

Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions

1. How have the AmeriCorps performance measure requirements changed in 2019?

The performance measure requirement for AmeriCorps State and National programs – at least one aligned performance measure (output paired with outcome) that corresponds to the proposed primary intervention – has not changed from previous years. However, CNCS has substantially revised the list of National Performance Measures available for programs to use in 2019, and is also requiring all performance measures to reflect the community impact of the program. All 2019 applicants, including continuation applicants, must revise their applications to remove or replace any performance measures that do not correspond with the updated Performance Measure Instructions.

2. What should a continuation applicant do if one or more of their National Performance Measures is no longer present in the Performance Measure Instructions?

All applicants, including continuation applicants, must follow the National Performance Measure selection rules specified in the 2019 Performance Measure Instructions. Applicants must revise their performance measures as needed to conform to the updated instructions.

3. What should a continuation grantee who is measuring a National Performance Measure output or outcome that has a changed definition do in the continuation application?

If the grantee is unable to measure the output or outcome as defined in the 2019 Performance Measure Instructions, the grantee should choose a different performance measure.

4. What are National Performance Measures?

CNCS has established six Focus Areas: Disaster Services, Economic Opportunity, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families based on the priorities included in the Serve America Act. Within these Focus Areas, as well as for Capacity Building, CNCS has created National Performance Measures in order to aggregate the results of similar programs and demonstrate the impact across our agency programs and initiatives.

5. What is an aligned performance measure?

An aligned performance measure is an output paired with an outcome. The paired output-outcome measures may be National Performance Measures, applicant-determined measures, or the combination of a National Performance Measure output and an applicant-determined outcome. Applicant-determined outputs cannot be paired with National Performance Measure outcomes in an aligned performance measure.

6. What is an applicant-determined performance measure?

An applicant-determined performance measure is one in which the applicant creates the language for the outputs and/or outcomes that will be measured. This is different from the National Performance Measures, where CNCS pre-determines common outputs and, in some instances, outcomes that are available for applicants to use.

7. What is an output-only performance measure?

An output-only measure is a National Performance Measure output without associated outcome(s). Applicants may select output-only measures if the output measures a significant program activity. These do not fulfill the requirement for an aligned performance measure, but may be selected in addition to the aligned measure(s).

8. What is the definition of "National Service Participant"?

For AmeriCorps State and National programs, National Service Participant refers to the AmeriCorps members themselves.

9. *Can I count AmeriCorps members as beneficiaries of service under my performance measures?*

No. Effective for all 2019 applicants (new, recompetes, and continuation), AmeriCorps members and other National Service Participants may not be counted as beneficiaries under either National Performance Measures or applicant-determined measures. Some member-focused outputs and outcomes may be reported as demographic indicators.

10. *Do the AmeriCorps members in my program have to be directly providing the service counted in the performance measures?*

The activities associated with your performance measures must be carried out either by National Service Participants or by volunteers directly recruited and/or supported by National Service Participants.

11. *How many performance measures should I propose?*

Each program must have at least one aligned measure (composed of an output and an outcome) reflecting its primary intervention. It is appropriate to have additional performance measures for other significant components of your program, but CNCS values the quality of performance measures more than the quantity. Performance measures reflecting activities that are not central to your program model should not be included in your application and do not need to be reported to CNCS, although you might still collect the data for your own purposes.

12. *Can I count the same beneficiaries in more than one performance measure output?*

Unless otherwise specified, the same beneficiaries may be counted more than once across different measures for different interventions (services) they may be receiving. For example, if your AmeriCorps members helped one specific individual to both prepare for a disaster and obtain employment, you may count that same individual in both D1A and O1A. However, programs cannot count the same individual more than once within any one specific performance measure. So, for example, an individual who attended two disaster preparation training workshops during a single program year cannot be counted twice under D1A.

13. *Do all beneficiaries counted under a particular performance measure have to receive the same interventions?*

Yes, the interventions associated with the measure need to be applicable to all of the beneficiaries counted under the measure, even if the details of the intervention (e.g., the exact dosage provided) may vary. If one set of beneficiaries is receiving one type of intervention (e.g., mentoring) and a different set of beneficiaries is receiving a different type of intervention (e.g., tutoring), the two sets of beneficiaries should be counted in separate performance measures even if the expected outcome is the same. In contrast, if all beneficiaries are receiving multiple interventions with the same expected outcome (e.g. all beneficiaries are being both mentored and tutored to improve their academic performance), they can be counted in a single performance measure.

14. *Can one performance measure output have more than one outcome?*

Yes, there may be more than one outcome measure associated with a single output. Aligned measures should only be configured this way if it is expected that all of the individuals counted in the output will potentially achieve the outcomes indicated. If the outcomes are resulting from different populations being served, they should be counted in distinct performance measures.

