

## 2020-2021 AmeriCorps Competitive Grants Cycle

### Volunteer West Virginia FAQs and Guidance

#### Training and Technical Assistance

##### *Tips for On3Learn Webinars:*

- The administrator has lifted the restriction on the 'Completed Course Certificates' so you should now be able to access the certificate by navigating to the 'Completed Courses Tab'.
- If the On3Learn webinars are left open in your browser for an extended period it causes a glitch in the system. This is most likely why the system has had challenges logging your total progress. From this point on, please exit the program when you are done viewing the webinar. If you have emailed us previously with issues we have that on file and will refer to that when looking at your On3Learn training involvement.
- The best browser for On3Learn webinars is Google Chrome, not Internet Explorer.
- If you have any difficulty with the webinars please contact [info@on3learn.com](mailto:info@on3learn.com)

##### *What is the difference between the CNCS and On3Learn Trainings?*

##### *Are they required?*

The CNCS Webinars and the On3Learn Webinars are both optional. They are separate trainings. The CNCS Competitive Grant Webinars are hosted by CNCS, which is the funding agency for the AmeriCorps Competitive Grant. On3Learn is a training agency that Volunteer West Virginia has contracted with to provide resources and training for organizations that submitted an intent to apply to this competition.

Volunteer West Virginia suggests that potential applicants take advantage of both trainings, but the information may be duplicated due to the same grants process being covered. We have gotten feedback from current AmeriCorps programs that the CNCS Evidence Webinar is very useful.

##### *Accessing the Trainings:*

If you cannot find your Intent to Apply email with the On3Learn codes please contact [americorps@wv.gov](mailto:americorps@wv.gov) and a staff member will resend the information.

The CNCS Webinar series is no longer hosting live webinars but the recordings of The Competitive Grants Process Overview, Budget Development, Developing Performance Measures, Writing an Evaluation Plan and Best Practices in Demonstrating Evidence can be found on this page:

[https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2020/ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants-fy-2020#tech\\_assistance](https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2020/ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants-fy-2020#tech_assistance)

## Submitting your Application

*I am having difficulty submitting my continuation grant in eGrants. Can you provide guidance on how to do this?*

On Volunteer West Virginia's AmeriCorps grants page, <https://volunteer.wv.gov/Grants/Pages/2010-21-AmeriCorps-Funding-.aspx>, please refer to 'eGrants How To Submit an Application' and 'eGrants Starting a New or Recompeting Application'. For continuation grants, you will see a screen that says 'Continuation 1920'. Please hit the button that says 'Continue' at the bottom of this page and it will create your 2021 application.

*If I have a technical issue with the eGrants system should I notify Volunteer West Virginia?*

Yes, please send an email to [americorps@wv.gov](mailto:americorps@wv.gov) with the customer service ticket issued by eGrants so we are aware of the issue.

*Is it okay to use an acronym for our program when submitting the additional document files to Volunteer West Virginia?*

Yes, you may title the documents with an acronym (for example AFNHA would be an acronym for Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area)

*Do we need to re-apply for the alternative match waiver in order to receive it for 20-21? Our program is in a continuation year.*

No, you do not need to re-apply for the alternative match waiver. You will only need to re-apply once your program is at the end of the three year grant period and is in a recompile year.

*What is the difference between the AmeriCorps Competitive Grants Competition and the Formula Grants Competition?*

The Competitive Grants Competition is a federal competition. Your program will be competing with other applicants across the country for federal funding. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is the federal funder who selects the programs that receive funding.

The Formula Grants Competition is a state competition. Your program will be competing with applicants within the state of West Virginia. Volunteer West Virginia is the state funder who selects the programs that receive funding. The funding is drawn from a set budget given to Volunteer West Virginia from CNCS, so the funds are limited.

*When is the deadline for the Volunteer West Virginia's Formula Process?*

The formula grants process will start in March of 2020.

