

AMERICORPS CONCEPT PROPOSAL 2013-2014

Equal Justice Works Veterans Legal Corps

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Introduction

Equal Justice Works seeks results-oriented host organizations for the Veterans Legal Corps, an exciting new initiative to change the lives of low-income and homeless veterans through high-quality, focused legal services. This AmeriCorps program provides partial funding for up to four AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and a chance to be part of a nationwide movement toward closing the justice gap for low-income and homeless veterans. Selected organizations will act as a host to Fellows providing direct legal services to underserved veterans and their families.

Equal Justice Works submitted a request for funding to the Corporation of National and Community Service (CNCS) in February 2013. If awarded, the program will support up to 40 Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellows and 380 law student members to work on veterans legal issues. Qualified organizations will propose outcome-driven and culturally competent projects that demonstrate both experience and success in serving the legal needs of veterans. Projects must also demonstrate how the legal services provided will improve the lives of veterans served. Organizations that have existing relationships with other organizations that serve veterans, a co-location with Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities or an extensive network of community collaborations are strongly encouraged to apply.

About Equal Justice Works

The mission of Equal Justice Works is to create a just society by mobilizing the next generation of lawyers committed to equal justice. We provide leadership to ensure a sustainable pipeline of talented and trained lawyers are involved in public service. Equal Justice Works provides a continuum of programs that begin with incoming law school students and extend into careers in the profession. We provide the nation's leading public interest law Fellowship program and offer more postgraduate, full-time legal positions in public service than any other organization.

Veterans Legal Corps Overview

Supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship program was created in 1993 to address gaps in the legal aid community through direct representation and community outreach and collaboration. AmeriCorps Legal Fellows provide legal services to thousands of people across the country. Fellows have worked in a variety of issues areas including veterans' assistance, foreclosure prevention, disaster relief, and medical-legal partnerships.

For the 2013-2014 program year Equal Justice Works will engage lawyers as AmeriCorps members to provide low-income and homeless veterans with access to justice through the **Veterans Legal Corps**. Equal Justice Works began a veterans' pilot project in 2010 with ten AmeriCorps Legal Fellows. The pilot made significant strides in improving the legal services available to veterans. In the 2010-2012 program years, Fellows served 1,933 veterans in veteran-heavy populations including Los Angeles, Seattle and the state of West Virginia. Fellows will improve the lives of low-income and homeless veterans by providing legal services that ultimately lead to higher incomes, better health, safer and secure housing, and family stability.

Veterans-specific project proposals can include but are not limited to improving the lives of veterans by:

- ✓ Securing V.A. disability benefits for veterans with complex mental health disabilities.
- ✓ Securing SSDI/SSI benefits for veterans with complex mental health disabilities.
- ✓ Eliminating legal barriers to housing. .
- ✓ Reducing or dismissing of fines, warrants, and tickets
- ✓ Reducing unwarranted or waiving extremely high child support orders.

- ✓ Preventing foreclosures and evictions.
- ✓ Eliminating legal barriers to employment.

For more information about Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellowships and Equal Justice Works, please visit www.equaljusticeworks.org

Proposal Time Frame

AmeriCorps Concept Proposals for the 2013-2014 Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellows program are contingent upon receipt of funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). CNCS will provide notice of funding to Equal Justice Works in mid-June 2013.

Proposals must be submitted to Equal Justice Works by **April 23, 2013** to receive consideration. Organizations will be informed of their standing in May. Selected sites will be asked to submit a full application to Equal Justice Works via our online Grant Management System (GMS). Successful, waitlisted and rejected applicants will be announced in late May or early June.

Veterans Legal Corps Fellows begin their term of service between **August 1 and September 30, 2013** and will be required to attend leadership training in Washington, D.C. in late October. Travel costs will be covered by the award. Staff from awarded host sites will be required to attend multiple webinar trainings in July and throughout the year. Veterans Legal Corps Fellow terms are one year, with an option to renew for a second year upon successful reapplication.