15. *Can I count the same people more than once under one performance measure output or outcome if they receive service in more than one grant year?*

If the individual receives services in more than one grant year, they may be counted as having received services in the output measure for each of the grant years in which they receive services. They may only be counted in the outcome measure for each grant year if they meet the specified level of improvement for the outcome in each year. For example, a student receives tutoring in second and third grade. The program expects that students will improve their reading score by one grade level each year. If the student is served in both second and third grade and

improves by one grade level in each year, the student may be counted in output ED1A and outcome ED5A for both years. If the student improves by ½ grade level in second grade and one grade level in third grade, the student may be counted in ED1A for both years but only in ED5A for the third-grade year.

16. Am I allowed to allocate funds for collecting and analyzing data? If so, how much?

Costs related to measuring the performance of a program are allowable grant expenses. There is no standard recommended amount. As with all grant expenditures, these costs must be reasonable, allowable for the proposed program, and properly allocated across grant activities.

17. Is my program expected to monitor member time to ensure that it corresponds to what is entered into the Performance Measures Module for the focus areas and strategic plan objectives?

Applicants should enter MSYs and members according to the distribution of time that members are expected to engage in each focus area and strategic plan objective. Programs will not be required to report on how the members actually spent their time. MSY allocations in the application should present the program's best estimate.

18. On the logic model chart there are three outcome levels (short, medium and long). Should all of these outcomes be entered as performance measures?

A program may have a theory of change that is based on accomplishing a long-term change in condition that is not measurable in a single program year. However, there may be shorter-term changes that can be linked to this ultimate goal that are strong indicators that the long-term change is likely to happen. While all of these outcomes may be included in the logic model, grantees are not required to measure or report on all of the outcomes. For performance measurement purposes, outcomes must measure changes that can be observed within a single program year.

19. The National Performance Measure I want to select doesn't appear in the drop-down menu. What should I do?

Only performance measures corresponding to objectives selected on the Objectives tab will appear in the drop-down menu. Refer to the National Performance Measure selection rules to determine which objective to select for each performance measure. Do NOT create an applicant-determined measure that duplicates a National Performance Measure.

20. I want to create an applicant-determined measure, but the Performance Measures Module isn't allowing me to do that. What should I do?

There are some objectives for which the creation of applicant-determined measures is not allowed. These include the Capacity Building and Leverage objective (Capacity Building focus area), the Find Opportunity objective (Economic Opportunity focus area), the Teacher Corps objective (Education focus area), the Green Jobs objective (Environmental Stewardship focus area), and the Access & Attract objective (Veterans and Military Families focus area). For the Capacity Building and Leverage objective, only National Performance Measures are allowed to be used. For the Find Opportunity, Teacher Corps, Green Jobs, and Access & Attract objectives, programs are not allowed to create performance measures.

21. I am required to have a performance measure associated with my primary intervention, but I am not able to create a performance measure for the primary intervention I have selected. What should I do?

Since the Find Opportunity, Teacher Corps, Green Jobs, and Access & Attract objectives are member-focused rather than beneficiary-focused, programs are not allowed to create performance measures under these objectives (see FAQ 9). If your primary intervention is connected to one of those objectives, you will need to go back and select a different primary intervention under a different objective. You can retain the member-focused objective as secondary.

22. Under what circumstances is it ok for grantees to use sampling to measure outputs and outcomes?

Methodologically speaking, sampling is appropriate for competitive grantees as long as the grantee has a solid plan for ensuring that its sample will be representative. Practically speaking, we would want grantees to use sampling only when they are able to make the case that it is unrealistic to collect data from the whole population. Formula grantees, with rare exceptions granted by CNCS, are not permitted to sample.

23. When would CNCS not allow sampling?

CNCS will not allow sampling when it is reasonable to expect a grantee to collect data from the whole population. CNCS will also not allow sampling if the grantee's sampling frame is not sufficient or if the grantee's methodology will not result in a representative sample.

24. How does a grantee set targets when it is planning to sample?

In most cases the grantee should be able to set targets based on the population as a whole. If a grantee's sampling methodology is sound and results in a representative sample, then the program can extrapolate their results to report on an outcome for the population as a whole. For example, a program reports an output of 1000 children served. The program selects a representative sample of 200 children. Of these, 180 students (90%) demonstrate the desired change. In this case, the program could report an extrapolated outcome of 900 students.

25. How do I request permission to sample?

A detailed sampling plan must be forwarded to CNCS for consideration. Please consult the Notice of Funding Opportunity or your program officer for instructions on how to submit additional documents.