



AMERICORPS CONTRACT PROCUREMENT PROCESS SUMMARY

The New York State Commission on National and Community Service (Commission) is required by the National Community Service Trust Act of 1993 and Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (2009) to conduct a competitive AmeriCorps grant award process. This process must comply with federal rules set forth by the Corporation for National and Community Service (Corporation) and New York State regulations and guidelines. Applications are solicited from eligible entities by the State Office of National and Community Service (NCS) through a State Request for Proposal (RFP) process.

New York State organizations interested in applying for AmeriCorps funding to place members in service in New York State only must respond to the Commission's annual AmeriCorps RFP. The core of the New York State Commission's AmeriCorps RFP is based on the Corporation's *Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)* which announces the availability of AmeriCorps funding and *AmeriCorps Application Instructions* that provide guidance to applicants applying for current year funding.

Applications submitted to the Commission for AmeriCorps funding are classified into one of the following categories defined below and detailed in the current year RFP:

- New – Applications submitted by an eligible organization that has not received AmeriCorps funding in the last five years.
- Re-Competing – Applications submitted by an eligible organization that (1) is completing a three-year AmeriCorps contract cycle and seeking a new, three-year grant, or (2) did not receive AmeriCorps funding in the previous year, but has operated an AmeriCorps grant in the last five years.
- Continuation - Applications submitted by an eligible organization that is currently managing an AmeriCorps grant moving from year one to year two or from year two to year three of their three-year contract cycle.
- Education Award Program (EAP) – Applications submitted by an eligible organization with a program model that includes most or all of the AmeriCorps program costs supported by sources other than the Corporation and whose members do not receive living stipends. These programs support education awards for members and help lower the State per full-time equivalent member cost. Applicants for EAP grants can apply for up to \$800 per MSY. The amount per full-time member requested will be a competitive factor in the Corporation's selection process.
- Fixed-Cost Program – Applications submitted by an eligible organization with a fiscal model that uses a fixed dollar amount up to \$13,000 per full-time member. Fixed-Cost applications can only be submitted by eligible applicants who are (1) classified as New or Re-competing, and (2) propose a program design that will enroll full-time members only.

AmeriCorps Procurement/RFP Process

The Corporation issues a NOFO in early Fall which provides anticipated funding available for the current federal program year, a program description, and application submission information. The Corporation also sets forth its strategic initiatives and any initiatives that would receive special consideration during the federal review process. For example in 2010, programs designed to engage veterans as service recipients or providers were identified as a priority.

*This document is intended to provide a summary of the AmeriCorps*State application and funding process as conducted by the Corporation for National & Community Service and the New York State Commission on National & Community Service. Information in this document is not considered final guidance and is superseded by the AmeriCorps*State Request for Proposals (RFP) for the current year and the Corporation for National & Community Service Notice of Funding Available (NOFA).*

The State Office of National and Community Service (NCS) commences planning and development of a draft Request For Proposal document and Procurement Timeline during this period. The completed draft RFP document must be cleared through the formal Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) Internal Clearance process, the State Commission on National and Community Service Application Process Committee, the State Commission, the State Division of the Budget, and the Office of the Governor.

NCS follows guidelines set forth in the New York State Procurement Law. The goal of the State's procurement process is to procure commodities, services and technology that enable State agencies to fulfill their respective missions while ensuring fair and open competition. The State's procurement process is designed to: (a) guard against favoritism, improvidence, extravagance, fraud and corruption; (b) ensure that the results meet agency needs; and, (c) protect the interests of the State and its taxpayers. To ensure these goals are met, State statute provides for checks and balances to regulate and oversee agency procurement activities. NCS maintains a Procurement Record each funding cycle which documents all decisions regarding the procurement process which must be submitted to and approved by the Office of the State Comptroller (OSC) before contracts can be awarded.

In compliance with these procurement guidelines, the Commission must convene all stakeholders defined in the Internal Clearance process to review and approve the draft AmeriCorps RFP. Relevant stakeholders include but are not limited to: members of the State Commission on National and Community Service Application Process Committee, staff from Office of Budget Management, Bureau of Contract Management, Office of Legal Affairs, Strategic Planning and Policy Development, Office of Public Affairs, Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity development, and Business Finance Office. The purpose of the RFP review is to confirm inclusion of the required federal qualifications of applicants, New York State mandatory contract terms, regulations and conditions, and any priorities set forth by the Commission.

AmeriCorps RFP Issuance

Once the draft RFP is approved for public release, notice must be posted in the New York State Register and an announcement issued to registered users of the New York State On-Line Bidder's list. In addition, the AmeriCorps RFP is announced on the State Commission's website, other state and local partner websites, and a blast email distributed to a Commission-maintained database of more than 6,000 community-based organizations throughout the state. The RFP, Corporation's NOFO, and Application Instructions are thereby available to the public on the internet or by hard copy which is mailed upon request.