*Can I apply to the AmeriCorps Competitive Grants Competition and the Formula Grants Competition?*

Yes, you can apply for both competitions. However, in order to be fair to all applicants if you participate in the Competitive Competition, and do not receive funding, your application will be forwarded to the State Formula Competition. You can also choose to not participate in the Competitive Competition and submit your application during the Formula Competition in March 2020.

*My program was awarded a competitive grant last April, but we haven't started that program year because our program year is from January- December. Do I need to submit a continuation and an intent to apply?*

Yes. All continuation, recompetes and new applicants must submit an application via eGrants and an intent to apply to [americorps@wv.gov](mailto:americorps@wv.gov).

*Do you know when the applications will be open in the eGrants portal?*

Applications are currently open in eGrants.

*We have developed our budget for our recompetes application due Monday. We calculated it at two different match rates, 35% and 50%. Our match requirement in E-Grants is set at 35%. Does reduced match award carry over to the new grant cycle at 35%, or do we need to submit the budget at 50% and then request the reduced match?*

Since you are recompetes this year you will submit your budget at 50% match, and if approved set the budget to 35% match. CNCS will send instructions within 30 days with how to change the budget to match the Alternative Match Schedule.

Please see CNCS guidance below:

Application Instructions pg. 34

"CNCS will review your request and notify you within 30 days if you qualify for the alternative schedule and provide instructions for entering your budget into eGrants under the Alternative Match Schedule"

*Can I add my On3Learn Certificates to my additional document submission?*

Yes

*If I am a continuation AmeriCorps program do I need to submit a Financial Management Survey?*

No, you do not.

*Where do I send my consortium support letters?*

Consortium support letters need to be sent as additional documents to [americorps@wv.gov](mailto:americorps@wv.gov) by 5pm on Monday Dec. 9, 2019.

*Do I need to gather new consortium support letters if I am an continuation program?*

No, you do not. You can send the same support letters as additional documents. Please see above for that information.

*Can I change the narrative section of my application if I am a continuation program?*

No, do not change the text in the narrative section of your application if you are submitting a continuation application. If you have changes to make, please include them in the 'Continuation Changes' narrative field. See pg. 12 of the Application Instructions for more information.

## Writing Your Grant Application

*I understand that the 'Theory of Change', 'Logic Model' and 'Evidence' sections in the application should be complete enough to stand alone. However, for the 'Organizational Capacity' section do I need to repeat information in order to answer to each sub section in the Notice of Funding (NOFO)?*

Our suggestion is to fully follow the instructions set out in the Notice of Funding Opportunity. It is important that the grant reviewer gets all the necessary information in a way that is easy to access and understand. The section that this question is referring to is on pg. 17 of the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO).

*What information is written in the 'Notice Priority' section? Do we address the West Virginia Geographic priority in this section?*

The 'Notice Priority' addresses the CNCS Priorities (pg. 2 NOFO) and the Volunteer West Virginia Priorities (pg. 19 NOFO). You do address the WV Geographic priority in this section. The areas for this priority can be found on pg. 19 of the NOFO.

*I am matching my program to a study in the CNCS Evidence Exchange. How do I access the Evidence Exchange and choose the appropriate study?*

The CNCS Evidence Exchange can be found at the following link:

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange>

We advise that you choose a study that closely matches your program. All studies on the Evidence Exchange has been rated by The Corporation for National and Community Service and have been deemed to be evidence based. For more information on the rating criteria and full explanations of the evidence tiers please refer to pgs. 2-4 of the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance.

*Can we obtain feedback from CNCS concerning our application?*

Yes, typically this feedback is available in the spring following the Competitive Grant Competition. Please request this via [americorps@wv.gov](mailto:americorps@wv.gov) and we will get the feedback from CNCS.

*Do I need to submit a Financial Management Survey? I am a new applicant.*

Yes, all new (applicants who currently do not have CNCS funding) and recompute (applicants who currently have CNCS funding but are at the end of their grant period) have to submit a Financial Management Survey.

