

**2025 – 2026
YOUTH CAREER PATHWAYS INITIATIVE
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Proposals Due: Friday, October 31, 2025

ISSUED BY THE MASSACHUSETTS SERVICE ALLIANCE
WITH SUPPORT FROM AMERICORPS



VOLUNTEER GENERATION FUND

[Click Here to access MSA's Online Grants System and Submit your Application](#)

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About

Youth Career Pathways Initiative (YCPI)

The Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA) is pleased to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for its Youth Career Pathways Initiative, addressing both the state's historically tight labor market and the ongoing educational and mental health challenges youth face since COVID-19. MSA values the critical role that youth-serving agencies and volunteers play in the development and prosperity of the state's young people. MSA seeks to award between 10-15 matching grants up to **\$20,000** to provide capacity-building opportunities to nonprofits and Volunteer Connector Organizations* to better engage volunteers in youth career development programming/support or engage youth in skill-building/career development service by creating, expanding, and/or replicating promising models.

**Volunteer Connector Organizations include agencies that connect individuals with volunteer opportunities and support organizations in effectively using those volunteers to create meaningful change in local communities.*

Grant funding is contingent on the availability of funds from AmeriCorps. Grant payments will be disbursed on a reimbursement basis. Requests for reimbursement must be accompanied by all documentation required by MSA, in compliance with the rules for the administration of federal funds. Grants awarded under this initiative will be for the period of **January 1, 2026 – August 31, 2026**.

The Massachusetts Service Alliance

The Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA), established in 1991, is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. As the State Commission on volunteerism and service, we foster collaboration and public-private partnerships at the local, state, and federal level to grow volunteerism and service initiatives in Massachusetts. Our strong partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies allow us to mobilize funding to advance service and volunteerism through the AmeriCorps, Commonwealth Corps, and Volunteer Generation Fund initiatives. We have a proven track record developed through more than 30 years of bringing volunteerism and service resources to hundreds of organizations from Pittsfield to New Bedford and Springfield to Lowell. We believe in the power of volunteerism and service to improve the quality of life of all residents of the Commonwealth. We seek to understand and address the changing needs of Massachusetts and its residents and allocate resources through a process that ensures all organizations have the opportunity to access and benefit from these resources.

AmeriCorps

The mission of the federal AmeriCorps Agency is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. Through its multitude of programs, AmeriCorps has helped to engage millions of citizens in meeting community and national challenges through service and volunteer action. Through Volunteer Generation Fund grants, AmeriCorps seeks to fund effective approaches that expand volunteering, strengthen the capacity of local nonprofits to recruit and retain skill-based volunteers, and develop strategies to effectively use volunteers to solve problems. Administered by MSA, the Youth Career Pathways Initiative grant is funded by the Volunteer Generation Fund which comes from AmeriCorps.

Grant Overview

Project Scope

The overall goal of the Youth Career Pathways Initiative is to strengthen and sustain the ability of nonprofits and Volunteer Connector Organizations (VCOs) to support volunteer work that allows youth to develop meaningful and tangible work-related skills and/or explore a variety of work environments and career options.

Youth Career Pathways Initiative funds are available for the:

Implementation of new programming, expansion* of existing programming, or replication of promising models that either:

1. Engage volunteers to support youth specifically with their career development and/or exploration.
 - i. Examples of this might include:
 - a. Career Development focused mentoring programs for youth.
 - b. Student Success or Post-Secondary Transition Coaches in an effort to improve college access and success in higher education.
 - c. Specialized tutors/instructors to support students in specific career readiness skill building.
 - d. Job readiness and job search assistance coaches/case managers for youth.
2. Engage youth as volunteers to both meet urgent community needs while simultaneously developing skills that will better their chances for future employment.
 - i. Examples of this might include:
 - a. Service-Learning programs that combine learning and service which allow students to experience certain career options.
 - b. Student internships with local nonprofits where they gain skills and experience through the service being provided.
 - c. Apprenticeship programs

**Program expansion may include new geographics area(s) not currently served by the program, engaging a new population of volunteers and/or youth, or building new partnerships with established organizations to deliver programming.*

MSA will prioritize the following criteria in our grantmaking process:

- Organizations and initiatives serving Massachusetts communities.
- Organizations located in regions of the state that are considered Gateway Cities.
- Initiatives that engage higher numbers of youth, as program recipients and/or volunteers.
- MSA seeks to fund programs hosted by organizations that vary in size and mission area.

