

## AMERICORPS GRANT APPLICATION REVIEW PROCESS (GARP)

### Background

AmeriCorps has an extensive application process that starts in the fall and ends in June of the following year. There are several due dates and types of application submissions so it is important to understand each. This section explains the basic definitions, review process, and policies Serve Indiana follows.

**Definitions** Serve Indiana has the potential to fund all types of grants below depending on the types of submissions. Any organizations funded under the below definitions is considered part of Serve Indiana's portfolio to manage. Regardless of type of funding, funded organizations must follow the rules and regulations set out by both CNCS and Serve Indiana.

### **General Definitions:**

- **Grant Application Review Process** refers to the processes employed by Serve Indiana and The Serve Indiana Commission (Commission) for the review and selection of AmeriCorps\*State host organizations (programs).
- **Sub grantee** means the host organization with legal and fiscal responsibilities for an AmeriCorps\*State Formula, Competitive, or Education Award program and its members.

### **Funding Types:**

- **Competitive Funds** is an award to organizations operating in Indiana that are nominated to participate in a nationwide competition. Successful applicants receive grants to fund a portion of program costs and member's living allowance.
- **Formula Funds** means an award to organizations in Indiana through a statewide competition. Successful applicants receive grants to support AmeriCorps member positions and other program costs.

### **Grant Types**

- **Cost Reimbursement Grants (non-fixed-amount)** fund a portion of program operating costs and member living allowances, with flexibility to use all of the funds for allowable costs regardless of whether or not the program recruits and retains all AmeriCorps members. Cost reimbursement grants include a formal matching requirement and require the submission of a budget and financial reports. They require a minimum match of 24 percent for the first three-year funding period. Starting with year four, the match requirement gradually increases every year to 50 percent by year ten.
- **Fixed Amount Grants** provide a fixed amount of funding per Member Service Year (MSY) that is substantially lower than the amount required to operate the program. Organizations use their own or other resources to cover the remaining costs. Programs are not required to submit budgets or financial reports, there is no specific match requirement, and programs are not required to track and maintain documentation of match. However, CNCS provides only a portion of the cost of running the program and organizations must raise the additional resources needed to run the program. Programs can access all of the funds, provided they recruit and retain the members supported under the grant based on the MSY level awarded. Professional Corps programs applying for operational funding through a Fixed Amount Grant must submit a budget in support of their request for operational funds.
  - **Full-Time Fixed amount grants:** Fixed amount grants are available for programs that enroll full-time members or less than full-time members serving in a full time capacity only. Professional Corps may only have full-time members. Programs can access funds under the grant based on enrolling the full complement of members supported under the grant.
  - **Education Award Grants (EAP) Fixed amount grant:** Programs apply for a small fixed amount per MSY, can enroll less than full-time members, and use their own resources to cover all other costs. Programs can access funds under the grant based on enrolling the full complement of members

supported under the grant. As with full-time fixed amount grants, there are no specific match or financial reporting requirements for EAP fixed amount grants.

- **Planning Grant recipients** receive funding to spend one year developing an application for an AmeriCorps program that would be submitted in a subsequent grant competition. Funds are typically used to cover expenses such as staff salary, consultants, travel to similar established programs or topical conferences, and any reasonable costs supporting the development of an operational program. The Commissions offering of planning grants can change from year to year depending on staff capacity and fund availability.

**Types of Applicants**

- New Applicant (No previous AmeriCorps funding or a 5 year gap in funding, see below)
- Continuing Formula Sub grantee (in year 1 and 2 of a 3-year Fixed-Amount or Cost Reimbursable Formula grant period)
- Continuing Competitive Sub grantee (in year 1 and 2 of a 3-year Fixed-Amount or Cost Reimbursable Competitive grant period)
- Re-compete Formula Sub grantee (in the last year of a 3-year Fixed-Amount or Cost Reimbursable Formula grant period)
- Re-compete Competitive Sub grantee (in the last year of a 3-year Fixed-Amount or Cost Reimbursable Competitive grant period)
- Planning Formula Sub grantee
- Current Planning Grant applying for formula operational funding

**Eligible Applicants.**

The following institutions are eligible to receive AmeriCorps\*State formula and competitive funding under 42 U.S.C. 12571(a). For purposes of this policy, the terms *eligible applicant*, *eligible entity*, *sub grantee*, and *sub-recipient* are interchangeable.

