

Missouri Community Service Commission

AmeriCorps Frequently Asked Questions

General

▪ **What is the Missouri Community Service Commission?**

The MCSC is the administrative agent of Missouri AmeriCorps*State programs. The vision of the MCSC is to nurture volunteerism by encouraging an atmosphere that enables citizen service to prosper. The MCSC works to fulfill this vision through a number of programs, projects and activities focused on service and volunteerism. Currently, the MCSC funds thirteen AmeriCorps programs across Missouri fulfilling a variety of needs in their communities.

▪ **What is AmeriCorps?**

AmeriCorps is a National Service program, similar to a domestic Peace Corps, that involves individuals (members) in “getting things done” in their community. In exchange for their service, members receive a living allowance and an education award to pay for college or repay student loans.

▪ **What does “MSY” mean?**

MSY stands for “Member Service Year,” and it is comparable to the phrase FTE, meaning “full-time equivalent.” Because the terminology “FTE” is familiar to most organizations when talking about employees, we use the term MSY as a reminder that **AmeriCorps members are NOT employees**. For your understanding, however, FTE and MSY are the same thing in concept.

▪ **What types of grants are available?**

The MCSC funds Missouri AmeriCorps*State grants for development and expansion of programs that meet community needs in the areas of education, environment, public safety, homeland security and other human needs, particularly those affecting children, elderly and the disabled. Grant awards will cover a period of one year and may be renewed for additional years, subject to review and the availability of federal appropriations.

Programs must be large enough to achieve a demonstrable impact on the community served. While the actual size of each program will vary depending on the community, the design of the program, and other factors, applicants are required to apply for at least five (5) full-time equivalent AmeriCorps members. Applicants should evaluate their present infrastructure and capacity when considering program size.

▪ **What is the grant timeframe?**

The grant period is 3-years, however the grant period is composed of three one-year budget periods and an application must be submitted for each budget period.

▪ **Who is eligible to apply?**

Educational institutions, local government entities, state agencies, and non-profit agencies that have their 501 (c) 3 status and have been in existence for at least three years are eligible to apply for funding.

▪ **What are the application and funding timelines?**

AmeriCorps*State applications are due to the MCSC in March of each year. If approved by the MCSC and CNCS, the earliest that funding can begin is the following August.

▪ **Does our project have to serve in one of the Corporation for National and Community Service’s areas – education, homeland security, public safety, environment or other human needs?**

Yes, however, the area of “other human needs” is broad and is intended to allow programs flexibility to address the community’s needs. The programs may also serve in more than one area with their project.

▪ **Where can I get additional information?**

Additional information on specific grant requirements can be found in the AmeriCorps Application Instructions, AmeriCorps Provisions and/or AmeriCorps Regulations. These documents are located on the AmeriCorps website: http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/manage/index.asp.

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Administration

- **Is there administrative funding available?**
Yes, 5.26% is the administrative maximum.

- **Can we build in other administrative costs, such as supervisor time and office space?**
Yes, supervisory staff, office space, phones, supplies, etc. are allowable costs under the grant. Many programs also use these areas as sources of matching resources for the AmeriCorps grant.

- **How much time is needed to manage the members and the grant reporting?**
It is recommended that most programs utilize a full-time program director (particularly at the on-set of the grant). As the program becomes more internalized and the program director becomes more familiar with the reporting and other aspects of AmeriCorps, it is possible that the program director role could be a portion of his/her position, however, a significant amount of time should be devoted to this position.

- **How much time is required by the site supervisors?**
Site supervisors provide the day-to-day supervision and support for the AmeriCorps members. Depending on the individual member, the time requirement will vary; however, it shouldn't be more burdensome than overseeing another staff member.

Budget

- **Can the 33% program costs match be in-kind?**
Yes, the 33% program costs match can be 100% in-kind. The 15% member support costs match must be non-federal cash.

- **What is the cost of a full-time AmeriCorps member to the agency?**
According to the grant requirements, programs are required to provide a 15% non-federal cash match for member costs, including living allowance, FICA, workmen's compensation and member benefits. The minimum living allowance for a full-time AmeriCorps member is \$11,100, of which, 15% must be provided locally in non-federal cash.

- **Are there other budgetary restrictions?**
Yes, each year, the Corporation establishes a maximum cost per MSY (Member Service Year, equivalent to FTE, full-time equivalent) over a state's portfolio of AmeriCorps programs. The Corporation's maximum average cost per MSY is \$12,600.

- **Does the program provide a portion of the Education Award?**
No, the entire cost of the Education Award is provided by federal funds and no local funds are required to support the Education Awards.

Members

- **Is five MSY the minimum number a program can have?**
Because of the administrative requirements of the program (both on the local sponsor and the commission) and because of the team-building and member development elements of the program, the minimum number of members is 5 MSY in order to balance the administrative burden with the benefits to the members, the community and the program. Programs are encouraged to think creatively about other community partners with whom they may partner to apply jointly in order to maximize the value and impact of the program. For example, another community program that works with a similar constituency may be interested in utilizing 2 members, while your agency can utilize 3 members. A program can also choose to have a mixture of full-time and less than full-time members. For example, the 5 MSY requirement can be met by having 4 full-time members, and 4 half-time members, or many other various combinations. Again, these are only minimums; provided that other budget requirements are met, there are no maximums.

- **Who recruits the members?**
Local programs are responsible for recruiting their own members; however, an on-line national recruiting system is also used by programs to enhance recruiting.

- **What types of activities can AmeriCorps members do?**
Traditionally, AmeriCorps members have provided primarily direct service activities, however, recently, the Corporation has expanded the role of AmeriCorps members to include some capacity-building activities, specifically volunteer recruitment and management and grant writing (members are not allowed to write the AmeriCorps grant).

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- **How many hours do AmeriCorps members serve?**
Full time members serve a minimum of 1700 hours over a 10-12 month period. Half time members serve at least 900 hours (over one or two years), reduced half-time members serve at least 675, quarter time members serve at least 450 hours and minimum time members serve at least 300 hours. Length of service and numbers of hours are described by programs in the member contracts.

- **How do the Education Awards work?**
Following successful completion of a term of service, members are eligible to receive an education award (\$4725 for one year of full-time service) that can be used to pursue post-secondary education or pay off qualified student loans. Members who serve less than full-time are eligible pro-rated Education Awards. All Education Award funding goes directly to the educational institution.

- **Can members use their education awards for training/education other than college?**
Yes, however Education Awards must be used at approved institutions, so check with the National Service Trust before enrolling in a program.

- **Can the Education Awards be “cashed out” or transferred to someone else?**
At this point, Education Awards cannot be cashed or transferred.

- **Is there other education-related information I should know?**
During their terms of service, AmeriCorps members are eligible for loan forbearance and the National Service Trust will pay interest accrued during a members’ service for qualified student loans.

- **What benefits are provided to the AmeriCorps members?**
Full-time AmeriCorps members receive health care benefits. Members who are income-eligible may also receive childcare benefits. Programs are responsible for establishing vacation, sick and holiday policies for AmeriCorps members; however, members do not accrue service hours for vacation, sick or holidays. Other benefits vary from program to program.