Definition of Key Terms

Youth Served

MSA will prioritize organizations that will create or enhance volunteer programs or volunteer positions that will impact youth from across the Commonwealth. The National Institute of Health (NIH) commonly refers to young adult youth as being between the ages of 12-24 years old. Sub-grantees are asked to provide their own definition of youth served in the “Community Need” section of their application

submission. Sub-grantees are expected to provide the demographics of youth served within the application narrative as well as document the number of youth impacted by the grant funding. Sub-grantees will also provide the tracking method and tools used to determine the number of youth from their program who are categorized in their application.

Volunteer Engagement

Through this initiative, youth-serving nonprofits will be expected to strengthen the capacity and infrastructure of new or existing youth development program(s) through the engagement of volunteers to support youth or the engagement of youth as volunteers. Sub-grantees will be expected to provide relevant, competency-based volunteer roles and opportunities that attract and retain high-caliber volunteers, train the volunteers appropriately, and develop a system or utilize a technology-based tracking system to collect and report data that demonstrate results.

Volunteer Management

Nonprofits and Volunteer Connector Organizations must demonstrate their ability to effectively support volunteer activities, create meaningful opportunities, and manage the volunteer experience. Proposals must clearly describe a strategy and goals to increase the number and/or improve the experience of volunteers who serve in meaningful roles within their agency.

Gateway Cities

Gateway Cities are defined by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as "midsize urban centers that anchor regional economies around the state," facing "stubborn social and economic challenges" while retaining "many assets with unrealized potential." These communities, which all have a legacy of economic success, have struggled as the state's economy has shifted toward skills-centered knowledge sectors (<https://massinc.org/our-work/policy-center/gateway-cities/about-the-gateway-cities/>).

Timeline

Informational Webinar

MSA Will provide an optional Informational Webinar for this RFP. This webinar will be recorded and posted on www.mass-service.org. [Click here to register for the info session webinar](#). If you are unable to attend, a copy of the recording will also be sent to all registrants. Specific questions regarding the RFP can be directed to Ian Whalen-Stone at iwhalen@mass-service.org and 351-218-9893.

Submission Deadline

Proposals must be received no later than 5:00p.m. on Friday, October 31, 2025. Your application must be submitted through MSA's online grant system, Applicants will be notified of the status of their grant proposal by mid-December.

Grant Timeline

The YCPI program period will begin January 1, 2026, and end on August 31, 2026. All project work must be completed (and all grant funds expended) by August 31, 2026. Sub-grantees are required to submit a midterm financial report by May 31, 2026, and final financial and programmatic reports by September 30, 2026.

Please note: Project expenditures occurring outside of the grant period will not be eligible for reimbursement or as a source of match unless the sub-grantee has received prior written approval from MSA.

Eligibility/Restrictions

Eligibility

Funding for this proposal is made available to the following organizations in Massachusetts: a nonprofit organization (incorporated with 501(c)(3) status); an institution of higher education; a state agency; a community or faith-based organization; a federally recognized Tribal Nation; city, council, or other municipal government entity; or a partnership of any of the above entities.

