

# AmeriCorps Application: Narrative Section

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*THE BASICS OF THE AMERICORPS STATE APPLICATION NARRATIVE  
SECTIONS TO BUILD THE BEST POSSIBLE APPLICATION*

*UPDATED: NOVEMBER 2020*



# Goals

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- Discuss overall application process
- Discuss application narratives in detail
- Discuss best practices for application
- Questions and concerns
  - PowerPoint mirrors information available in NOFO & Application Instructions on Serve Indiana's website: <https://www.in.gov/serveindiana/funding-opportunities/>
- **PowerPoint is part 2 of a 3-part series:**
  - PowerPoint #1: What is AmeriCorps?
  - PowerPoint #2: Application Basics.
  - PowerPoint #3: Logic Models, Budgets, and Performance Measures.

# Grant Application Review Process (GARP) Contact & Information

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- How to keep up to date:
  - Sign up for newsletter, receive emails
  - Check website frequently
  - Follow us on Facebook and twitter
  
- Main Contact: Cassandra Gillenwater
  - Email: [ckellogggillenwater@serveindiana.gov](mailto:ckellogggillenwater@serveindiana.gov)
  - Phone: 317-220-1659

# Application Basics & Reminders

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# Funding Basics

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- **Funding types:** Competitive or Formula
- **Grantee types covered in Fall application due date:**
  - *Competitive Continuation: Already funded applicants*
  - *Competitive/Formula re-compete : Competitive applicants currently in year 3*
  - *New applicants*
- **Types of grants**
  - Cost reimbursement
  - Fixed\*
  - Education Award only, professional Corps, etc.
- *\*Not recommended for new applicants*

# Application Materials

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- **NOFO:** Notice of funding opportunity
- **Supplemental Guidance:** Definitions
- **Performance Measure Instructions**
- **Application Instructions**
- **Templates**
  - *Applicants must read and understand all materials to successfully complete grant*
  - *All items & updates are available on Serve Indiana website: <https://www.in.gov/serveindiana/funding-opportunities/>*
  - *Due dates and materials are updated in September of every year for the next year's funding.*
    - *i.e. 2021-2022 application materials were updated September 2020.*

# Submission Roles & Additional Information

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- **Submission roles:**

- Main applicant: Serve Indiana
- Sub-applicant: Programs/Organizations

- **Review materials:**

- Read all materials on website
- Review Serve Indiana AmeriCorps handbook
- Review Serve Indiana State Service Plan
- Review AmeriCorps State Terms and Conditions



# Grant Application Sections

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- SF 424 (Application Info & Application Info)
- Documents: Evaluation, Labor Union Concurrence, etc.
- Narrative section makes up the following:
  - Executive Summary (0 Points)
  - Program Design (50 Points)
  - Organizational Capability (25 Points)
  - Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy (25 Points)
  - Evaluation Plan (if applicable)
  - Logic Model/theory of change
- Logic model
- Budget
- Performance Measures



# Page Limits

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- Applications must not exceed 10 pages for the Narrative
  - *Includes: Executive Summary, SF 424 Facesheet, and The Narrative portions contained in the Program Design, Organizational Capacity, and Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy sections of the application.*
- Print out from “Review” tab in web-based system to see where you are at for page length.
- The application page limit does not include:
  - the Budget, narrative portion of the Evaluation Plan, the Logic Model, performance measures, or the supplementary materials, if applicable.

# Best Practices for Grant Writing

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- **Best practices:**

- Be clear and concise; no jargon
- Focus on strengths and align with your organization
- Focus effort on evidence based or evidence informed program
- Follow deadlines, no late submissions
- **Grant takes between 40-80 hours to complete**
- Engage full organization for program model & review

- **Suggested steps:**

- Read through the full NOFO & map out goals of program
- Create a draft of logic model & performance measure instructions
- Create budget
- Draft narratives
- Set-up a meeting with Cassandra

# SF 424 & Executive Summary

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# Standard Form 424

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- Standard Form 424 (SF-424) Face Sheet:
  - This is automatically generated when applicants complete the data elements in the system.
- In eGrants “Applicant and Application Information” as well as your “Budget” sections pulls to create this form.