Subsequent to the public release of the AmeriCorps RFP, an on-line training and technical assistance session is made available on-demand at the State Commission's website for the duration the RFP is open. The content of the AmeriCorps Training and Technical Assistance Session includes a thorough presentation of the New York State AmeriCorps RFP, the Corporation's NOFO and Application Instructions, and clarification to common questions. Additional questions from potential applicants may be submitted to NCS and are published as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) on the State Commission website. All material from the AmeriCorps Training and Technical Assistance Session is also available to potential applicants by mail in hard copy as well as on CD-ROM.

Application Submission and Peer Review Process

The AmeriCorps application review and selection process must be documented prior to the receipt of applications and is presented in a format that is consistent with the evaluation process set forth in the RFP.

All applications must be submitted through the Corporation's electronic grants management system (eGrants) by the due date stated in the application. Documents required by and related to the New York State Contracting Process must also be submitted in hard copy to NCS by the due date. No application can be opened or reviewed until the close of business on the due date. At that time, applications are opened and reviewed for completeness of required components and documents. Those applications that are considered complete are then logged into the NCS electronic database. Applications that are not considered complete may be sent to the Office of Legal Affairs for a final determination. Applications that do not meet the mandatory requirements specified in the RFP will not receive further evaluation and are ineligible for funding consideration. Applicants in this situation are notified within 30 days of application submission.

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Prior to the submission deadline for applications, a committee of independent reviewers is identified and trained to participate in the State AmeriCorps application review process. The scoring tools are explained and each reviewer is asked to sign a Conflict of Interest form for each application they read. Each application is reviewed by three independent reviewers. Scores are recorded and averaged. If there is a disparity of 15 points or more between any of the three peer reviewer scores, two additional reviews will be conducted by two new reviewers and the five total scores will be averaged.

AmeriCorps Competitive Recommendations/Funding

To achieve the Commission's goal of funding AmeriCorps programs that operate in regionally diverse areas of the state including urban and rural communities, the Commission will submit the highest scoring applicant in each of the ten regions defined in the RFP that receive an average score of 85% or higher for Competitive consideration. Statewide or Multi-Regional programs either based in a region or with members serving in that region are not taken into account when determining regional diversity.

Once this process is complete, the Commission complies with all additional scoring criteria defined in the State RFP after which all scores are final. Applicant scores and pertinent information are then rank ordered by average score, from the highest scoring proposal to the lowest.

Applications with the highest average score that meet or exceed the criteria set forth in the application review and selection process are then presented by the State Commission Application Process Committee to the full Commission as a recommended funding package for its review and approval. The Commission-approved package of applications is then sent via the federal government's eGrants system to the Corporation to compete with other State Commission's applications for Competitive funding.

All proposals submitted for Competitive funding consideration are reviewed and scored by Corporation staff and/or peer reviewers. This federal, competitive review is independent of the process conducted by State Commissions and the scores assigned at the State level are not associated with proposals during the Corporation's review. Competitive grant announcements are made in late spring/early summer.

Upon receipt of the federal Notice of Grant Award for Competitive AmeriCorps grantees, NCS begins the development of New York State Contracts with all successful applicants.

AmeriCorps Formula Recommendations/Funding

The New York State Commission receives AmeriCorps Formula Funding from the Corporation. Formula Funding is allocated to states using a population-based formula. The Commission awards these Formula dollars to fund AmeriCorps programs with eligible organizations that submitted an application to the Commission and the proposal was either (1) included as part of the State Competitive portfolio submitted to the Corporation for Competitive Funding consideration, but was not awarded a Competitive grant, or (2) was not included as part of the State Competitive portfolio submitted to the Corporation for Competitive Funding consideration.

Formula funding for states is finite and limited. To maximize those resources, the State Commission on National and Community Service Application Process Committee, supported by NCS staff, develop funding options based on the results of the original State Application Review process. Formula funding charts are created and include applications that meet the aforementioned criteria, removing only those applications funded through the Corporation's Competitive process. Applications appear in rank order using the same average score as originally determined during the original State Application Review process.

As defined in the State AmeriCorps RFP, the Commission will use Formula Funds to support Continuation applicants first before considering any New or Re-competing proposals.

To achieve the Commission's goal of funding AmeriCorps programs that operate in regionally diverse areas of the state including urban and rural communities, the Commission will use Formula dollars to fund the highest scoring applicant in each of the ten regions defined in the RFP that receive an average score of 85% or higher. In the event that the highest scoring proposal in any one region is funded by Competitive dollars, this qualification will have been

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met and there is no requirement that Formula funding be awarded for geographic equality. Statewide or Multi-Regional programs either based in a region or with members serving in that region are not taken into account when determining regional diversity.

Once these conditions and any other funding option guidance included in the current year AmeriCorps State RFP, are met, and if additional Formula funding is available, New/Re-competing applications will be recommended for funding at varying levels using the list of scores in rank order until funding is expended. The Commission Application Process Committee recommends a funding scenario to the full Commission for its review. The Commission may accept the committee's recommendation or create a new funding scenario for final approval. The Formula funding recommendation is then submitted via eGrants to the Corporation for authorization.

Upon receipt of the federal Notice of Grant Award for Formula AmeriCorps grantees, NCS begins the development of New York State Contracts with all successful applicants.