- A State;
- Subdivisions of States;
- A public or private nonprofit organization (including religious entities and labor groups);
- An institution of higher education; or,
- A Federal agency.

**Application Consideration.**

Under guidelines outlined in Serve Indiana Communication 2006-P-10 (effective October 2, 2006), the Commission shall determine solely the appropriate funding source – formula or competitive – for a particular eligible applicant.

**Award Limitations.**

An eligible entity in receipt of AmeriCorps\*State competitive or national direct funds is ineligible to receive a formula award.

**Matching Requirements.**

A recipient of formula funds shall adhere to the basic matching requirements set forth by the CNCS.

A recipient of formula funds shall provide a single match for the AmeriCorps\*State program beginning in the first year of the first three-year grant. The single match percentage shall increase over the previous period by two-percent in the first year of a second three-year grant and by four-percent (4%) over each of the previous periods in years two (2) through ten (10). A recipient shall contribute a dollar for dollar match for the tenth year of funding and any year thereafter.

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Year 4</b>	<b>Year 5</b>	<b>Year 6</b>	<b>Year 7</b>	<b>Year 8</b>	<b>Year 9</b>	<b>Year 10+</b>
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<b>Sub grantee Share Requirements</b>	24%	24%	24%	26%	30%	34%	38%	42%	46%	50%
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- If a sub-grantee receives two non-consecutive formula awards, then the Commission shall hold the entity to the level of overall match it provided in the previous competitive grant cycle.
  - If a sub-recipient fails to receive formula or competitive funds for a period of five (5) or more years, or can document a comprehensive change in program model, then the minimum overall share defaults to year one of a three-year grant cycle upon the sub-grantee’s receipt of Commission funds.
  - If an entity is a new or replacement applicant for an existing program funded under 42 U.S.C. 12581(a)(1), then it shall provide matching resources at the level the previous legal applicant had reached at the time the new or replacement applicant assumed responsibility for the program.
- A sub-grantee may be eligible to receive a waiver from the minimum overall share provided it meets the requirements set forth in 45 C.F.R. 2524.60(3)(c)-(f)(2) and 2521.70.
- Additional information on match is included in the Match section of this handbook and updated yearly in the NOFO/Application Instructions.

Action Steps:

***Grant Application Review, Selection, and Appeals Process Schedule.***

Serve Indiana will develop a schedule relative to the Grant Application Review, Selection, and Appeals Process prior to or near the start of the program year that clearly outlines anticipated GARP activities for the year. The schedule will include submission deadlines for all applicant activities and proposed time frames for the Commission and Serve Indiana staff functions.

***Distribution of Indiana’s AmeriCorps\*State Formula Funding Allocation.***

1. Each year, funding will be set-aside from Indiana’s Formula allocation for continued support of Continuing Formula Sub grantees, pending The Serve Indiana Commission (Commission) approval and Corporation for National and Community Service (Corporation) funding support.
2. The remainder of the Formula allocation will be made available to applicants through a public Request for Proposals process.

***Annual Review Process Timeline***

1. Early fall: CNCS releases NOFO and application instructions to Commission. Commission GARP staff review and edit for Commission specific requirements and deadlines. This version of application materials applies to new and re-compete applicants, and competitive continuations.
2. End of October: Due date for above applicants
3. October-Mid November: Review of applicants, initial clarification process. SI staff conduct PARA (see section for more information) and prepare for Commission meeting.
4. December: Commission meeting, SI staff present applications, previous performance, and recommendations. Commission votes on applicants moving to competitive considerations, all applicants notified of results by SI staff.
5. January: Submission of competitive applications to CNCS.
6. Early spring: SI releases formula continuation application materials based on NOFO/application instructions above.

