

READINESS ASSESSMENT: Is My Organization Ready to Apply for an AmeriCorps Grant?

INTRODUCTION



This Readiness Assessment uses simple questions to help you determine whether your organization is poised to successfully apply for and implement an AmeriCorps grant. Read each question carefully and answer honestly. This assessment is a tool to help you plan for implementation and administration of AmeriCorps grant-funded programming.

Successful completion of the assessment does not guarantee AmeriCorps funding through the Washington Commission for National and Community Service (WCNCS) or the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS).

Regardless of your results, WCNCS is eager to assist you in designing and implementing services benefiting the residents of our state. Please contact Brian Lock or Debbie Schuffenhauer to learn more about how AmeriCorps may be able to benefit your organization and how our Commission may be able to help you implementing new AmeriCorps programs or creating partnerships with existing programs.

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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; a government entity within the State of Washington states or territories; an Indian Tribe; or a partnership or consortia?

Yes No Unsure

Does your organization's plan for utilizing AmeriCorps members address specific unmet community needs in the areas of education, human needs, public safety, the environment, and/or homeland security/disaster preparedness?

Yes No Unsure

If the answer to either of the above questions 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 service exclusively within the state of Washington?

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 & Community Service for an AmeriCorps*National grant.

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 & skill, financial expertise, and the ability to manage volunteers.

Yes No Unsure

Has your organization previously managed a major 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? Both the Federal and State governments rarely, if ever, pay grant funds in advance. Payments are made 30-60 days after submission of invoices by programs.

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 in Washington. Serving as an AmeriCorps host site, rather than as a primary grant applicant is often a better option for smaller organizations. Contact the WCNCS for more 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.

Score this section of the assessment by giving yourself one (1) point for each correct answer.

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 organizational programs and efforts 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 understood by ALL stakeholders within the organization?
 Yes No Unsure
5. Is the mission frequently referred to (e.g. in planning sessions and other meetings)?
 Yes No Unsure

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

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 #13)
 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 realistic and detailed annual plans that outline the specific work to be accomplished?

Yes No Unsure

12. Is this annual plan consistently used at all levels of the organization to guide operations?

Yes No Unsure

13. Does the organization conduct regular assessment of internal operations to assess efficiency and effectiveness?

Yes No Unsure

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

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 the organization have a development/fundraising plan in place?

Yes No Unsure

19. Does the organization have plans to secure the financial and in-kind resources to meet any required matches?

Yes No Unsure

ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: TECHNOLOGY

20. Does your organization have networked computers?

Yes No Unsure

21. Does every key staff member have access to a computer with up-to-date software, internet access and e-mail capabilities?

Yes No Unsure

22. Are all staff competent and comfortable using their computers?

Yes No Unsure

23. Does your organization have a computerized accounting system?

Yes No Unsure

ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE: HUMAN RESOURCES

24. Does your organization have a well-planned process to recruit, develop, and retain the best employees in accordance with an equal opportunity environment?

Yes No Unsure

25. Does your organization provide staff and volunteers with written job descriptions and the necessary resources to carry out duties appropriately?

Yes No Unsure

26. Does the organization provide relevant and regular training for staff and board members?

Yes No Unsure

27. Are employee performance appraisals conducted on a consistent and fair basis?

Yes No Unsure

28. Does your organization have a well-planned process to recruit, develop, and retain volunteers?

Yes No Unsure

PROGRAM DESIGN: NEEDS ASSESSMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

29. Does your organization conduct regular assessments of community need?

Yes No Unsure Date Last Conducted: _____

30. Does your organization analyze and use the results of needs assessments to chart change?

Yes No Unsure

31. 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

32. Are your organization's programs and services well defined?

Yes No Unsure

33. Does your organization have the ability to close a program that is no longer needed or relevant?

Yes No Unsure

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT: MEASURING PERFORMANCE & CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

34. Does your organization have a comprehensive well-developed evaluation system used to measure the impact of programs and services?

Yes No Unsure

35. Does your organization conduct regular assessments of existing programs' effectiveness in meeting recipient needs AND identify areas for improvement?

Yes No Unsure

36. Does your organization collect data to measure performance and progress on a continual basis?

Yes No Unsure

37. Is data analyzed, used in program redesign and communicated to stakeholders on a regular basis? (e.g. annual report)

Yes No Unsure

ORGANIZATIONAL OUTREACH: PARTNERSHIP & COLLABORATION

38. Does your organization participate in partnerships with other groups?

Yes No Unsure

39. Have these relationships led to mutually beneficial collaboration?

Yes No Unsure

FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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.
- Government funded positions must not proselytize.
- Government funded programs must be held in a separate place or time from religious activities.

RESULTS

Count the total number of times you selected "yes" and refer to the chart below to determine your organization's readiness. Balanced organizations with consistent excellence across organizational competencies tend to be most successful in administering complex grants like AmeriCorps. If your replies to this assessment reveal significant areas of growth, it might be best to address these before pursuing AmeriCorps support.

- **25 - 40 points:** Based on your self-assessment, your organization may have the capacity to successfully operate a government-funded project or program.
- **15 - 24 points:** Based on your self-assessment, your organization may need to make a few improvements in your capacity and planning to independently administer an AmeriCorps grant. Exploring partnerships might be beneficial.
- **Less than 15 points:** Based on your self-assessment, your organization may have a significant need to build its capacity before it is ready to apply for an AmeriCorps grant.