



**AmeriCorps**  
Montana



**LIFTS**  
Linking Infants & Families to Supports

**HMHB AmeriCorps Planning Grant 2022-23  
LIFTS Corps  
Anticipated Questions, Updates, and Answers**

HMHB is providing this document for interested stakeholders to share details about the LIFTS Corps planning grant. HMHB will update this document periodically by providing new questions and answers and/or updates at the end of the document with the date of the update. This document was first created and published on October 20, 2022.

**1. What is an AmeriCorps planning grant?**

An AmeriCorps planning grant allows an organization (like HMHB) to assess community needs and consider whether and how an AmeriCorps program could address those needs. Toward the end of the planning grant period, the organization decides whether to apply for an operating grant, which would allow the organization to become an administering organization placing AmeriCorps members at host sites to do whatever tasks and activities are determined during the planning period.

**2. Where can I get a basic introduction to HMHB's current ideas of a concept for an AmeriCorps LIFTS Corps?**

On our website, at <https://hmhb-mt.org/amicorps>.

**3. Has anything like the idea for a LIFTS Corps been done before?**

YES! See <https://www.americorps.gov/funded-grants/public-health-amicorps> for examples of AmeriCorps members doing screening, community referrals, outreach, volunteer coordination, and other public health activities across the country. In addition, Justice for Montanans members conduct intakes and make follow-up calls, among other duties. Finally, certain AmeriCorps programs relating to home visiting and family supports have been recognized as evidence-based. See [https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/HF\\_Evidence\\_Brief\\_FINAL\\_v2\\_508\\_1.pdf](https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/evidenceexchange/HF_Evidence_Brief_FINAL_v2_508_1.pdf).

**4. What should a potential host site be thinking about?**

If you are potentially interested in hosting an AmeriCorps member, it is a good idea to convene your human resources, information technology, financial, legal, and programmatic colleagues to discuss hosting. Questions to consider include:

- Would an AmeriCorps position **displace or duplicate** an existing staff member's duties? It is okay to expand on what an existing staff member is doing, but you can't duplicate or displace staff duties per AmeriCorps regulations.
- If you are a "union shop," would the **union or labor organization consent in writing** to having an AmeriCorps member serve with your organization?



**AmeriCorps**  
Montana



**LIFTS**  
Linking Infants & Families to Supports

- If you intend to ask the AmeriCorps member to use **technologies** in relation to service (e.g., to process applications), what kind of licenses and/or security protocols do you have or need (e.g., permissions, restricted access, etc.)?
- For purposes of match, do you have the **financial services capacity** to track any cost share, supervision time, and/or other items?
- Would you be willing to sign a **memorandum of understanding** about your roles, and do you foresee any potential legal issues?
- Does someone on staff have **capacity to be the supervisor** of an AmeriCorps member, which would mean:
  - Reviewing a supervisor handbook to learn AmeriCorps and program requirements
  - Attending supervisor trainings and/or meetings
  - Checking in with the member regularly,
  - Providing guidance and any organization or position specific training,
  - Tracking your own supervision time (if using for match)
  - Introducing the member to colleagues and stakeholders
  - Approving member timesheets and reports (this is a big one!)
- Have you reviewed the **“prohibited activities”** that neither an AmeriCorps member nor anyone else can do while billing to or supported by an AmeriCorps grant (including as match). The applicable regulation is 45 CFR 2520.65, which lists lobbying, partisan politics, certain religious activities, directly benefiting a for-profit, abortion services, and voter registration, among other things.

**5. Could there be more than one member per site/community, or more than one site per member?**

Possibly. Discussion of questions like this will be part of the program design, if we proceed with an operating grant. There may be significant logistical details to work out, especially for sites wishing to “share” a member.

