



Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., *Governor* • Paula Parker-Sawyers, *Executive Director*

COMMUNICATION 2006-P-10

TO: AmeriCorps*State Sub-Grantee Organizations
FROM: Paula Parker-Sawyers
CC: Agency Operations Manual (2006)
DATE: September 18, 2006
SUBJECT: **Grant Application Review Process**

PURPOSE

To establish a policy for conducting the AmeriCorps*State Grantee Application Review Process, or GARP.

EFFECTIVE DATE

October 1, 2006

SCOPE

This communication applies to all OFBCI personnel, the Indiana Commission on Community Service and Volunteerism, and prospective AmeriCorps*State applicant organizations.

RECESSION

None.

STATEMENT OF POLICY

A. *Definitions.*

Competitive Funds is an award to organizations operating in a single state (Indiana) that are nominated to participate in a nationwide competition. Successful applicants receive grants to support AmeriCorps member positions and other program costs.

Education Award Program (EAP) Funds refers to an award to organizations operating in a single state (Indiana) that are nominated to participate in a nationwide competition. Successful applicants receive a small administrative grant and use their own or other resources to cover AmeriCorps member living allowance and other program costs.

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Formula Funds means an award to organizations in Indiana through a statewide competition. Successful applicants receive grants to support AmeriCorps member positions and other program costs.

Grant Application Review Process refers to the processes employed by the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) and the Indiana Commission on Community Service and Volunteerism (ICCSV) for the review and selection of AmeriCorps*State host organizations.

Sub-Grantee means the host organization with legal and fiscal responsibilities for an AmeriCorps*State Formula, Competitive, or Education Award program and its members.

B. *Types of Applicants.*

- (1) New Applicant
- (2) Continuing Formula Sub-Grantee (in the midst of a 3-year formula grant period)
- (3) Continuing Competitive Sub-Grantee (in the midst of a 3-year Competitive or EAP grant period)
- (4) Recompete Formula Sub-Grantee (in the last year of the 1st 3-year formula grant period)
- (5) Recompete Competitive Sub-Grantee (in last year of a 3-year Competitive or EAP grant period)

C. *Grant Application Review, Selection, and Appeals Process Schedule.*

OFBCI will develop a schedule relative to the Grant Application Review, Selection, and Appeals Process prior to or near the start of the program year that clearly outlines anticipated GARP activities for the year. The schedule will include submission deadlines for all applicant activities and proposed time frames for ICCSV and OFBCI staff functions.

D. *Distribution of Indiana's AmeriCorps*State Formula Funding Allocation.*

- (1) Each year, funding will be set-aside from Indiana's Formula allocation for continued support of Continuing Formula Sub-Grantees, pending Indiana Commission on Community Service and Volunteerism (ICCSV) approval and Corporation for National and Community Service (Corporation) funding support.
- (2) The remainder of the Formula allocation will be made available to applicants through a public Request for Proposals process.

E. *Renewal Process for Indiana's AmeriCorps*State Continuing Formula Sub-Grantees.*

- (1) OFBCI will release a renewal request process for Continuing Formula Sub-Grantees.
- (2) Continuing Formula Requests will be reviewed by OFBCI staff, taking into consideration past performance.
- (3) Recommendations will be sent to the ICCSV.
- (4) The ICCSV may decide to renew or to not renew the Sub-Grantee, based on formal and informal criteria established by the ICCSV for the given year.

- (a) If the ICCSV decides not to renew the Sub-Grantee, the funds that were set-aside for the Sub-Grantee may be added to the pool of available Formula funds.

F. *Funding Process for New and Recompeting AmeriCorps*State Applicants and Continuing Competitive AmeriCorps*State Applicants.*

- (1) The OFBCI will issue a Request for Proposals for AmeriCorps*State Competitive funds, State Education Award Program funds, and available AmeriCorps*State Formula funds, as directed by the Corporation.
- (2) Proposals will be subject to the following Review Process:
 - (a) Upon receipt, the OFBCI staff will review proposals for submission accuracy and compliance. Incomplete proposals will not be considered.
 - (b) The OFBCI will utilize a peer review process to evaluate AmeriCorps proposals. Peer review teams may be comprised of three to five grant readers who evaluate and score each new proposal. All reviewers will be required to sign conflict of interest forms to ensure unbiased evaluation of proposals. Once proposals have been read and scored, the peer review committee will convene to discuss results, rank proposals, and to formalize recommendations to the ICCSV.
 - (c) OFBCI staff will conduct a review of all AmeriCorps proposals. For New and Recompeting applicants, staff may analyze the results of the peer review and further scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of all proposals, taking into consideration the past performance of Recompeting applicants. For Competitive Continuing applicants, staff may, in addition to reviewing the proposal, aggregate past performance from information compiled through monitoring reports, quarterly program progress reports and monthly and quarterly fiscal reports.
 - (d) Following the peer and staff reviews, OFBCI will prepare formal funding recommendations to be presented to the ICCSV for consideration.
- (3) The proposals for New, Recompeting, and Continuing Competitive funds may be ranked and/or evaluated based on score and/or other formal and informal criteria as determined by the ICCSV.
- (4) The ICCSV may select one of the following recommendations/decisions relative to the proposals:
 - (a) Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with no changes.
 - (b) Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with contingencies.
 - (c) Fund the proposal at less than requested, with contingencies.
 - (d) Do not fund the proposal.
 - (e) Fund the proposal at the amount requested with contingencies, including that applicant institute a 3-month development period followed by 9 months operating in Year 1 (new applicants; formula funding only).