Required Criteria

- ❖ Direct Representation of target population: Proposals *must* include direct representation to help resolve the legal problems of low-income and homeless veteran clients. Lawyer members should devote at least 75% of their time to direct legal representation.
- ❖ Outreach & Collaboration: Projects *should* include community outreach and collaboration with non-legal veteran serving individuals and organizations. Outreach and Collaboration should account for no more than 25% of the overall project.
- ❖ Theory of Change: Proposals *must* demonstrate a strong “theory of change” and identify methods for which Fellow performance will be measured. A theory of change has three main components: problem, intervention, and outcomes. Alignment among these three components is critical. In other words, the applicant must describe a problem in their community, what they will do to address that problem and what the expected outcomes of the work are.

Every theory of change starts with a documented community need or problem. The intervention is the specific strategy employed to solve the problem. The outcome is the specific and quantifiable change that eliminates or substantially ameliorates the problem and occurs as a result of the intervention.

Underlying this three-step logic are two types of data or evidence:

- Data that documents the existence of the community need your intervention will address;
- Evidence that informs your understanding of why a particular intervention will be effective in addressing the need and in producing the intended outcome.

Proposals must clearly demonstrate an understanding and application of the theory of change for their local community. More detailed definitions of terms associated with the theory of change can be found in Appendix B.

- ❖ Law Student Interns: The project design should include a plan to manage a minimum of two law students to serve as “minimum-time” AmeriCorps members and work on the veterans’ project. There is no maximum on the number of law students that may be included in the proposal. Law student members must serve at least 300 hours and will receive a \$1,175 education award upon successful completion of their term. Students may serve during the summer or all year round.

NOTE: Because of AmeriCorps rules, a Veterans Legal Corps AmeriCorps Fellow may not supervise law student AmeriCorps members, but they may work together. Host sites are encouraged to incorporate and describe plans for as many law students as possible, including students who spend a portion of their time on veterans’ legal issues.

What will Veterans Legal Corps Fellows Accomplish?

The focus of the Veterans Legal Corps program is to address the justice gap for low-income and homeless veterans. Located in 10 states and the District of Columbia, 17 AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows currently provide direct legal assistance, manage clinics and workshops, develop substantive legal resources and expand the capacity of their host organization’s existing veterans legal services. Crucial to the success of these projects is the network of support that Fellows foster in their community through establishing partnerships with social service providers.

Ideal applications will craft a program that will resolve the legal problems of low-income and homeless veterans, leading to improved lives: higher incomes, better health, safe and secure housing, and family stability. Applications may include elements such as the following activities: 1) conducting initial intake of the veteran to identify legal issues needing resolution; 2) preparing, filing and winning complex claims and appeals for VA disability benefits due to service-connected mental disabilities such as PTSD and TBI; 3) preparing, filing and winning reductions or dismissals of fines, warrants, tickets, and child support orders; 4) resolving other legal problems that impact the veteran's ability to obtain income, housing, employment, or family stability; 5) otherwise securing positive outcomes for the client; and 6) following up with the veteran subsequent to case closure to determine whether the case resolution led to the client's goals and, if it did not, determine why.

Positive outcomes may include, but are not limited to, successful initial claims for VA disability benefit applications; successful VA disability benefit appeals; modification or waiver of child support orders; reduction of debt or fines abated; dismissal of warrants; barrier to housing removed; access to or retention of permanent housing; removal of barrier to employment; and access to or successful reinstatement of a driver’s license. Each Fellow should, over the course of one year, secure positive outcomes for an average of at least two veterans per month.

Unallowable Activity

Proposals may not include any the Prohibited Activities outlined in Appendix A, which includes influencing legislation, religious proselytizing, and assisting a for-profit business. Similarly, direct representation to veterans that were “dishonorably discharged” also may not be part of proposals as this is unallowable under AmeriCorps regulations. Note that veterans with a discharges status of "other than

honorable" may be served. Only veterans with an official "Dishonorably Discharged" status may not be served with AmeriCorps funds.

Who can serve as an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellow?

