to the applicant for clarification.
- Applicant strengthens application based on feedback and resubmits to GOCS.
- GOCS submits all grants in a package to AmeriCorps.

### AmeriCorps Review Process

1. Write for audiences in faraway places, like Washington D. C.! Assume reviewers don't know anything about your program, the communities you serve, or Montana generally.
  - AmeriCorps uses a fully external review of experts and individuals with AmeriCorps grant experience. This may include: university professors, focus area experts, and former AmeriCorps or commission staff from around the nation.
2. Using third party citations lends credibility to your application, evidence, and more.
3. Frame things in concepts, metaphors, or visualizations that make sense to people from around the nation, not just Montana. Past examples include:
  - hydrologic cradle
  - compelling tapestry of needs
  - treated the equivalent to 600 football fields of public land

## Grantmaking Next Steps

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1. GOCS submits applications to AmeriCorps, typically competitive in January and formula in May.
2. AmeriCorps reviews and makes funding determinations.
3. GOCS receives Notice of Grant Award (NGA) and notifies organizations if they are funded or not, including dollars, Member Service Years/Slots, and Education Awards.
4. Programs must have staff available to respond to clarification/resolution requests. Timing of this is not always clear at time of application. Clarification usually pertains to budget calculations.
5. AmeriCorps issues application feedback.
6. Awarded applicants will receive evaluation plan feedback outside of the grant competition process. Expect to work with GOCS and AmeriCorps to revise and resubmit the evaluation plan at least once.
7. GOCS issues subaward contract based on program start date.
8. Awarded applicants implement programs & get working on recruiting sites and members!

***Congratulations on making it this far! We hope this has been a useful tool as your organization embarks on AmeriCorps Grant Writing!***