You can access the survey via this link:

[https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Financial\\_Management\\_Survey\\_FMS\\_%20OMB\\_3045-0102\\_Expires\\_May2021\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Financial_Management_Survey_FMS_%20OMB_3045-0102_Expires_May2021_PDF.pdf)

It will also be posted to our website (<https://volunteer.wv.gov/Grants/Pages/2010-21-AmeriCorps-Funding-.aspx>) and will be sent out to the intent to apply mailing list.

*How long should our application be? Does the page limit include the 'Notice Priority' section?*

The page limit for this application is 10 pages double spaced, unless your program is applying for or is currently a rural intermediary program. If this is the case the page limit is 12 pages double spaced.

This page limit included the following sections:

Face Sheet

Executive Summary

Program Design

Organizational Capacity

Cost Effectiveness

Budget Adequacy

The 'Notice Priority' is a sub section of the 'Program Design' section, so yes it is included in the overall page limit.

*Where can I receive more information about evidence tiers and how to write the evidence section in my application?*

Please review pgs. 2-4 of the Mandatory Supplemental Guidance, pgs. 15-17 in the NOFO, On3Learn's Selecting and Developing Performance Measurements webinar (sent as a response to your intent to apply email) and CNCS Best Practices in Demonstrating Evidence webinar ([https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2020/ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants-fy-2020#tech\\_assistance](https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2020/ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants-fy-2020#tech_assistance))

*Is a list of citations required if it is properly referenced in the grant application? If yes, can it be sent as an attached document?*

Page 16 of the NOFO states "Applicants should provide citations for the studies they describe, if applicable,; however, reviewers will not review any documents external to the application other than evaluation report (s) submitted in accordance with the Notice instructions." Citations can be incorporated into the narrative or listed at the end and will be included when counting pages.

*Is there a list of acceptable documents to attach to the grant?*

A list of additional document submission requirements is available on page 12 of the West Virginia AmeriCorps Notice of Funding Opportunity. Additional information regarding evidence documents is provided on page 16 which states, "Submitted evaluation reports which do not sufficiently match the intervention proposed by the applicant in all of the areas listed on page 16 will not be considered applicable and will not be reviewed or receive any points." All attachments and additional documents should be submitted as PDF files, unless reasonable justification is provided for a different format.

*Should the evidence brief be sent as an attachment or only discussed in the evidence tier?*

The references to evidence brief and evidence tier in the question are unclear. Below is a summary of the additional supporting documents required for supporting the Evidence Base Section of the application narrative. See NOFO, page 12 and Mandatory Supplemental Guidance, page 6, paragraph 1 for more information on these additional documents.

In summary:

For applicants competing in the third or more funding cycle an Evidence Report is a required additional document.

Applicants required to submit an Evidence Report may also submit up to two additional documents to support the evidence of the proposed intervention. These additional documents may be Evidence Briefs, Reports, or Studies. For these applicants, no more than three documents will be reviewed to support the evidence for the proposed intervention.

For applicants not required to submit an Evidence Report, no more than two additional documents will be reviewed to support the evidence for the applicant's proposed intervention. The Evidence Base Section of the application narrative is broken into two sections – Evidence Tier (12 points) and Evidence Quality (8 points). Both sections must provide information to specifically address the key points found in the NOFO page 15-17. This narrative description of evidence quality is supported by the 2 or 3 allowable attachments, as referenced above.

*What is required for qualifications for the evaluator in the Evaluation Plan (p. 21 NOFO)?*

An applicant determines what qualifications are necessary to successfully implement their proposed Evaluation Plan. We recommend considering the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to inform a high quality, reliable, valid research approach based on the size, type of program, evaluation techniques necessary, data collection procedures, scope and size of the evaluation approach in determining the right qualifications for your external evaluator. Once submitted, Evaluation Plans are then reviewed by CNCS Research and Evaluation staff after funding decisions are made.