AmeriCorps Legal Fellows are generally lawyers in their first three years of practice; however, this is not a restriction. To be eligible, Fellows must have graduated from an Equal Justice Works [member law school](#) and have taken the bar examination in the state where they will serve (or be willing to sit for the February examination). Fellows cannot have served more than three prior terms with other AmeriCorps programs, including the Equal Justice Works Summer Corps program. Applicants may not be current full-time staff attorneys at the host site. They also must pass the required criminal history background checks which include the National Sex Offender Public Registry, a state background check in the state of service and state of application for service and an FBI fingerprint-based criminal history check. Note that a criminal history is not a bar to serving as an AmeriCorps member. Every case is evaluated individually. However, presence on the sex offender registry or a conviction of murder is a mandatory bar to serving as an AmeriCorps member.

What support does Equal Justice Works provide?

- Equal Justice Works helps host sites market the AmeriCorps positions to our national network of law students, law schools, firms, and stakeholders.
- Once enrolled in the program, Equal Justice Works Veterans Legal Corps Fellows are part of a national community of public interest lawyers and the national AmeriCorps network.
- Fellows attend the October Equal Justice Works leadership and development training. Travel and training costs for this event are provided by Equal Justice Works.
- Equal Justice Works' staff provides ongoing support and recognition of the Fellows throughout the year and the Fellows frequently build peer networks that advance their careers and the host organization's capacity.
- Equal Justice Works' staff provides training and technical assistance to host site staff to ensure the AmeriCorps grant is managed effectively and efficiently.

What are the host organization's responsibilities?

Your organization will interview and select Veterans Legal Corps Fellows with guidance from Equal Justice Works. Once the Fellows are chosen, host organizations are responsible for day-to-day supervision and support of the Fellows and implementation of the project.

Applicant organizations must demonstrate their capacity to administer federal funds, implement a detailed plan of action to address a local unmet need, have a strong theory of change, propose specific, measurable and attainable outcomes, provide evidence of strong connections to the community being served, and have the ability to raise the required match funds.

The responsibilities for operating an AmeriCorps program include:

- Recruiting, selecting, placing, training, and supervising the AmeriCorps Legal Fellow(s).
- Designating a Project Director, Fiscal Manager and Fellow Supervisor(s) to oversee the project.
 - Project Director: The Project Director oversees the entire AmeriCorps Legal Fellows program within their office and any satellite sites. The Project Director is also responsible for enrolling and exiting the Fellow from the Equal Justice Works and AmeriCorps online systems, providing guidance to the Fellow Supervisors and Fiscal

Managers regarding funder needs, submitting reports and data to Equal Justice Works, amongst others.

- Fiscal Manager: The Fiscal Manager must manage all financial aspects related to the grant including submitting monthly Periodic Expense Reports, maintaining proper financial documentation, amongst other responsibilities.
- Fellow Supervisors: Must possess knowledge of veterans' law and experience providing direct services to low-income and homeless veteran clients. The main function will be to provide supervision and guidance to the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows.
- Submitting quarterly progress reports, monthly expenditure reports and quarterly financial status reports.
- Setting appropriate performance measurement goals and adhering to these goals.
- Having rigorous systems for collecting and reporting data, including demographic data on the recipient of service, case outcomes (including economic benefits obtained), and follow up with the client following case closure to determine whether client goals were met.
- Maintaining a payroll system that distinguishes between AmeriCorps-funded living allowance and grantee matching payments.
- Participating in training and technical assistance meetings.
- Understanding and complying with AmeriCorps and Office of Management and Budget regulations, as well as policies found in the Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps program manual.

What is the Financial Commitment?

Equal Justice Works sub-grants \$24,200 per Fellow for a living allowance, plus \$1,200 per Fellow to the organization for administrative and indirect costs. In turn, host organizations must provide and document at least \$24,200 in matching funds per Fellow requested. The sub-grant is designed to subsidize half of the Fellow's compensation and benefits. Fellows receive their compensation and benefits directly from the host site. Please see the Appendix for a sample program budget.

Equal Justice Works will provide an AmeriCorps living allowance of \$24,200 per Fellow. This amount is capped by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). Upon successful completion of the term of service, Fellows receive a \$5,550 AmeriCorps education award. The education award amount is awarded directly to the Fellow from the National Service Trust administered by CNCS. If a Fellow has previously served in AmeriCorps, their education award amount could be lower, per AmeriCorps regulations. For more information about the education award, visit the [AmeriCorps website](#).