7. March or April: Formula continuations submit application in egrants. Review process and initial clarification process begins. CNCS may also provide clarification for competitive applicants at this time.
8. Mid May: CNCS releases competitive application decisions, SI communicates results to applicants. Non-approved competitive applicants moved to formula slate as appropriate.
9. May/June: Commission meeting where SI staff present formula slate, Commissioners vote on final formula slate. SI staff communicate results to programs.

**Commission meeting presentation:** Two weeks before the December and May/June funding decision meetings, Serve Indiana staff will send two documents to Commissioners. An excel spreadsheet will include a list of all applicants, their funding request totals, match totals, and previous performance based on the program Expectations and Monitoring section of this handbook. The second document will be a word document with executive summaries and proposed performance measures of each applicant. During the meeting, the GARP SI contact will present this information and be available to answer questions of each applicant. Decisions around funding or reducing an applicant's award will be communicated in the total number of MSY.

**Award letters:** Following each Commission meeting where funding decisions are made, SI staff will send out a letter to all applicants. After the December meeting, the letter will include whether or not the applicant was moved to competitive consideration. It will also include a document with reviewers' aggregate information and feedback. After the May/June formula meeting, the letter will include whether or not the application was approved for funding, the total MSY, and total CNCS award amount. These letters may also include clarifications and next steps for applicants.

**Applicant self-removal:** If an applicant organization decides to remove their application from further consideration at any point in the process, SI will document that decision and save it in the organization's monitoring folder or in that year's GARP folder. Documentation may include an email from the organization or an official letter from SI to the organization following an in person/phone conversation.

***Renewal Process for Indiana's AmeriCorps\*State Continuing Formula Sub grantees.***

1. Serve Indiana will release a renewal request process for Continuing Formula Sub grantees.
2. Continuing Formula Requests will be reviewed by Serve Indiana staff and the Commission's Program Committee, taking into consideration past performance.
3. Recommendations will be presented to the Commission at the meeting following the CNCS competitive decisions (May/June).
4. The Commission may decide to renew or to not renew the Sub grantee, based on formal and informal criteria established by the Commission for the given year.
5. If the Commission decides not to renew the Sub grantee, the funds that were set-aside for the Sub grantee may be added to the pool of available Formula funds.

***Renewal Process for Indiana's AmeriCorps\*State Continuing Competitive Sub grantees.***

1. Serve Indiana will issue the renewal request process for Continuing Competitive Sub grantees, as directed by the Corporation.
2. Continuing Competitive Requests will be reviewed by Serve Indiana staff and the Commission's Program Committee.
1. Recommendations will be presented to the Commission. For information on presentation materials provided for each applicant, see the below Commission Meeting Presentation section. The Commission may select one of the following recommendations/decisions relative to the proposals
  - a. Submit proposal to competitive consideration at the amount requested, with no changes.
  - b. Submit proposal to competitive consideration at the amount requested, with contingencies.
  - c. Submit proposal to competitive consideration at less than requested, with contingencies.

- d. Move proposal to formula consideration, with contingencies.
  - e. Move proposal to formula consideration, with no changes.
  - f. Do not fund the proposal.
3. Following the Commission meeting, applications will be notified of the Commission Competitive decision within 3 days of the meeting. For information on what is included in such a notification, see the award letter section.
4. Once applications are resubmitted, Serve Indiana staff will review and submit the approved Competitive applications to CNCS by their deadline and move the remaining formula considered applications to the proper prime in egrants.
5. Once the Commission receives notice of Competitive funding decisions from the Corporation, the Commission will finalize funding awards relative to Indiana's available AmeriCorps\*State Formula funding. Proposals declined by the Corporation for Competitive funding may be eligible for Formula funding consideration. Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of CNCS funding decisions and next steps.
6. Following the CNCS Competitive decision, the Commission will be presented with the full formula slate for final formula decisions. The Commission may select one of the following recommendations/decisions relative to the proposals:
  - a. Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with no changes.
  - b. Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with contingencies.
  - c. Fund the proposal at less than requested, with contingencies.
  - d. Do not fund the proposal.
  - e. Fund the proposal at the amount requested with contingencies, including that applicant institute a 3-month development period followed by 9 months operating in Year 1 (new applicants; formula funding only).
  - f. Fund the proposal at less than requested with contingencies, including that applicant institute a 3-month development period followed by 9 months operating in Year 1 (new applicants; formula funding only).
  - g. Fund as a planning grant
7. Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of Commission formula funding decisions and next steps. Following any clarification process, Serve Indiana staff will send on the formula approved applicants to CNCS for final review.
8. Following the CNCS review, Serve Indiana staff will communicate final