Restrictions

Organizations may not replace staff time or other expenses already being covered by existing MSA grant funding with funds to be provided through the grant described in this RFP, including funding AmeriCorps Member stipends/member support costs or Commonwealth Corps member stipends. Additionally, MSA will **not** fund activities that engage in the following*:

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— a. A business organized for profit; b. A labor union; c. A partisan political organization; d. A nonprofit organization that fails to comply with the restrictions contained in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 3 related to engaging in political activities or substantial amount of lobbying except that nothing in these provisions shall be construed to prevent participants from engaging in advocacy activities undertaken at their own initiative; and e. An organization engaged in the religious activities described in paragraph 7. above, unless AmeriCorps assistance is not used to support those religious activities;
9. Conducting a voter registration drive or using AmeriCorps funds to conduct a voter registration drive;
10. Providing abortion services or referrals for receipt of such services;

11. Engaging in activities that are prohibited by applicable executive orders; and
12. Such other activities as AmeriCorps may prohibit.

*Organizations are not otherwise prohibited in engaging in these activities if they are funded by alternate funding sources and not included as match.

Administrative Requirements

General Requirements

Organizations receiving these funds are required to:

- Participate in a grant management and compliance webinar prior to grant start date (currently scheduled for December 16, 2025, at 2pm; subject to change);
- Complete the necessary National Service Criminal History Check through process described below for all staff listed on the program budget, whether on the federal or match share;
- Create or access a tracking system necessary to collect and report on data that demonstrates results;
- Include MSA and AmeriCorps logos on program materials, volunteer recognition items, and in publicity;
- Participate in a mandatory mid-year training and sub-grantee meeting (date TBD);
- Host a site visit by MSA staff;
- Submit a final report on the program that includes reporting on the performance measurements listed on page 7 and some narrative questions (template provided by MSA); and
- Submit two financial reports/requests for reimbursement, with all required documentation of expenditures, by May 31, 2026 (covering 1/1/26 – 4/30/26), and September 30, 2026 (covering 5/1/26 – 8/31/26). **Only expenses for which proper documentation has been received will be reimbursed.**

Criminal History Checks

Per federal AmeriCorps requirements, ALL staff members listed on the 2026 YCPI grant budget (under requested and/or matching funds) must have a compliant National Service Criminal History Check (NSCHC). NSCHC is not a background check; NSCHC is the specific combination of criminal history checks required to be a staff person for an AmeriCorps program. All checks must be conducted, reviewed, and an eligibility determination made *before* the individual begins charging time to the grant. **MSA will order, pay for, and adjudicate NSCHC checks for all staff members listed on the grant budget.** In order to charge time to the grant, staff members listed on the grant budget will be required to follow MSA's instructions to complete the NSCHC requirements.

A staff person is ineligible to charge time to an AmeriCorps grant if they:

- Are registered or required to be registered on a State Sex Offender Registry
- Convicted of murder
- Make a false statement in connection with an NSCHC
- Refuse to consent to the required checks

If you were a YCPI sub-grantee during the 2025 program year, only personnel who were not previously cleared by MSA must go through the NSCHC process for 2026. Please note, if there was a break in employment of a period 180 days or longer, then the staff member will need to go through the NSCHC process again. When asked, please still provide the information around all employees who will charge time to the grant, that way MSA can make sure we have previous staff on record as being cleared of the NSCHC process.

Reporting

Organizations should be prepared to track the following during the full grant period, to be submitted in the final project report:

- Number of total volunteers, categorized by age groups, who were recruited, coordinated, and supported by the grant funds
- Total number of hours volunteers served during the grant period also categorized by age group
- Number of new (anticipated) volunteers recruited/managed for this specific initiative
- Number of hours new volunteers have contributed to your organization
- Number of new (anticipated) youth served by the proposed program
- Number of youth impacted by the proposed program
- Impact to the community (decided on by the sub-grantee)

Match Overview and Usage of Funds

Match Requirement

The Massachusetts Service Alliance anticipates awarding grants of up to **\$20,000** each. **Sub-grantees will be required to provide a bottom-line, dollar-for-dollar match of the budget submitted to support the project.** All programs receiving support will be required to report the resources utilized to match grant funds. Matching funds can be a combination of cash and in-kind match. Volunteer time contributed to the program is NOT an acceptable source of match. Programs may only use other federal funds to match this grant with prior written permission from the awarding agency.