Host Site Match

Host organizations provide matching funds of at least \$24,200 per Fellow. The following are the costs associated with a host site's match:

- \$12,000 to \$30,800 per Fellow as "Supplemental Benefits" for housing and loan repayment.
- Fully paid healthcare insurance that meets minimum AmeriCorps standards (required for each Fellow) and FICA, as well as any benefits (including workers compensation if required by your state) given to employees of the host site.
- Training, travel reimbursement, supervision and support for the Fellows in the normal course of their work on the project.

When does the Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps program/contract begin?

The Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps grant year begins August 1, 2013 with host sites selecting Fellows to begin 11 or 12-month terms between August 1 and September 30, 2013. Equal Justice Works is funded on an annual basis by the CNCS and anticipates a funding notification in mid-June each year.

How does my organization apply to host Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellows?

Organizations must submit a concept proposal by **April 23, 2013** to be eligible for funding in the fall of 2013. Equal Justice Works will review all concept proposals and invite a select number of organizations to submit full AmeriCorps applications. Once full applications are received, Equal Justice Works will interview and choose host organizations. Successful, waitlisted and rejected applicants will be announced in late May or early June.

Submission: Please email the attached concept proposal (Sections I, II and III) to Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps at americorpsmail@equaljusticeworks.org no later than **April 23**.

Thank you for your interest in national service, Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps and the Veterans Legal Corps!

CONCEPT PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

Formatting: The concept proposal (Sections II and III) must be an MS Word document and adhere strictly to the single-spaced page limits listed with 12 point font (Times New Roman) and one inch margins. Please also attach Section I, the Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship Organizational Assessment. We provided a sample budget only for planning purposes in Appendix C.

Section I: AmeriCorps Legal Fellowship Organizational Assessment

The following assessment will help organizations determine their capacity and whether this Fellowship program is a good fit. . This assessment asks the reader to score the organization on elements necessary to run a high quality program, by selecting the answer that best describes the organization's current status or performance. Include the assessment with the application.

Organization Name: _____

Program Design

The proposed Fellowships should expand but not duplicate services provided by the organization. Will the proposed Fellow(s) expand services? Yes No Unsure

Will the Veterans Legal Corps Fellow(s) have distinct roles in your organization? That is, will they have different position descriptions than other staff attorneys?

Yes No Unsure

Have any other full-time staff been responsible for the tasks identified in this Concept Proposal in the past 12 months?

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization identified a role a minimum of two law student AmeriCorps members in the delivery of legal services associated with the Fellowships?

Yes No Unsure

Organizational Capacity

Has your organization ever hosted any type of legal Fellow? If yes, please specify in a separate attachment.

Yes No Unsure

Has your organization ever served as a host site for AmeriCorps or VISTA members? If yes, please specify how many and when they served.

Yes No Unsure

Has your organization ever managed an AmeriCorps*State program?

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization discussed the application and project goals with all staff expected to contribute or support the project?

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization hosted Equal Justice Works Summer Corps members in the last two years?

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization identified an experienced senior staff member to serve as Project Director to supervise all aspects of the grant? If yes, please provide their name, position in the organization, biography including number of years of experience.

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization identified an experienced accountant or someone proficient in finances to serve as Fiscal Manager for the grant? If yes, please provide their name, position in the organization and number of years of experience in a separate attachment.

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization identified supervisors to help the Fellows develop work plans and to oversee their legal work? If yes, please provide their name, position in the organization, biography and number of years of experience in a separate attachment.

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization accounted for the level of staff support required to manage the grant (estimated at least 35% of a full-time-equivalent employee)?

Yes No Unsure

Financial Management

Has the organization previously managed federal or other publicly-funded grants? If yes, please list the grant and the amount in a separate attachment.

Yes No Unsure

Does the organization have a computerized accounting system? If yes, please provide the name of the system.

Yes No Unsure

Has the organization identified sources for matching funds which are a required \$24,200 minimum for each Fellow you request? Note: federal funds, including Legal Services Corporation funds, may not be used as matching funds. Please list the source and amount of additional funding in a separate attachment.