***Application Process for New and Re-competing AmeriCorps\*State Applicants. \*\****

1. Serve Indiana will issue a full application Request for Proposals for AmeriCorps\*State Competitive funds and available AmeriCorps\*State Formula funds, as directed by the Corporation.
2. Application Instructions will be distributed to all applicants specific to the type of grant they are applying for, New/Re-compete, Continuation, and/or Planning. Such instructions will include a final deadline and may include a notice of intent to apply deadline as well.
3. All New and Re-compete applications, regardless of whether they are competing for competitive or formula funding, will be subject to the following Review Process:
  - a. Upon receipt, Serve Indiana staff will review proposals for submission accuracy and compliance. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.
  - b. Serve Indiana will utilize a peer review process to evaluate AmeriCorps proposals. Peer review teams may be comprised of three to five grant readers who evaluate and score each New and Re-compete proposal. All reviewers will be required to sign conflict of interest forms to ensure unbiased evaluation of proposals. Once proposals have been read and scored, the peer review committee will convene to discuss results, rank proposals, and to formalize recommendations to the Commission.

- c. Serve Indiana staff will conduct a review of all AmeriCorps proposals. Staff may analyze the results of the peer review and further scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of all proposals, taking into consideration the past performance of re-competing applicants.
  - d. The proposals for new and Re-competing grants may be ranked and/or evaluated based on score and/or other formal and informal criteria as determined by the Commission.
- 4. Recommendations will be presented to the Commission. For information on presentation materials provided for each applicant, see the below Commission Meeting Presentation section. The Commission may select one of the following recommendations/decisions relative to the proposals
  - a. Submit proposal to competitive consideration at the amount requested, with no changes.
  - b. Submit proposal to competitive consideration at the amount requested, with contingencies.
  - c. Submit proposal to competitive consideration at less than requested, with contingencies.
  - d. Move proposal to formula consideration, with contingencies.
  - e. Move proposal to formula consideration, with no changes.
  - f. Do not fund the proposal.
- 5. Following the Commission meeting, applications will be notified of the Commission Competitive decision within 3 days of the meeting. For information on what is included in such a notification, see the award letter section.
- 6. Once applications are resubmitted, Serve Indiana staff will review and submit the approved Competitive applications to CNCS by their deadline and move the remaining formula considered applications to the proper prime in egrants.
- 7. Once the Commission receives notice of Competitive funding decisions from the Corporation, the Commission will finalize funding awards relative to Indiana's available AmeriCorps\*State Formula funding. Proposals declined by the Corporation for Competitive funding may be eligible for Formula funding consideration. Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of CNCS funding decisions and next steps.
- 8. Following the CNCS Competitive decision, the Commission will be presented with the full formula slate for final formula decisions. The Commission may select one of the following recommendations/decisions relative to the proposals
  - a. Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with no changes.
  - b. Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with contingencies.
  - c. Fund the proposal at less than requested, with contingencies.
  - d. Do not fund the proposal.
  - e. Fund the proposal at the amount requested with contingencies, including that applicant institute a 3-month development period followed by 9 months operating in Year 1 (new applicants; formula funding only).
  - f. Fund the proposal at less than requested with contingencies, including that applicant institute a 3-month development period followed by 9 months operating in Year 1 (new applicants; formula funding only).
  - g. Fund as a planning grant.
- 9. New Applicants are not eligible to receive a recommendation/decision of "Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with no changes," until a Pre-Award Risk Assessment has been conducted and it is determined that the applicant is capable of successfully managing an AmeriCorps grant. See PARA section for additional information.
- 10. Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of final funding decisions. For information on what is included in such a notification, see the award letter section.

