



Commonwealth Corps Host Site Application Information



Overview

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

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

- Host site applicants must select one OR two focus areas in which to apply that best match with their programming and goals. There is no preference for sites that apply for two rather than one focus area. If you do select two focus areas, please be sure to explain if each member will address one or two focus areas, and how you will build a sense of team across your member projects. In addition to selecting your focus area(s) (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.

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 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.

3. What does our budget and staffing capacity need to be 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 in 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. This works best when the entire organization or team of staff is aware of the members' roles and committed to their support and success. 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 considered.

4. How competitive is the process?

- We anticipate that this will be a competitive selection process. Although the size of each year's host site cohort will depend on what is proposed/selected, we often receive between 25-35 host site partner applications and typically select around 12-16 host site partners.

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 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.

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 of Commonwealth Corps 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". Please contact us with any specific questions.

7. Can we host members with different roles/projects/focus areas?

- Yes, you may apply to host members with different roles/projects/focus areas, however there should still be a sense of team amongst your members. In addition, all member roles should include some aspect of direct service and capacity building. 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?

- All organizations are expected to cost-share a portion of the cost of each member. The host site fee is based on your organization's annual revenue, as reported on your most recently filed Form 990.
- A non-refundable deposit of \$500/member is required in mid-July; you will be invoiced for the remainder of the host site fee for all enrolled members in early October.
- You may request a 30% reimbursement of the host site fee if a member exits within the first three months of service.
- MSA does not prorate the host site fee if your program or members start late.

Organizational Revenue	Host Site Fee per Full-Time Member	Host Site Fee per Half-Time Member
Less than \$5M	\$8,000	\$4,000
Greater than \$5M	\$11,400	\$5,700

10. What are some of the differences between the Commonwealth Corps and AmeriCorps/AmeriCorps VISTA, and can we host more than one?

- Both focus on the combination of community impact and member development. Some larger differences include:
 - o 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.)
 - o CC members' service combines direct service with capacity building. While there is not a required percentage of direct service or capacity building, every member must have some combination of the two.
 - o 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.
 - o 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.).
 - o The Commonwealth Corps is a state-funded program established in 2007 administered by MSA.
 - o Although CC members are eligible for many benefits, some benefits specific to AmeriCorps (ed award vs. completion award, guaranteed federal loan forbearance, relocation stipend, etc.) are not available to CC members.
 - o 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.
 - o CC and AC service are not related when considering AC term limits.
 - o Sites may host a combination of service members but must be able to clearly distinguish how service roles/goals are different between CC and AC and demonstrate that they are not applying for CC to replace past AC positions.

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

- In general, schedules should average 40 hours/week for full-time and 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. Sites must also free up members' schedules to attend MSA events about 1-2 times per month as well as make time for members' own professional development as part of their hours.

12. What is the difference between a supervisor and a main contact?

- For many host sites, the main contact and supervisor will be the same person. However, if members are serving with different departments or projects and there are multiple supervisors, sites must choose one staff member to serve as the main point of contact with MSA.
- If not supervising all members, the main contact must have full understanding of all members service roles and should be able to keep MSA updated on their progress and experiences. The main contact is also responsible for promoting a sense of team among the members and ensuring that the responsibilities listed below are followed and deadlines are met.
 - o Past host sites have found it successful to establish monthly team meetings with all members and supervisors, and/or monthly meetings between the main contact and member(s).

13. If we're a returning site, can we reapply for members to do the same thing again?

- All host sites, new or returning, must be looking at how they can utilize members to further grow and expand their programming/services and impact. For returning sites, that could mean continuing to expand upon the outcomes and progress made by your current members or applying for members to serve on a whole new project or with a different department/team/partner. Returning sites are required to complete section 5 of the application in order to demonstrate how you are building upon your current model and what lessons you have learned from past performance.
- If you feel that further growth and expansion does not make sense for your organization or program at this time, please use section 5 to explain why this is the case. Sites applying for a 4th consecutive year are encouraged, but not required, to propose a new capacity building project.
- Please note that if you were a host site over five years ago, you are not required to complete section 5. Please reach out to MSA with further questions.

14. Can Host Sites supplement the stipend for Commonwealth Corps members?

- Similar to AmeriCorps, Commonwealth Corps host sites cannot provide a supplemental stipend or “cash” directly to members. They can supplement the stipend with additional benefits, but they must be paid directly to the vendor or through reimbursement. Some examples are providing members with gift cards specifically for groceries or gas, or providing monthly subsidies of housing, childcare, and/or transportation costs (paid directly to the vendor).
- The other key thing to note with any additional benefits, is that you have to offer the same benefits to all members. They don't all have to accept/use the same amount, but it needs to at least be offered.

15. How do I calculate cash/in-kind value for our members?

- This will vary depending on your member project, but it is typical to include any resources or funds brought in as a part of members’ service, as well as the value of the volunteers recruited and/or managed by your members. A good source of information on this is Independent Sector which provides [estimated value of volunteer time](#), and explains this methodology [here](#).

16. As we develop our member roles, should we be more specific with their responsibilities and goals of the project, or should we focus on creating a flexible opportunity that can be adapted to the interests/needs of the members?

- As you write your proposal, we encourage you to be as specific as possible about what the members will be doing in their roles, which can be shared through the “typical week” and 10-month timeline, as well as through the position description. Deciding on a specific project will help reviewers gain a clear understanding of the member experience and also provide clear structure and achievable goals for your members during their 10-month term of service.
- Once your members are selected and start their service, you will have an opportunity to adjust your performance measures and member responsibilities to better align with the current needs of your organization as well as the member’s individual interests and skills.

Questions? If you have additional questions, please contact us at CCQuestions@mass-service.org.