Yes No Unsure

Equal Justice Works makes grant payments on a monthly cash reimbursement basis. Does your organization have sufficient cash flow to operate a grant on a reimbursement basis?

- Yes No Unsure

Are financial operations of the organization audited annually by an independent auditor?

- Yes No Unsure

Is the organization required to do an audit under OMB Circular A-133 for receiving a certain level of federal funds?

- Yes No Unsure

Section II: Host Organization Information

Please complete this chart and paste it into your application narrative before the narrative.

Name of Organization (as shown on income tax return)	
Employer Identification Number (EIN)	
Executive Director	
Contact Person for Application	
Contact Person Title	
Contact Person Email	
Contact Person Phone	
Organization Address	
Organization City/State/Zip	
Organization Phone	
Website	
Number of AmeriCorps Fellowships requested	
Grant funds to be requested (Multiply \$24,200 per Fellow requested)	
Organization's starting attorney salary	
Organization's Total Annual Operating Budget	
Name and location of all employee unions for attorneys (if applicable)	
Number of law students proposing to manage	

Section III: Concept Proposal Narrative & Budget

Theory of Change and Program Design (50 points): Applicants should describe what the project will accomplish and the role the AmeriCorps Legal Fellows will play in the organization and the community. Please include the following topics in **no more than five pages, single spaced:**

- A. *Need:* Describe the specific need(s) your project will address. Include a documented, compelling description of the need in the communities you intend to serve and how the needs were identified. Please be as specific as possible and provide the number of low-income and homeless veterans in your community along with the types of legal problems encountered.
- B. *Intervention:* How will a solution to the need be carried out by Veterans Legal Corps Fellows? Describe what your Fellows will do in the service year. Describe how you will utilize law students for your project.
- C. *Outcomes:* What are the proposed outcomes from your intervention? How many cases will be closed? How many documented positive outcomes for clients do you expect and in what legal areas? What economic benefits do you expect to obtain for your clients?
- D. *Evidence Basis:* How do you know the Fellows' intervention will lead to outcomes addressing the need?
- E. *Data Collection Plan:* What data will you collect to show progress toward the stated outcomes? How will you collect the data? Please provide a print-out (not included in page limit) of your case management system and the demographic and outcome data that you collect from clients.
- F. *Reporting-* Describe your organization's track record in reporting on case outcomes, including multiple case outcomes, economic benefits received, and change in client circumstance from case opening to case closure (e.g. the client's housing situation at the beginning of the case vs. the end of the case). Describe your organization's track record in following up with clients after case closure. This may include the information you gain about clients through partner organizations.
- G. *Accomplishments:* Describe your organization's history and past accomplishments serving veterans. In the last year, how many veterans did you serve? How many positive outcomes did you achieve for veterans? Please describe those positive outcomes (e.g., obtained disability benefits for 6 veterans, obtained back benefits of \$500,000, obtained an average monthly benefit of \$1,600 per veterans, 4 veterans were able to remain in housing, 5 criminal records were expunged etc.). What level of effort went into achieving these outcomes? In other words, how many people were involved (e.g., 2 full time attorneys, 1 quarter time supervisor, 1 half time paralegal, 2 pro bono attorneys finishing one case each)? You can define "last year" in the way most convenient for you - your last fiscal year, the last calendar year, etc.
- H. *Intern Recruitment and Integration:* How many law students will you manage in this project who will apply for and meet the requirements for receiving an AmeriCorps education award (e.g. no prohibited activities, will deliver direct legal services to veterans, ability to document outcomes, will complete all required paperwork within timeframes).
- I. *Network* – List the organization's community collaborations related to veterans and briefly describe how the organization will use these collaborations to better serve clients.

NOTE: The applicant's theory of change should model or operate within the Equal Justice Works Veterans Legal Corps theory of change. The Equal Justice Works Veterans Legal Corps theory of change and expected outcomes can be found in the Appendix.

