

IS MY ORGANIZATION READY FOR AN AMERICORPS GRANT? A READINESS ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION:

This assessment is to assist you in determining if your organization is poised to apply, and hopefully, implement, an AmeriCorps grant. It should also assist you in getting your systems ready and preparing to submit a grant application for any type of funding.

This assessment is a general guide, a rough tool to help you plan for implementation of AmeriCorps and other complex grant-funded programming. Successful completion of the assessment does not guarantee AmeriCorps funding through the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service/Volunteer Mississippi or the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Read each question carefully and answer honestly. **Please return your completed assessment to judy@volunteermississippi.org no later than **November 15, 2016**.**

Regardless of your results, the MCVS is eager to assist you in designing and implementing services benefiting the residents of our state. Please contact Judy Stein (judy@volunteermississippi.org) or 601-432-6224) to learn more about how national service opportunities may be able to benefit your organization.

Special Note for Faith-Based Organizations seeking to operate government funded programs:

If the conditions below are not acceptable to your organization, government funding is probably not a good option:

- Participation in government funded programs must be open to all who qualify, without regard to religious beliefs.
 - No participant in a government funded program may be required to participate in inherently religious activities.
 - AmeriCorps members must not proselytize.
 - Government funded programs must be held in a separate place or time from religious activities.
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A READINESS ASSESSMENT

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Is your organization a public or private nonprofit organization – including labor organizations, faith-based and other community organizations; an institution of higher education; an educational institution; a government entity within the State of Mississippi; an Indian Tribe; or a partnership or consortia?

Yes No Unsure

If the answer to the above question is “No” then your organization is not eligible to receive an AmeriCorps grant or serve as a Host Site for AmeriCorps members. You are similarly ineligible if your organization is a 501 (c) (4) non-profit entity [under the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 26 U.S.C. 501 (c)(4)] that engages in lobbying.

Do your plans for utilizing AmeriCorps members call for members to provide services exclusively within the state of Mississippi?

Yes No Unsure

If the answer to the above question is “No” and the other results of this Assessment are favorable, then your organization may be interested in applying directly to the Corporation for National and Community Service for an AmeriCorps*National grant. Contact the MCVS for details.

2017 PRIORITIES

The Corporation's purpose is to maximize the power of service and volunteering to improve lives in communities across the country. Through all its programs, CNCS expands economic opportunity – helping Americans acquire the skills, education, and training they need for productive employment. By helping more Americans graduate, pursue higher education, and find work, national service provides immediate and long term benefits by expanding individual opportunity, building family stability, and creating more sustainable, resilient communities. In order to carry out Congress' intent and to maximize the impact of investment in national service, CNCS has following focus areas:

● **Disaster Services:** Grants activities will provide support to increase the preparedness of individuals, improve individuals' readiness to respond to disasters, help individuals recover from disasters, and/or help individuals mitigate disasters.

● **Economic Opportunity:** Grants will provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to the improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people.

● **Education:** Grants will provide support and/or facilitate access to services and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children; improved school readiness for economically disadvantaged young children; improved educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving schools; and/or support economically disadvantaged students prepare for success in post-secondary educational institutions.

● **Environmental Stewardship:** Grants will provide support for increased individual behavioral change leading to increased energy efficiency, renewable energy use, and ecosystem improvements particularly for economically disadvantaged households and communities.

● **Healthy Futures:** Grants will provide support for activities that will improve access to primary and preventive health care for communities served by CNCS-supported programs; increase seniors' ability to remain in their own homes with the same or improved quality of life for as long as possible; and/or increase physical activity and improve nutrition in youth with the purpose of reducing childhood obesity.

● **Veterans and Military Families:** Grants will positively impact the quality of life of veterans and improve military family strength; increase the number of veterans, military service members, and their families served by CNCS-supported programs; and/or increase the number of veterans and military family members engaged in service through CNCS-supported programs.