**6. What factors go into HMHB’s decision about whether and how to apply for an operating grant?**

HMHB will weigh factors including the following:

- Stakeholder input about community needs that AmeriCorps members could address
- Potential interest among organizations in becoming host sites
- Financial considerations, including meeting any match requirements
- HMHB’s capacity to administer an AmeriCorps program
- Existing AmeriCorps programs that may already be meeting needs
- Potential program design, which will require
  - Evidence-based interventions
  - Performance measures that can be effectively tracked



**AmeriCorps**  
Montana



- Host sites willing to supervise and support members
- A “logic model” with a theory of change
- Partners who stand ready to assist with providing input and data
- Knowledge of AmeriCorps requirements
- Development of manuals, policies, and trainings

Some of these factors will interrelate. For example, we may decide not to proceed if potential host sites are only interested in AmeriCorps members performing functions that could be covered by existing AmeriCorps programs. Or in considering a potential budget including any cost share or match requirements, there is a minimum and maximum living allowance for members, so HMHB would seek input from potential host sites and stakeholders about how much the living allowance should be. Moreover, the site monitoring and travel costs will be quite different if there would be five members in two communities who will do all their service in their host site community, versus fifteen members in fifteen communities who need to travel to outlying communities to serve. All of these considerations are somewhat circular in nature and will require continuing conversations and close review of AmeriCorps requirements.

#### **7. How is an AmeriCorps member different from an employee?**

An AmeriCorps member is not the same as an employee. The administering organization (HMHB if we move forward) would handle screening, national service criminal history checks, payroll, and grant-related recordkeeping pertaining to the member’s service.

An AmeriCorps State member commits to serve a certain number of hours during the term of service, currently 1,700+ hours of actual service in approximately 11 months for a full-time member. Because AmeriCorps monitors and/or auditors sometimes disallow some member hours upon review, members are encouraged to serve more than the minimum required (e.g., 1,750 hours to meet the 1,700-hour requirement). Typically, the host site will designate a schedule that the member will be expected to follow, such as 8:00 to 5:00 on Monday through Friday with an hour lunch break, and may also allow the member to serve at events or activities that fall outside the regular schedule. Members cannot claim hours that they haven’t actually served, such as for holidays when the office or facility is closed. The member may take time off for illness or vacation, so long as they meet the minimum hours requirement to successfully complete the term of service.

As part of their service, members are required to attend certain AmeriCorps training sessions (e.g., orientation), attend AmeriCorps meetings with other members and/or the administering organization (e.g., the Serve Montana Symposium and monthly program-wide calls), and participate in designated days of service (e.g., Martin Luther



**AmeriCorps**  
Montana



**LIFTS**  
Linking Infants & Families to Supports

King, Jr. Day). Each host site will be required to allow members to participate in and attend these activities, and some activities will be in-person and will require that the member travel.

The host site designates a supervisor to oversee the member and is encouraged to include the member in staff meetings and other organizational activities. The host site may require the member to comply with its own applicable policies and procedures, in

addition to any applicable policies and procedures of the administering organization. The host site may also require the member to be trained in accordance with the site's policies and practices. And of course, the host site will maintain any records or documentation necessary for its own operations (e.g., entries the member makes in a database, acknowledgment of policies).

**8. Aren't AmeriCorps members too "temporary" and/or unreliable?**

Not necessarily. Many AmeriCorps members are young recent college graduates with little training or experience who move across the country to serve. As with any recruitment, some candidates are "superstars," and others are average or even below average. It is important to set realistic expectations of what an AmeriCorps member can accomplish within an 11-month period. That said, some AmeriCorps members report amazing progress and achievements.

Due to recruitment and retention challenges faced by AmeriCorps programs across the country pertaining to housing costs and other factors, HMHB is especially interested in recruiting people within Montana to serve, including students and recent graduates of Montana colleges, retirees, and people exploring career changes. HMHB wants to design service-learning positions that are attractive to members and that will help develop a strong workforce for employers, and we welcome input from colleges and universities, licensing authorities, and potential long-term (post-AmeriCorps) employers. For example, HMHB is communicating with Montana State University about its Community Health Worker online training and related programs. See <https://healthinfo.montana.edu/bhwet/chw/index.html>. Finally, if HMHB pursues an operating grant, we will work with partner host site organizations to design position descriptions with delegable tasks that can be appropriately trained during an AmeriCorps member's term.