- (f) Fund the proposal at less than requested with contingencies, including that applicant institute a 3-month development period followed by 9 months operating in Year 1 (new applicants; formula funding only).
- (5) New Applicants are not eligible to receive a recommendation/decision of "Fund the proposal at the amount requested, with no changes." New applicants may only receive a decision other than "Do not fund the proposal" that includes contingencies, as new applicants' approvals will be contingent upon, at a minimum, the results of a Pre-Award Risk Assessment.
 - (a) The OFBCI will conduct a Pre-Award Risk Assessment regarding financial and organizational capacity to administer federal grants with each new, conditionally approved AmeriCorps*State applicant. Applicants will be asked to submit the most recent audit if available, as part of the assessment.
- (6) The ICCSV will decide which proposals will be sent to the Corporation for Competitive funding consideration.
 - (a) For New Applicants conditionally approved for the national competition, a Pre-Award Risk Assessment will be conducted prior to OFBCI's submission of its Indiana Competitive application to the Corporation. If the Pre-Award Risk Assessment is satisfactory, the application will be sent to the national competition. If the assessment results in an unsatisfactory result, the proposal may be dismissed from consideration altogether.
 - (b) For New Applicants conditionally approved, but not selected to be part of Indiana's Competitive funding application to the Corporation, a Pre-Award Risk Assessment will be conducted. If the Pre-Award Risk Assessment is satisfactory, the applicant's proposal will remain in the pool of proposals which may be funded with Formula funds. If the assessment results in an unsatisfactory result, the proposal may be dismissed from consideration altogether.
- (7) Once the ICCSV receives notice of Competitive funding decisions from the Corporation, the ICCSV will finalize funding awards relative to Indiana's available AmeriCorps*State Formula funding. Proposals declined by the Corporation for Competitive funding may be eligible for Formula funding consideration.
- (8) Indiana AmeriCorps*State Formula funding decisions will be based on proposal score, ranking, available funding, and/or and other formal and informal criteria as determined by the ICCSV.
- (9) Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of final funding decisions.

G. Special Note about Continuing Formula Sub-Grantees.

- (1) Continuing Formula Sub-Grantees may request to be considered for Competitive funds by submitting a proposal in accordance with the Request for Proposals guidelines.
- (2) If the proposal is awarded Competitive funds, the Formula funding reserved for the Sub-Grantee will be added to the pool of available Formula funding.
- (3) If the Sub-Grantee's Competitive funding proposal is declined, the Sub-Grantee will continue to receive Formula funding for the remainder of the three-year grant cycle (assuming all renewal conditions are met).

H. Appeals Process.

The ICCSV (through the OFBCI) offers an appeal process for AmeriCorps grant applicants whose request for funding has been denied or reduced. This process offers dissatisfied grant applicants an avenue to appeal an award decision and assures that the Commission peer review process and subsequent grant award decisions are accurate, fair, and reasonable. Such a process encourages confidence in the ICCSV grant process.

The ICCSV strives to assure that all grant awards fully reflect sound judgment and compliance with all RFP terms and conditions and all appropriate AmeriCorps federal, state and Commission regulations. Therefore, grant applicants may appeal an award decision based on substantive issues of fact concerning, bias, discrimination or conflicts of interest, and/or non-compliance with procedures described in the RFP document, such as significant computational errors or contextual omissions.

If a grant applicant has substantive objections to the results of the peer review process and wishes to appeal the decision made by the ICCSV, the applicant may request reconsideration. A request for reconsideration must be made by the applicant in writing within 14 business days of the date of the notice of the ICCSV funding decision via a letter of appeal submitted to the Executive Director of the OFBCI.

The letter must:

- (1) Describe the factor(s) or fact(s) concerning bias, discrimination, conflict of interest or non-compliance that cause the applicant to conclude that the proposal should have been approved.
- (2) Outline the specific area(s) in the proposal that applicant believes significantly addresses the RFP requirements.
- (3) Identify specific information in the proposal that the applicant believes the ICCSV overlooked or misinterpreted.

The OFBCI Executive Director and/or other designated staff will review the appeal request within five (5) business days of its receipt to ensure that it is in compliance with this policy and merits further review by the ICCSV. If the Executive Director or designee determines the appeal letter substantiates material issues concerning bias, discrimination, conflict of interest or non-compliance with procedures set forth in the RFP, the Executive Director and the ICCSV Chair will re-review the proposal and submit the request to the ICCSV for a vote.

Applicants will be notified in writing within three business days of final funding decisions. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) has final approval rights for all grant proposals.

REFERENCES AND PRECEDENCE

A. References.

45 C.F.R. Chapter XXV, Part 2521
45 C.F.R. Chapter XXV, Part 2522

B. Precedence.

Should there be any inconsistency between the United States and Indiana Codes, Indiana Executive Orders, U.S. and Indiana Administrative Codes, and this internal policy the order of

precedence that will prevail is (1) United States and Indiana Codes; (2) 45 C.F.R., Chapter XXV; (3) this internal policy.

INTERPRETATION

The OFBCI executive director shall have the sole authority to interpret the provisions set forth in this policy.

APPROVAL:



Paula Parker-Sawyers, Executive Director

September 18, 2006

Date