Organizational Capacity (25 points): Applicants should describe their organization's overall capacity to operate an AmeriCorps program. In this section, please address the following topics in **no more than three pages, single spaced:**

- A. *Management structure* – Describe the staff structure and other resources that will support the program at the host organization level. AmeriCorps requires that all subgrantee organizations consult with and obtain written concurrence from any site-based unions before being invited to make a full application. Describe plans to achieve union concurrence, if applicable.
- B. *Capacity to manage finances* – Describe your capacity to manage a federal grant and to provide monitoring of financial and other required systems utilized to administer the AmeriCorps grant. Include the benefits that you will provide to the Fellow as part of your match and the sources of your matching funds. List all Federal grants and amounts the organization receives in FY 2012. Describe the organization's prior experience with AmeriCorps funds or members.
- C. *Supervision and training* – Describe your organization's involvement with veteran's issues and your capacity to train a Fellow in this area of law. Provide a biography of your proposed supervisors. Describe the orientation and issue area training the Fellows will receive. Describe the supervisory structure and philosophy the organization will use to support the Fellows day-to-day and over the course of the term of service.
- D. *AmeriCorps integration* – Describe your organization's work with your AmeriCorps' [State Commission](#) (called different things in different states, see [this link](#) for a list of state commissions and other AmeriCorps programs in your state to further your Fellows' goals? If none, describe plans to work with AmeriCorps state commissions and other AmeriCorps programs in your state.
- E. *Willingness to participate in an Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Evaluation* – Equal Justice Works will conduct a formal evaluation of the Veterans Legal Corps, somehow comparing clients who receive services from the Veterans Legal Corps with those who do not. The evaluation may include a randomized control trial. Please describe the organization's experience and track record in participating in comparison evaluations, including randomized control trials.
- F. *Audit and Fiscal Management History*– Copy of your organization's most recent audit. Have you ever had findings an audit within the past seven years? If so, describe what the findings were and how the issues were resolved. Further, discuss if you have ever had to refund a private or public grant within the past seven years. If so, describe the reason for the refund and what steps were taking to prevent the issue from reoccurring in the future.

Budget (25 points): Please attach a proposed budget using a format similar to the sample budget found in Appendix C.

APPENDIX A

AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities

While charging time to the AmeriCorps program, accumulating service or training hours, or otherwise performing activities supported by the AmeriCorps program or the Corporation, staff and members may not engage in the following activities:

- (1) Attempting to influence legislation;
- (2) Organizing or engaging in protests, petitions, boycotts, or strikes;
- (3) Assisting, promoting, or deterring union organizing;
- (4) Impairing existing contracts for services or collective bargaining agreements;
- (5) Engaging in partisan political activities, or other activities designed to influence the outcome of an election to any public office;
- (6) Participating in, or endorsing, events or activities that are likely to include advocacy for or against political parties, political platforms, political candidates, proposed legislation, or elected officials;
- (7) Engaging in religious instruction, conducting worship services, providing instruction as part of a program that includes mandatory religious instruction or worship, constructing or operating facilities devoted to religious instruction or worship, maintaining facilities primarily or inherently devoted to religious instruction or worship, or engaging in any form of religious proselytization;
- (8) Providing a direct benefit to—
 - (i) A business organized for profit;
 - (ii) A labor union;
 - (iii) A partisan political organization;
 - (iv) A nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 except that nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and
 - (v) An organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph (g) of this section, unless Corporation assistance is not used to support those religious activities;
- (9) Conducting a voter registration drive or using Corporation funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
- (10) Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services; and
- (11) Such other activities as the Corporation may prohibit.

Individuals may exercise their rights as private citizens and may participate in the activities listed above on their initiative, on non-AmeriCorps time, and using non-Corporation funds. Individuals should not wear the AmeriCorps logo while doing so.

Additional note: The AmeriCorps prohibited activities apply to Veterans Legal Corps Fellows and the volunteers whom they recruit and manage. The prohibited activities do not apply to other staff in the organization.

APPENDIX B

Theory of Change

Equal Justice Works Veterans Legal Corps program design and projected community impact is based on the theory of change, performance measures, and expected outcomes outlined below. Applicants should use this theory of change as a guide for their own project design.