*Is a program in the moderate tier required to complete a full QED every year or only once every three years? (This is a question in relation to the timeline for the evaluation that describes how the evaluation will cover at least one year of CNCS-funded activity p. 21 NOFO.)*

The results of a program's evaluation determines the evaluation tier assessed during the application process, not the other way around. An Evaluation Plan is a long-term strategic approach that is beneficial to your program and helps inform future programming decisions. According to the Evaluation Plan requirements on page 21 of the NOFO, applicants should propose an Evaluation Plan for the future that will provide helpful information to improve programming and ensure a timeline that is sufficient to collect data for at least one full year of CNCS supported program activities. Information provided in the Evaluation Plan field will not be scored and will not be reviewed until after funding decisions have been made.

*Are we required to state the evidence tier we believe we are in as the narrative portion of the Evidence Base?*

No, this is not a stated requirement in the 2020-2021 Notice.

*I understand the logic model is a way to better explain the program design as indicated in the theory of change. Does EVERY single item on the logic model need to be explained in the TOC/Program Design? Can the items included in the logic model stand alone as further explanation of the TOC/Program Design?*

That is a decision made by the applicant according to the descriptions on page 14-15 of the Notice.



*In a performance measure, can a target number be a percentage?*

No.

*How much time should my organization dedicate to creating a new application?*

This will vary depending on the current capacity in your organization and staff familiarity with writing federal grants; but we suggest that applicants set aside 20-40 hours of time to write, edit and review the application. It is also a good idea to involve several people in the grant application process.

*If your program is partnering with other initiatives or programs is it recommended that we explain the partnerships in full detail? For instance, is it recommended that we lay out a full explanation for the three-year plan of involvement for each new partnership?*

We cannot recommend what your program should or shouldn't include in that section. We advise that you follow the bullet points listed in that section and follow the CNCS NOFO guidance as closely as possible.

You might also get some ideas for grant writing by reviewing narrative sections from previous grant applications that have similar education focused programs. Past applications can be found at this link: <https://www.nationalservice.gov/about/open-government-initiative/transparency/results-grants-competition>. Scroll to the bottom and you can search according to year and type of application.

*After reading Appendix : FAQ for Performance Measures, I see that an organization must submit a detailed sampling plan for consideration. It also indicates that information is in the NOFO. I am unable to locate it. Is this completed every year an application is submitted or does an organization submit this information one time?*

Please submit a detailed description of your proposed sampling methodology as part of your Evaluation Plan. It is part of the Evaluation Plan narrative which is not counted towards page limits and not reviewed prior to making funding decisions.

If selected for funding, the Evaluation Plan will go through an additional approval process and the sampling methods would be approved at that time after any CNCS requested clarifications or revisions are completed.

The Evaluation Plan will need to sufficiently describe how the program will ensure that the sample is representative of the full population being served.

This Evaluation Plan is submitted once every three years during a recompeting year.

*Do we attach the evidence brief that lists all the effective CNCS programs or find a specific evidence brief about the one most like our program from that list?*

You should attach (up to) two studies that best support the evidence that your proposed intervention will be successful, plus your Evaluation Plan. To the extent possible, the studies should conform to the specifications for quality, relevance, rigor and recency described in the Notice.

Any studies that meet the criteria may count, including but not limited to, the studies found on the CNCS evidence exchange.

*Last year, CNCS asked that we include criminal background check costs for all members and supervisors, even though a number are returning and will not need to be retested. I haven't seen that instruction anywhere this year. Can we budget criminal background check costs estimating to our actual expected costs instead?*

Yes, this year your program will only need to budget criminal background check costs with the actual expected costs.

*We have a program designed performance measure that measures maintained knowledge instead of knowledge gained. Is this allowed? According to the guidance CNCS states that only performance measures which track improving knowledge are appropriate.*

CNCS will give ask for clarification on this measure. However, Volunteer West Virginia suggests that you choose a CNCS aligned performance measure and then add an additional outcome that captured the maintained knowledge. In that scenario the performance measure will have 1 output and 2 outcomes.