Use of Funds

YCPI sub-grants originate from the federal government. As such, all federal compliance regulations must be followed both for the funds requested for reimbursement and those expenses claimed as match. See the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at [2 CFR.200](#) for further details (MSA will assist those organizations unfamiliar with the CFR to ensure all expenses are compliant).

Funds are intended for volunteer service/initiative development and implementation, including:

- Staff and/or consultant time that is used for the development or implementation of the program.
 - Staff time is only eligible for grant funding and as a source of match if the staff salary is paid by private, state, or local dollars.
 - Staff salaries are only eligible for reimbursement (or claimed as match) if the staff listed on the budget have completed the National Service Criminal History Check.
 - Consultants are not required to complete the National Service Criminal History Check.

- Applicants must have clear tracking systems in place to track the hours that staff listed on the budget spend working specifically on the program supported by the YCPI grant as well as documenting hours spent on all other activities in order to determine the specific percentage that is allocable to YCPI. Documentation such as timesheets, paystubs, and wage authorization forms are required for reimbursement.
- Costs for supplies, materials, etc. directly related to the implementation of grant activities;
 - **MSA will not award funding for the purchase of food and refreshments.**
- Volunteer recruitment, screening, orientation and training, and recognition;
 - **MSA will not award more than \$1,000 for the purchase of volunteer appreciation items.**
- Costs associated with transportation and other reasonable out-of-pocket expenses directly related to development and implementation of the program/initiative;
- Communication materials and activities designed to share program/initiative or program/initiative results with the community and prospective volunteers; and
- Costs of occupancy for staff, volunteers, meetings, etc., used directly for YCPI project planning and implementation, only with a clear, written cost allocation methodology distinguishing YCPI usage from other general usage of your office space. For any costs associated with your own space (whether rented or owned), there are very specific federal guidelines that must be followed. Please discuss with MSA.

Prohibited Use of Funds

- Volunteer or service member payments or stipends (also an unallowable source of match)
 - You may provide a stipend if it comes from another funding source and is not claimed as match.
- The purchase of equipment
 - **Equipment, defined as tangible, non-expendable personal property having a useful life of more than one year and/or acquisition cost of \$10,000 or more per unit.**
- The purchase of gift cards/gift certificates (purchased and donated gift cards/gift certificates are also an unallowable source of match)
- Indirect costs, unless your organization has a federally negotiated indirect cost rate (NICRA) or has elected the *de minimis* rate across all your federal grant awards (costs that may generally be considered indirect could be budgeted as direct costs as long as this method aligns with your organizational policies and cost allocation plan)
- Food and refreshments
- Fringe benefits (including, but not limited to, FICA, Worker's Compensation, Retirement, SUTA, Health and Life Insurance, IRA, and 401K)

Application Instructions

Your application will be submitted online through our grants system. Please make sure to complete and submit each of the following components. *Please note that all attachments will be uploaded as part of your application.*

Online Application Checklist

- ☐ Application Cover Page (provided in online system)
- ☐ Project/Initiative Proposal Narrative (provided in online system)
- ☐ Uploaded: Budget Form (linked below)
- ☐ Uploaded: Most recent audit (or 990 if you have not completed an audit within the past fiscal year)
- ☐ Uploaded: 501(c)(3) letter (or equivalent)

[Click here to access MSA's Online Grants System
and Submit your application](#)

Submission Deadline

5:00pm, Friday, October 31, 2025

Faxed, emailed, or hard copy transmissions will not be accepted.

Any application that is not complete and/or does not comply with all submission requirements may not be reviewed.