CNCS seeks to prioritize the investment of national service resources in:

- Disaster Services - improving community resiliency through disaster preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation
- Economic Opportunity - increasing economic opportunities for communities by engaging opportunity youth, either as the population served and/or as AmeriCorps members
- Education - improving student academic performance in Science, Technology, Engineering, and/or Mathematics (STEM)
- Environment - 21st Century Service Corps
- Healthy Futures – Reducing and/or Preventing Prescription Drug and Opioid Abuse
- Veterans and Military Families -- positively impacting the quality of life of veterans and improving military family strength
- Governor and Mayor Initiatives
- Programming that supports My Brother's Keeper
- Multi-focus intermediaries that demonstrate measureable impact and primarily serve communities with limited resources and organizational infrastructure. i.e. rural and other underserved communities
- Safer communities
- Evidence Based Intervention Planning Grants
- Encore Programs

(For more information on the above see [the CNCS Supplemental Guidance.](#))

Do your plans for an AmeriCorps application include any of the above priorities?

Yes No Unsure

Do your plans for an AmeriCorps application include engaging some individuals age 55+ in service?

Yes No Unsure

Do your plans for an AmeriCorps application include engaging some veterans in service?

Yes No Unsure

It is not a requirement to address any of the above priorities.

ADMINISTRATIVE

Does your organization have a track record of success with its programs?

- Yes No Unsure

Does your organization have the infrastructure to recruit, train, and support the efforts of AmeriCorps members? Variables include office space, technology, supervisory time and skill, financial expertise, and the ability to manage a team of AmeriCorps members.

- Yes No Unsure

Has your organization previously managed a federal, state, or foundation grant?

- Yes No Unsure

Are there formal internal controls governing all financial operations?

- Yes No Unsure

Does your organization have sufficient cash to operate a major grant on a reimbursement basis? *If your program starts September 1, 2017, you will submit a reimbursement request, with supporting documentation, to MCVS by October 15, 2017, for expenses incurred September 1 - September 30. Payments are made 15-30 days after submission of reimbursement requests if adequate documentation is provided upon submission.*

- Yes No Unsure

Are the financial operations of your organization audited annually by an independent auditor?

- Yes No Unsure

If you answered “No” to any of the above questions, it is likely your organization would struggle to successfully administer an AmeriCorps grant. Consideration should be given to seeking a partnership with an existing AmeriCorps program or Applicant. Serving as an AmeriCorps host site, rather than as a primary grant applicant, is often a better option for smaller organizations. Contact the MCVS for details.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCIES

The following questions address key elements of successful organizations. Completion of this portion of the assessment will help provide you with additional information about the capacity and structure in place to operate an AmeriCorps program.

ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE: THE MISSION

1. Does your organization have a clear written mission statement? (if no, skip to question 6)

- Yes No Unsure

2. Do all programs and efforts of your organization align with the mission?

- Yes No Unsure

3. Has your organization said “no” to potentially good opportunities which are not consistent with the organizational mission or strategy?

- Yes No Unsure

4. Is the mission of your organization understood by all stakeholders, including staff and board members?

- Yes No Unsure

5. Is the mission of your organization frequently referred to (e.g. in planning sessions and other meetings)?
- Yes No Unsure
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ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE & OPERATIONS

6. Does your organization have an active and independent board of directors and/or other governing body? (Independent is defined as a majority of board members who are neither employees of the organization nor family members of employees or other board members.)
- Yes No Unsure
7. Does the organization have written policies and procedures, including a conflict of interest policy for employees and directors?
- Yes No Unsure
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ORGANIZATIONAL DIRECTION: STRATEGIC PLANNING

8. Does your organization have a clear and coherent written plan for the future (i.e. 3-10 year strategic plan)? (If no, skip to question #14.)
- Yes No Unsure
9. Does the strategic plan have well defined measurable goals and achievable action steps with timeframes?
- Yes No Unsure
10. Are the goals in the strategic plan well known and understood by the staff and board?
- Yes No Unsure
11. Is the strategic plan made actionable by the realistic and detailed annual plans that outline specific work to be accomplished?
- Yes No Unsure
12. Is this annual plan consistently used at all levels of the organization to guide organizations?
- Yes No Unsure
13. Does the organization conduct regular assessment of internal operations to assess efficiency and effectiveness?
- Yes No Unsure
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ORGANIZATIONAL REVENUE: SUSTAINABILITY

