



Frequently Asked Questions FAQ- as of 12/20/16



Overview

This document answers the most commonly questions asked about the 2017-2018 Commonwealth Corps program/application. For the complete Host Site Application, including instructions and requirements and slides from MSA's technical assistance webinars, please visit <http://www.mass-service.org/grants-and-funding/commonwealth-corps>.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Do I have to apply in/select one focus area?

- Yes. Host site applicants must select one (1) focus area in which to apply that best matches with their programming and goals. In addition to selecting into one focus area (economic opportunity/workforce development, education, health & nutrition, veterans' support, **OR** youth development/violence prevention), applicants must also focus on building capacity in their organization/community and propose related capacity building performance measures. Selecting one focus area falls in line with the requirement that applicants propose common projects/goals across their members.

2. What if I am only looking for one member?

- The Commonwealth Corps seeks to build a sense of community both across all sites/members and among the cohort within a site. Host sites must need and must be able to support a minimum of 2 full-time or 3 half-time members. If you are looking for a single member to support your programming, the Commonwealth Corps is not the right fit. However, if you partner with other agencies to support and meaningfully engage that minimum number of members, you can apply jointly. One agency must take on the role of lead applicant, and you must explain common goals across members and how you will build a sense of team. See the RFP pages 6-7 and 11.

3. What does our budget and staffing have to be to have the capacity to host members?

- Commonwealth Corps host sites have ranged from small to medium-sized agencies, and we do not have a minimum requirement for overall agency budget. We are pleased to be able to keep our host site cash match per service member at a modest level to help agencies of all sizes be able to apply.
- Although the listed eligibility requirements on page 12 of the RFP are somewhat minimal (such as being "in existence for at least one year"), we are looking for partners who truly have the capacity to fulfill the various host site requirements listed throughout the RFP and meaningfully support their members. This partnership with MSA and members takes time and effort (administrative, programmatic, and fiscal) on your agency's part, and supervisors must be able to make time and space in their roles to manage and support members, including a focus on their development. Applicants are asked a number of questions in the narrative that allow you to help demonstrate your organization's capacity to host members, and prior performance is also taken into account.

4. Is this a very competitive process?

- We anticipate that this will be a competitive selection process. Although the size of the 2017-2018 host site cohort will depend on what is proposed/selected, in 2016-2017, we have ~18 host site partners and 45 member slots.

5. How many members should we request and of what slot type? What will happen if we request more members than MSA can support?

- Applicants should only request the minimum number of members they need for their proposed programming (as long as they need at least 2 full-time or 3 half-time members). MSA anticipates that it will not be able to fund all requested slots, especially full-time requests.
- Please make sure to justify the number of members you are requesting in your narrative and why full-time positions are necessary (if applicable). If a host site is being considered for selection but MSA cannot support their entire request, MSA may ask an applicant if they would be willing/able to take part in the Commonwealth Corps and accomplish their programming with a smaller number of members or with half-time instead of full-time members. (This might result in renegotiation of overall performance measures.)
- Although numbers for 2017-2018 will depend on applications received, for your reference, the maximum number of full-time members MSA awarded to a single site in was 4 in 2014-15, 2 in 2015-16, and 4 in 2016-2017.

6. Our proposed member roles don't focus heavily on volunteer recruitment/volunteer management. Is there a minimum number of volunteers that members must recruit/manage for the capacity building performance measures? Who can count as "community volunteers?"

- One element of the mission is to increase volunteerism. Although there is no minimum number of volunteers that members must recruit/manage, your application should include some meaningful ways that all members would expand volunteerism at your site via volunteer recruitment and/or management as part of their roles.
- Students may be able to be considered “community volunteers,” depending on the context of their service (please contact MSA for details). MSA generally does not allow sites to count volunteers who are getting payment or stipends as “community volunteers,” and you can contact us with any specific questions.

7. If we are proposing to host members with different roles, should we fill out multiple Position Descriptions (Attachment B).

- Yes. Applicants should complete a single narrative and single performance measure worksheet (Attachment A) that describe common goals/programming but should submit multiple/distinct position descriptions (Attachment B) if they are proposing very different roles across members that cannot be captured in a single description.

8. Can you give us examples of what you are looking for with the required Capacity Building performance measure on “projects aimed at increasing sustainability/documentation of program?”

- We are looking for applications that explain both how members can have an impact within their year of service and how their service will build capacity and foster impact in years to come. The details will depend on your organization, but examples might include:
 - Creating presentations and outreach materials for current and future use;
 - Documenting a new program’s policies/procedures/content;
 - Developing a process for identifying and meaningfully connecting with new partner agencies;
 - Developing a curriculum for a course/series that can be used in future years;
 - Developing a process for identifying occasional volunteers and helping transition them into and train them for larger volunteer roles/commitments;
 - Transitioning a program piloted during the Commonwealth Corps year into a sustainable program with other partners/sources of support; etc.

(For any of these, members might play a lead role or a supportive role helping their supervisor/the agency’s staff.)

9. How does the host site cash match work? Is it one-time? To MSA?

- Host sites submit a one-time cash match payment directly to MSA before the start of the member service term (mid-August) of \$3,500 per awarded full-time member and \$2,000 per awarded half-time member.

10. What are some of the differences between the Commonwealth Corps and AmeriCorps, and can we host both?

- Both focus on the combination of community impact and member development. Some larger differences include:
 - Commonwealth Corps (CC) focuses on Massachusetts residents. (Members must be MA residents legally authorized to work in the US and can only serve one term in this program.)
 - CC members’ service combines direct service with capacity building.
 - The ability to apply for support via CC for organizations without the capacity to host a team of 10-15+ AmeriCorps (AC) members but with the need for more than 1 service member.
 - MSA’s heavy role in shared member management and simplification of some of the administrative aspects of the program for host sites (such management of stipends, health insurance, etc.).
 - The Commonwealth Corps is a state-funded program established in 2007 administered by MSA.
 - Although CC members are eligible for many benefits, some benefits specific to AmeriCorps (ed award, federal loan forbearance, etc.) are not available to CC members.
 - The range of members who have served. We are proud that the range of ages (recently 18-75), races, ethnicities, first languages, military experiences, and other backgrounds across our members represents a more diverse cohort than the average year-of-service (YOS) program. About half of members each year fall above the “typical” 18-24 year old range for YOS programs; about half identify as people of color.
 - CC and AC service are not related when considering AC term limits.
 - Sites can host both, but applications should clearly distinguish how service roles/goals are different between CC and AC and make sure they are not applying for CC members to replace past AC positions.

11. What does/can the average member schedule look like?

- In general, schedules should average 38-40 hours/week for full-time and 18-20 hours/week for half-time members. These hours should include time for both direct service and member development. Sites must be clear about members’ daily/weekly schedules in their application, especially in the Position Description. If sites set clear limits for maximum hours and demonstrated results expected, a limited number of hours can be scheduled for off-site service. Sites must also free up members’ schedules to attend MSA events about once per month.

Questions? If you have additional questions, please review the RFP and TA slides and contact CC Program Manager Susie Flug Silva (sflugsilva@mass-service.org) or CC Program Assistant Amy Mulvena (amulvena@mass-service.org).