# Executive Summary

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- **Do not deviate from the template below.**
- *The [Name of the organization] proposes to have [Number of] AmeriCorps members who will [service activities the members will be doing] in [the locations the AmeriCorps members will serve]. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for [anticipated outcome of project]. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage [number of leveraged volunteers, if applicable] who will be engaged in [what the leveraged volunteers will be doing.]*
- *This program will focus on the CNCS focus area(s) of [Focus Area(s)].\* The CNCS investment of \$[amount of request] will be matched with \$[amount of projected match], \$[amount of local, state, and federal funds] in public funding and \$[amount of non-governmental funds] in private funding.*
- *\*If the program is not operating in a CNCS focus area, omit this sentence.*
- *Fixed-Amount grant applicants (EAP, Full-time Fixed) should list their Other Revenue (see Mandatory Supplemental Guidance) because they are not required to provide a specific amount of match, but still raise significant additional resources to operate the program. CNCS will post all Executive Summaries of awarded grant applications on [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov) in the interest of transparency and Open Government.*

**\*\*Make sure your ES matches your budget totals and your source of funds**



# Program Design

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# Selection Criteria

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*Each application must clearly describe a project that will effectively deploy AmeriCorps members to solve a significant community problem. Specifics about the selection criteria are published in the Notice of Funding Opportunity document.*

# Program Design

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*In assessing Rationale and Approach/Program Design, reviewers will examine the degree to which the applicant demonstrates how AmeriCorps members and the proposed intervention are particularly well-suited to addressing the identified community problem.*



# Program Design Section: 50%

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- Theory of Change and Logic Model: 24 points
- Evidence Tier: 12 points
- Evidence Quality: 8 points
- Notice Priority: 0 points
- Member Experience: 6 points

# Theory of Change

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- Documents why you think your intervention will achieve the intended outcome
  - Intervention can expand a current organizational intervention, a research intervention, copy another program's successful intervention, etc.
- Supports the use of a particular design, frequency, intensity and duration of intervention that is optimal
- Ensure your member's activities align with these ideas

# Theory of Change

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**Problem:** The identified community need (supported by data/research)



**Intervention:** The activities of members and community volunteers supported by AmeriCorps members

- Supported by evidence: Data/research that supports the likelihood that a certain set of actions (the intervention) will lead to the intended outcomes



**Outcome:** The change that occurs because of the intervention

# Logic Model

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- The logic model...
  - Is a visual explanation of the theory of change with more detail of each step
  - Focus on “who is the beneficiary”
  - Should include each intervention with a need to end outcome for each.
    - I.e. each focus area or each beneficiary
  - Must be explained in this section and created in the Logic Model section.
- Applicants new to a logic model should
  - Start with their theory of change
  - Use the logic model template provided on the Serve Indiana website
    - Start with the “need” and “end outcome”, build the individual sections in between after.

# Logic Model

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- **The Logic Model shall depict:**

- A summary of the community problem outlined in the narrative.
- The inputs or resources that are necessary to deliver the intervention, including but not limited to:
  - Number of locations or sites in which members will provide services
  - Number of AmeriCorps members that will deliver the intervention
- The core activities that define the intervention or program model that members will implement or deliver, including:
  - The duration of the intervention (e.g., the total number of weeks, sessions or months of the intervention)
  - The dosage of the intervention (e.g., the number of hours per session or sessions per week)
  - The target population for the intervention (e.g., disconnected youth, third graders at a certain reading proficiency level)
  - The measurable outputs that result from delivering the intervention (i.e. number of beneficiaries served, hours of service delivered, types and number of activities conducted.) If applicable, identify which National Performance Measures will be used as output indicators
  - Outcomes that demonstrate changes in knowledge/skill, attitude, behavior, or condition that occur as a result of the intervention. If applicable, identify which National Performance Measures will be used as outcome indicators.

# Evidence Base

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- The assessment of an applicant's evidence base has two steps.
  - Assignment of Evidence Tier
  - Quality of the applicant's evidence and the applicant's overall capacity to collect and use data (including performance measurement and evaluation data)
- Think of this as a term paper....
  - You have a theory in your theory of change/logic model, this section supports that theory with studies and data aka your "evidence"
    - ***Evidence tier is the "why" on your program model***
    - ***Evidence quality and evaluation capacity is the "how"***

# Evidence Base: *Evidence Tier*

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- Understands strength of each applicant's evidence base and the likelihood that the proposed intervention will lead to the outcomes identified.
  - Use the evidence checklist to self-assess before completing this section
- In this sub-section you should...
  - Identify the evidence tier (strong, moderate, preliminary, pre-preliminary)
  - Indicate and describe the evidence that supports the highest evidence tier
  - Describe the complete body of evidence that supports their program
  - Pay attention to the requirement of each tier

# Evidence Base: *Evidence Tier*

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*All applicants should provide as much detail as possible*

- **High Quality Studies:**

- All applicants should focus on presenting at a minimum, 2 high quality studies

- **Performance Measure Data:**

- All applicants who have collected PM data should describe that data as described in the pre-preliminary outline.
- Applicants who have not collected PM data or are re-competing should describe how they will.