Veterans Legal Corps Theory of Change

This is an abbreviated version of what Equal Justice Works submitted to CNCS in consultation with veterans' law experts.

Problem Statement: Low-income and homeless veterans face complicated legal problems related to disability benefits, fines, warrants, housing, employment, debt, and family issues. When legal issues remain unresolved, problems can multiply and escalate, leaving veterans in a web of challenges that is nearly impossible to resolve on their own. Due to the complexity of their issues, lawyers are uniquely equipped to resolve such problems and to therefore greatly improve the lives of veterans.

Assistance filing veterans' disability benefits applications and appeals is a significant need for low-income and homeless veterans. Veterans have high rates of mental disabilities as a result of their military service, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Compiling the necessary documentation to qualify for these benefits is incredibly involved, often due to incomplete medical and service records. Viable claims are frequently presented poorly, often because of a lack of legal representation. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) denies 30% of claims filed yet when denied applications are appealed, 29% are found to have been decided in error. The rate is as high as 38% for TBI and other complex cases.

Low-income and homeless veterans face a number of other interrelated legal challenges. Many veterans need legal help with fines, warrants, child support orders and debt that accumulated during a period of homelessness or untreated mental illness. Homeless veterans are often ticketed and fined for public violations. It is not uncommon for a homeless veteran to be unaware of legal judgments against them which can result in warrants for arrest. Debt accumulates and punishments escalate. Drivers' licenses and occupational licenses necessary to obtain housing and employment are suspended. Such legal barriers make breaking the cycle of poverty almost impossible. In these cases, legal intervention in a court of law is the only resolution.

Intervention: Legal Services

Description of Intervention: Veterans Legal Corps members - 40 full-time attorneys, 380 minimum-time law students and 150 volunteers - will provide legal services to low-income and homeless veterans related to disability benefits claims, barriers to housing and employment, debt, warrants, child support orders, and other legal issues. Lawyer members will serve under the supervision of attorneys experienced with veteran legal issues at established nonprofit legal aid organizations or state courts in high-need locations. Law student members will serve in an additional 200 sites in 40 states, expanding legal outreach to veterans.

Members will perform the following activities: 1) Conduct initial intake of the veteran to identify legal issues needing resolution; 2) Assemble evidence by interviewing the veteran, obtaining medical and

service records and gathering testimony from witnesses; 3) Review and assess the evidence collected in order to assess which cases are meritorious; 4) Prepare the case by researching prior court decisions and developing arguments to persuade a judge to rule in favor of the veteran; and 5) Present the case to the court or tribunal.

Some veterans will not have meritorious cases. Some legal issues will be resolved with advice and brief services. When a case is accepted for representation, members will spend an average of 40 hours per case.

Outcomes: Improving the lives of veterans through one or more positive legal outcomes.

Veterans Legal Corps Performance Measures & Expected Outcomes

Measurement: Number of veterans that received CNCS-supported assistance

- Description of Instrument: At the beginning of service, each member will receive a Veterans Legal Corps Activity Log (VLCAL) and instructions on how to complete it to ensure consistent, high quality data collection across host sites. The VLCAL will be used to document and track each veteran served, the legal services provided and the outcome for the client. Using a pre-formatted online reporting system, members will input and submit aggregated data on a quarterly basis. Among many other measures, the number of veterans served by members and their volunteers will be included as a VLCAL data point and quarterly reporting requirement.
- Target Number: 5,000
- Unit of Measure: Veterans

Outcome Measured: Number of veterans with meritorious legal cases prepared and submitted for resolution.

- Method of Measure: Other
- Description of Instrument: Members will utilize the VLCAL to record cases successfully prepared and submitted for review in a court of law or administrative body, as well as case outcomes. Members will track the following: number of disability benefit cases assessed or advised on; number of initial claims for disability benefits filed; number of appeals for disability benefits filed; number of successful initial claims for disability benefits; number of successful disability benefits appeals; yearly dollar value of disability benefits secured; dollar value of back-benefits awarded; dollar value of debts reduced and fines abated. A case outcome will be considered to have contributed to improving a veteran's life if one of more or the following events take place:
 - disability benefits claim won (includes access to health care);
 - income increased;
 - barrier to housing removed;
 - access to or retention of permanent housing;
 - removal of barrier to employment;
 - reduction of debt;
 - dismissal of warrant;
 - child support modification; and
 - access to or successful reinstatement of a driver's license.