**9. Why would anyone other than a current student or recent graduate want to serve in an AmeriCorps program?**

Some people serve because they truly want to help others, and they are actually ideal candidates. Or someone may want to explore a potential career path through AmeriCorps service before committing to a traditional job or education program.



**AmeriCorps**  
Montana



**LIFTS**  
Linking Infants & Families to Supports

The education award is also an incentive for some people. Currently, a full-time member who successfully completes a term of service is eligible to receive an education award of \$6,895. And members who are age 55 or older when they begin service can transfer an earned education award to their child, grandchild, stepchild, step-grandchild, or foster child. See <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/segal-ameri-corps-education-award/find-out-more>.

**10. What is HMHB reviewing during the planning process?**

HMHB either has reviewed or will review the following:

- AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange reports
- State Health Assessment/Improvement Plan (2019-2023)
- Community Health (Needs) Assessments/Implementation Plans from across Montana
- The Montana Institute and University of Washington, *Study of the Associations between Positive Childhood Experiences and Adult Substance Use Behaviors* (August 30, 2022)
- HMHB’s LIFTS in Indian Country Report (2022)
- Montana Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) data
- Kirsten Smith, *Montana’s Early Childhood System: A Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment* (2019)
- Montana Children’s Health Data Dashboard
- ENHANCE Montana survey (2020)
- Parenting Montana surveys (2019-2021)
- Montana Head Start Needs Assessment (2021) and recent area Head Start annual reports
- Montana State University Area Health Education Center, *Montana Paraprofessionals Workforce Report With a Spotlight on Integration* (January 2022)
- Montana Obstetrics & Maternal Supports (MOMS) needs assessment (forthcoming)
- Input from partners in HMHB projects such as MTECC and Meadowlark,
- General research on perinatal mental health and community supports, and
- MORE!

We continue to learn more as we have preliminary discussions with stakeholders. Suggestions for more data or reports to review are welcome.

**11. What is the difference between the ARPA-funded Public Health AmeriCorps grant and the formula funding grant?**

The formula funding grant is based on the federal AmeriCorps agency allotting each participating state and territory an amount of funding based on a formula. In Montana, the Commission on Community Service reviews grant applications for formula funding



**AmeriCorps**  
Montana



**LIFTS**

Linking Infants & Families to Supports

and decides how to distribute its allotted amount of funding to different programs. Formula grants require 24% match for the first few years, and then the match requirement increases in later years. That application will likely be due in April 2023, with the potential of members starting in August or September of 2023. See <https://serve.mt.gov/ameriCorps/ameriCorps-grants/> for current and recent formula funding opportunities.

Recently, the federal AmeriCorps agency partnered with the CDC to create the Public Health AmeriCorps program using American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. This program will only be funded for the next few years, which is one reason HMHB applied for a planning grant this year. This ARPA-funded grant has no match requirement. That said, there may still be costs that would not be covered by the Public Health AmeriCorps grant alone, such as enhanced living allowances for members or costs of member activities such as printing or travel. To learn more about the Public Health AmeriCorps grant, go to <https://americorps.gov/about/what-we-do/public-health-ameriCorps>. The next ARPA-funded application is due January 2023, which would likely be too soon to pull together with appropriate stakeholder input. If we wait until January 2024 to apply for the ARPA-funded grant, there would be the potential for members to start in August or September of 2024.

It is possible that HMHB could apply for both the formula and ARPA-funded grants. HMHB will continue to review options and talk with staff at the Montana Office of Community Service as we also communicate with stakeholders and potential host sites.

---