- **Program Evaluation:**

- If you have conducted an evaluation of your program or are replicating another evidence-based program, should describe that evaluation fully.



# Evidence Base: *Evidence Tier*

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## When describing studies....

- The date the research or evaluation was completed, and the time period for which the intervention was examined
- A description that shows the study's relevance to the proposed intervention
- A description of the target population studied (e.g., the demographics)
- The methodology used in the study (e.g., outcome study, random assignment, regression discontinuity design, propensity score matching, etc.)
- A description of the data, data source, and data collection methods
- The outcomes or impacts examined and the study findings
- The strength of the findings (e.g., effect size, confidence level, statistical power of the study design and statistical significance of findings).

**Don't forget to cite your studies!!**

# Evidence Section: *Evidence Quality & Evaluation Capacity*

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- **Quality: What type of evidence did you provide?**
  - Is it relevant, recent?
  - Standards are based on the evaluation capacity and point on evidence continuum the organization (see table in next slide)
- **Capacity: Can you collect the data you proposed for your performance measures?**
- **This is the “how” on collecting the data you propose in your logic model and performance measures**

# Evidence Section: *Evidence Quality & Evaluation Capacity*

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Evidence Quality and Evaluation Capacity Standards	No Evidence & Pre-Preliminary Points	Preliminary Points	Moderate & Strong Points
The applicant's evidence is of satisfactory quality. Applicants with no evidence describe an evidence-informed theory of change.	2	2	2
The applicant's data collection systems are sufficient to yield high quality process and outcome data.	5	4	1
The applicant demonstrates adequate capacity to use process and outcome data including performance measurement (and evaluation data if applicable) to inform continuous learning and program improvement.	5	5	5
The applicant's long-term research agenda is aligned to the organization's learning needs and position on the evidence continuum (evidence tier).	0	1	4

# Notice Priority

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- *The applicant proposed program fits within one or more of the AmeriCorps funding priorities as outlined in the Funding Priorities section and more fully described in the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance. The proposed program meets all requirements detailed in the Funding Priorities section and in the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance.*
- In other words...
  - Look at the funding priorities (i.e. Education, Healthy Futures)
  - Using your logic model, choose which one fits your program
  - Communicate that priority in the narrative

# Member Experience

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***This section explains how you will maintain a strong retention rate and the narratives must include....***

- Information on trainings and skills provided
  - Follow the Serve Indiana handbook
- How members will have access to a meaningful service experience and meet the needs of your program.
- How members will have access to opportunities for reflection that involves the intentional processing of members' experience and the incorporation of lessons learned.
- How your program will recruit AmeriCorps members from the geographic or demographic communities in which the programs operate.
- How your program will *foster an inclusive service culture where different backgrounds, talents, and capabilities are welcomed and leveraged for learning and effective service delivery.*

# Evidence Section: *Evidence Quality & Evaluation Capacity*

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- **Quality: What type of evidence did you provide?**
  - Is it relevant, recent?
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# Organizational Capacity

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25%

# Organizational Background & Staffing; Compliance & Accountability

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- **Organizational Background and Staffing** The organization has the experience, staffing, and management structure to plan and implement the proposed program.
- **Compliance and Accountability** The organization will comply with AmeriCorps rules and regulations including those related to prohibited and unallowable activities at the grantee, sub-grantee (if applicable), and service site locations.
  - The applicant will hold sub-grantees (if applicable) and service site locations accountable if instances of risk or non-compliance are identified.



# Culture that Values Learning; Member Supervision

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- **Culture that Values Learning**

- The applicant's board, management, and staff collects and uses information for learning and decision making.
- The applicant's management and staff produces frequent reports on how well the organization is implementing its programs and strategies.