14. Does the organization have diversified funding from multiple sources?
- Yes No Unsure
15. Does your organization have a group of dedicated people that believe in its mission and are willing to provide financial support and volunteer their time?
- Yes No Unsure
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ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

16. Are organizational and programmatic budgets closely and regularly monitored?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
17. Does your organization produce and review financial statements at least monthly?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
18. Does your organization have a development/fundraising plan in place?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
19. Does your organization have plans to secure the financial and in-kind resources to meet any required matches?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
20. Do you have a "fund based" accounting system?
 Yes **No** **Unsure** **Current System Used:** _____
21. If your organization uses accrual basis accounting, are there procedures in place to allow for reconciliation between cash and accrual basis reports?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
22. Is your organization's accounting system manual, automated, or a combination?
 Manual **Auto** **Combo** **Unsure**
23. How often are entries posted to the general ledger?
 Daily **Monthly** **Other:** _____
 Weekly **Unsure**
24. Does the accounting system track completely and accurately the receipt and disbursement of funds by each grant or funding source?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
25. Does your accounting system allow cash basis reporting and for the recording of "in kind" contributions?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
26. Is your organization familiar with federal cost principles?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
27. Is your organization familiar with procedures for the determination and allowance of costs in connection with Corporation for National and Community Service grants and contracts?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**

ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: INTERNAL CONTROLS

28. Are the duties of the bookkeeper and record keeper separate from cash functions (receipts, deposits, check signing/releasing)?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**

29. Are checks signed by individual(s) whose duties exclude recording cash received, approving vouchers for payment, and the preparation of payroll?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
30. Are purchase approval methods documented and communicated?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
31. Are employee payroll reports supported by appropriately signed documentation (timesheets, leave slips, etc)?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
32. Are employees who handle funds bonded against any loss by reasons of fraud or dishonesty?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
33. Are time and activity distribution records (time sheets) maintained by funding source and project type for each employee to account for total hours with your organization?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
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ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: TECHNOLOGY

34. Does every key staff member have access to a computer with up-to-date software, internet access and email capabilities?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
35. Does your organization have a computerized accounting system?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**

ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: HUMAN RESOURCES

36. Does your organization have a well-planned process to recruit, develop, and retain the best employees (and/or AmeriCorps members) in accordance with an equal opportunity environment?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
37. Does your organization provide staff and volunteers with written job descriptions and the necessary resources to carry out duties appropriately?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
38. Does your organization provide relevant and regular training for staff and board members?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
39. Are employee performance appraisals conducted on a consistent and fair basis?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
40. Does your organization have a well-planned process to recruit, develop, and retain volunteers?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
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PROGRAM DESIGN: NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

41. Does your organization conduct regular assessments of community need?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
42. Does your organization analyze and use the results of needs assessment to chart change?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
43. Does your organization have the ability to grow and/or create new and innovative programs to meet the needs of the community?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
44. Are your organization's programs and services well defined?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
45. Does your organization have the ability to close a program that is no longer needed or relevant?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
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ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT: MEASURING PERFORMANCE & CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

46. Does your organization have a comprehensive well-developed community assessment or evaluation system used to measure the impact of programs and services?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
47. Does your organization conduct regular assessments of existing programs' effectiveness in meeting recipient needs and identify needs for improvement?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
48. Does your organization collect data to measure performance and progress on a continual basis?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
49. Is data analyzed, used in program redesign and communicated to stakeholders on a regular basis? (e.g. annual reports)
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
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ORGANIZATION OUTREACH: PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

50. Does your organization participate in partnerships with other groups?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
51. Have these relationships led to mutually beneficial collaboration?
 Yes **No** **Unsure**
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Please return your completed assessment with your Letter of Intent no later than November 15, 2016, to judy@volunteermisissippi.org. This assessment is to assist you in determining if your organization is poised to apply, receive funding and successfully implement an AmeriCorps grant.

Thank you for your interest in submitting an application for AmeriCorps funding. We look forward to working with your organization.