***\*\*It should be noted that the above information also applies to current planning grants applying for operational funding as well.***

***Pre-award risk assessments:*** Prior to the December commission meeting, Serve Indiana staff will conduct a pre award risk assessment (PARA) on all new applicant organizations (both planning and program awards). This will include a document review and in person interview with necessary staff (and a board member as available). Items reviewed may include fiscal management, organizational policies/procedures, program development, human resources and use of federal funds will be reviewed. The Commission will use the same list of questions and checklists for all applicant organizations. SI staff will present to the Commission with the results at the December meeting. A full reports with the results and additional detail will be issued to the applicant organizations within 30 days of the in person interview. Serve Indiana will conduct a Pre-Award Risk Assessment regarding financial and organizational capacity to administer federal grants with each new AmeriCorps\*State applicant. Applicants may be asked to submit the most recent audit if available, as part of the assessment.

PARA results are either pass, pass with contingencies, or do not pass. If the Pre-Award Risk Assessment is pass or pass with contingencies, the applicant's proposal will remain in the pool of proposals. If the organization does not pass the PARA, the SI staff will not recommend them for funding to the Commission. The Commission may decide from there on whether or not to fund the application.

***Special Note about Continuing Formula Sub grantees.***

1. Continuing Formula Sub grantees are considered for competitive funds during their re-compete process (year 3 of funding).
2. If a formula funded sub grantee would like to be considered sooner (i.e. year 1 or 2), they must submit a full, updated application with a major change in program model, in the fall submission process.

***Applicant Formula Self-Selection***

During the submission process, a new or currently funded sub-grantee may self-select for formula consideration only. This must be communicated (and acknowledged) to SI staff in writing before the December Commission meeting. SI staff may also move a formula applicant to stay in formula if the application pool if the application does not meet all CNCS competitive standards.

***GARP to Contract Completion***

Following the June Commission meeting where awards letters are sent out to programs, Serve Indiana submits their formula slate to CNCS. CNCS may conduct a clarification process following that submission. Once complete, CNCS will send Serve Indiana a Notice of Funding Award (NOFA) which signifies the approval of the formula slate on CNCS' side. This also signifies the end of the Grant Application Review Process for the upcoming program year. At that point, Serve Indiana will work with the DWD contracts team to begin the state contract process. For more information on that process, see the contracts policy/procedure section of this handbook and the DWD policy on contracting.

***Appeals Process.***

The Commission offers an appeal process for AmeriCorps grant applicants whose request for funding has been denied or reduced. This process offers dissatisfied grant applicants an avenue to appeal an award decision and assures that the Commission peer review process and subsequent grant award decisions are accurate, fair, and reasonable. Such a process encourages confidence in the Commission grant process.

The Commission strives to assure that all grant awards fully reflect sound judgment and compliance with all RFP terms and conditions and all appropriate AmeriCorps federal, state and Commission regulations. Therefore, grant applicants may appeal an award decision based on substantive issues of fact concerning bias, discrimination or conflicts of interest, and/or non-compliance with procedures described in the RFP document, such as significant computational errors or contextual omissions.

If a grant applicant has substantive objections to the results of the peer review process and wishes to appeal the decision made by the Commission, the applicant may request reconsideration. A request for reconsideration must be made by the applicant in writing within 10 business days of the date of the notice of the Commission funding decision via a letter of appeal submitted to the State Service Director of Serve Indiana.

The letter must:

1. Describe the factor(s) or fact(s) concerning bias, discrimination, conflict of interest or non-compliance that cause the applicant to conclude that the proposal should have been approved.
2. Outline the specific area(s) in the proposal that applicant believes significantly addresses the RFP requirements.
3. Identify specific information in the proposal that the applicant believes the Commission overlooked or misinterpreted.

Serve Indiana State Service Director and/or other designated staff will review the appeal request within five (5) business days of its receipt to ensure that it is in compliance with this policy and merits further review by the Commission. If the State Service Director or designee determines the appeal letter substantiates material issues concerning bias, discrimination, conflict of interest or non-compliance with procedures set forth in the RFP, the State Service Director and the Commission Chair will re-review the proposal and submit the request to the Commission for a vote.

Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of final funding decisions. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) has final approval rights for all grant proposals.