- **Member Supervision**

- AmeriCorps members will receive sufficient guidance and support from their supervisor to provide effective service.
- AmeriCorps supervisors will be adequately trained/prepared to follow AmeriCorps and program regulations, priorities, and expectations.
- Applicants should review Serve Indiana training requirements in the Serve Indiana AmeriCorps Handbook for further information.

# Cost Effectiveness & Budget Adequacy

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25%



# Cost Effectiveness: 25%

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- Cost effectiveness and budget adequacy: 25 points
  - No narratives should be entered in this section, instead applicants should review their application for errors using the NOFO checklist.
    - Type in “see budget” for this section.
  - Ensure following Serve Indiana specific budget line-item guidance in NOFO/application instructions
    - Applies to continuations and re-competes as well.

# Communicate the following items:

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- Budget includes all required Serve Indiana budget line items.
  - If submitted a Fixed budget, follow that section accordingly.
- Budget is submitted without mathematical errors and proposed costs are allowable, reasonable, and allocable to the award.
- Budget is submitted with adequate information to assess how each line item is calculated.
- Budget is in compliance with the budget instructions.
- Match is submitted with adequate information to support the amount written in the budget.
- The cost per MSY is equal to or less than the maximum cost per MSY.
- Proposed budgets that contain MSY costs that exceed the maximum cost per MSY and/or less than required match will be considered unresponsive to the application criteria.
- Applicants must complete the budget and ensure the following information is in the budget screens:
  - Current indirect rate cost if used to claim indirect/administrative costs.
  - Identify the non-CNCS funding and resources necessary to support the project, including for Fixed Amount applicants.
  - Indicate the amount of non-CNCS resource commitments, type of commitments (in-kind and/or cash), the sources of these commitments, and if the commitments are proposed or secured.

# Evaluation Plan

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0%

# Evaluation Plan: 0%

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- Sections include the narrative...
  - **Evaluation plan:** 0 Points
- Difference requirements for different applicants and different types of re-competes. Ensure to follow the guidance in the NOFO and Application Instructions accordingly.

# Re-Compete Applications

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## *First time: Year 4*

- Provide a data collection and program evaluation plan in the “Evaluation Summary or Plan” field that includes the following:
  - A description of the applicant’s data collection system and how it is sufficient to collect high quality performance measurement data during the first three years of the grant.
  - If the applicant does not yet have a data collection system, describe the plan and timeline for developing a high-quality system.
  - A description of how the applicant will use performance data (including CNCS performance measures and other process and outcome measures if applicable) to improve its program in the first three years of funding.
- ***First-time applicants should be aware that CNCS may require submission of data collection instruments if a grant is approved for funding.***

# Re-Compete Continued

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## *Re-Competing Second Time: Year 7 plus*

- The program must submit its evaluation report and a learning memo as attachments via email (see Additional Document Section).
- Submit an evaluation plan for the next three-year period in the “Evaluation Summary or Plan” field in the system.



# Evaluation Plan Explained:

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- Evaluation plans must include as much information as possible for each of the following
  - A short description of the theory of change - why the proposed intervention is expected to produce the proposed results
  - Outcome of interest - clear and measurable outcomes that are aligned with the theory of change and will be assessed during the evaluation
  - Research questions to be addressed by the study - concrete research questions (or hypotheses) that are clearly connected to the outcomes
  - Study components – a) a proposed research design for the evaluation including a rationale for the design selected, an assessment of its strengths and limitations, and a description of the main components; b) description of the sampling methods, measurement tools, and data collection procedures, and c) an analysis plan
  - Qualifications needed for the evaluator
  - The proposed budget

# Next Steps & Questions/Concerns

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# Reminders

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- Evidence is very important to CNCS and SI
  - Evidence around your proposed intervention and model
  - Evidence you have collected as an organization or collected from the program model you are mirroring
  - Evidence you plan to collect (i.e. PM and program evaluations)
  - SI values community input and evidence too
- Writing the grants can take up to 80 hours
  - Think about a lay person reading your grant, avoid jargon and be as concise as possible
  - Start NOW with your logic model/theory of change, performance measures and budget then move on to the narratives

# Next Steps

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- Add name to newsletter list/follow us on social media so you are aware of funding announcements and deadlines.
- Work on logic model, PM, budget
- Watch for 2022-23 application materials update (late August/early September)
- Work on narratives
- Set up a meeting with Cassandra
  - [ckelloggillenwater@serveindiana.gov](mailto:ckelloggillenwater@serveindiana.gov) or 317-220-1659