Using a pre-formatted online reporting system, members will input and submit aggregated case outcomes collected from their VLCAL on a quarterly basis. Equal Justice Works will use quarterly reports to track

each member's outcomes. Using this information, staff will continuously assess ways to help members increase positive outcomes as well as improve member experience.

- Target Number: 2500

Key Terms

A **theory of change** defines a cause-and-effect relationship between a specific intervention, or service activity, and an intended outcome.

A **community problem** is the specific **need** in the community you have chosen to address through your program/project.

Data documenting the need are statistics that demonstrate the extent and severity of the community problem or need your program/project will address. The best data come from reputable primary sources, (such as government agencies, institutes, foundations, university research, the VA CHALENG Report, etc.), are as current (up to date) as possible, and are as locally relevant, as possible. News reports are NOT primary sources. Data from multiple sources increase reliability.

An **intervention** is a set of activities that you have chosen as a means to address the need, based on evidence that a similar approach has worked in the past or elsewhere.

Evidence is information from performance measurement results or evaluation/research findings that inform your understand of why the intervention you have selected will result in the change indentified as the outcome.

Outcome is the change in attitude, knowledge, behavior, or conditions that the intervention generates.

APPENDIX C

Sample Budget for an AmeriCorps Legal Fellow Project (Two Fellows)

Budget Tip: The Host Site should limit line items expenses within the “CNCS Amount” column to only proposed amounts for living allowances and the administrative and indirect costs. Under AmeriCorps rules, a sub-grantee can only receive 5% of the total federal funds provided for administrative and indirect costs. Therefore, a Host Site must only budget for a maximum of \$1,210 per Fellow in regards to administrative and indirect costs.

Expense Type	CNCS Amount <i>(from Equal Justice Works)</i>	Grantee Amount <i>(Host Site Match)</i>	Explanation
1. Program Operating Costs			
A. Travel	\$0.00	\$1,000.00	<i>Estimate work-related local and statewide travel costs for Fellows, including travel to non-Equal Justice Works sponsored training.</i>
B. Equipment	\$0.00	\$0.00	
C. Supplies	\$0.00	\$0.00	
D. Contractual & Consultant Services	\$0.00	\$0.00	
E. Training (Fellow)	\$0.00	\$1000.00	<i>Estimate costs associated with orienting and sending Fellows to (non-Equal Justice Works sponsored) trainings and conferences.</i>
F. Evaluation	\$0.00	\$0.00	
G. Other	\$0.00	\$0.00	
Subtotal for 1. Program Operating Costs	\$0.00	\$2000.00	
2. Member Costs			
A. Living Allowance	\$48,400.00	\$0.00	<i>The maximum Fellow living allowance is \$24,200 per Fellow.</i>
B. Member Support Costs Subtotal	\$0.00	\$0.00	
i. FICA for Members	\$0.00	\$5,539.00	<i>FICA rate of (.0765) * living allowance + supplemental benefits. This must be paid outside of match.</i>
ii. Workers' Compensation (if applicable)	\$0.00	\$0.00	

iii. Health Care	\$0.00	\$14,000.00	<i>Fellows are required to receive health insurance.</i>
iv. Other Benefits	\$0.00	\$2,000.00	<i>Work-related benefits such as transportation benefits, bar dues, etc.</i>
v. Unemployment Insurance (if applicable)	\$0.00	\$0.00	
v. Supplemental Benefits	\$0.00	\$25,000.00	<i>e.g. Housing and loan repayment. (Subject to OMB A-122 and audit)</i>
Subtotal for 2. Member Costs	\$48,400.00	\$46,539.00	
3. Administrative and Indirect Costs	\$2,400.00	\$0.00	<i>Administrative/indirect costs from the grant multiplied by number of Fellows.</i>
Grand Total	<u>\$50,800.00</u>	<u>\$48,539.00</u>	<i>Host site must match at least 100% of CNCS funds.</i>