Technical Assistance related to this RFP should be directed to

Ian Whalen-Stone, Program Officer for Volunteer Initiatives
351-218-9891
iwhalen@mass-service.org

Proposal Narrative Instructions

Please follow the instructions below when completing your online application. Please ensure that all sections of this RFP are completed in their entirety. Each proposal should be comprised of the following:

Executive Summary (150 word limit)

- Briefly provide an overview of the project you wish to fund.

Background / History of Organization (400 word limit)

- Describe the organization's history, mission, overall goals and/or objectives.
- Provide specific examples of your organization's experience and past accomplishments in the proposed areas of activity and your experience working with and managing volunteers and engaging youth.
- Describe the staffing and infrastructure that your organization has in place to ensure effective oversight of the initiative being proposed.

Fiscal and Programmatic Oversight (300 word limit)

- Describe the organization's capacity to manage a federal grant and to provide appropriate fiscal and programmatic oversight. If applicable, provide examples of other federal/state grants received.
- Describe current systems in place to ensure federal/state fiscal requirements are followed (i.e., providing sufficient back-up and supporting documentation for reimbursement request and matching funds).
- Describe your organization's ability to secure in-kind donations and/or resources to provide a dollar-for-dollar match to meet this requirement.

Community Need (300 word limit)

- Define the community your organization serves and describe the youth you intend to serve through this program. Provide the organization's definition of youth served.
- Describe the specific need that your proposed program or project will address.
 - If available, provide specific data points, statistics and/or examples regarding the need.
- How will a Youth Career Pathways Initiative Grant enhance your capacity to meet the needs of the community and specifically youth in your community?
- Describe in detail how engaging volunteers or youth as volunteers will be an effective means of addressing the identified need described.

Program Design and Development (1,400 word limit)

- Explain in detail the program being proposed and its scope. Discuss the goals, objectives, activities, and program structure.
- Describe how the proposed program will benefit the youth involved and how the youth will be recruited into the program.
- Provide a brief timeline of activities and benchmarks for the grant period.
- Describe the plan for recruitment of volunteers and outreach to other community organizations and partners. Please include any current partnerships in place that will help in achieving the outcomes of this initiative.
- Describe how volunteers will be utilized as part of the proposed program and the volunteer management practices in place to support them such as: onboarding, training, supervision, evaluation and recognition.

Performance Measures and Evaluation (400 word limit)

- Outline at least **one clear programmatic goal for youth being served**, with measurable outcomes. Please specify how you will identify and measure the impact on youth being served.
- Outline at least **one clear goal for volunteers engaged in the program**, with measurable outcomes. Please specify how you will identify and measure this goal.
- Describe the tools being used to measure the progress toward the outcomes outlined above (e.g., pre/post testing).
- Describe the plan and process for collecting overall data (number of participants, number of youths, number of volunteer hours, etc.) and evaluating your program's effectiveness.
- What is the overall change you would like to see after the 8-month grant cycle?

Budget Instructions

You may download the budget form below. This file will be uploaded as part of your online application. Select one of two templates:

1. [Workbook #1](#): for organizations with a Federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate (NICRA) or that have elected the *de minimis* rate across all your federal awards
2. [Workbook #2](#): all other organizations

Budget Narrative

1) Staff

- a. **Definition**: Professional staff that provide direct services to the proposed program.
- b. **Considerations**:
 - i. Applicants must have clear tracking systems in place to track the hours that staff listed on the budget spend working specifically on the YCPI grant. **You may not charge time simply based on the budgeted amount of time approved; time must be substantiated by actual time records.** Documentation such as timesheets, paystubs, and wage authorization forms are required for reimbursement.
 - ii. Organizations may not replace staff time already being covered by existing MSA grant funding with funds to be provided through the grant described in this RFP.
 - iii. Staff time is only eligible as a source of match if the staff salary is paid by private, state, or local dollars. **Salaries paid by federal monies are ineligible as match, unless the organization receives prior written approval from the awarding agency.**
 - iv. Funds may not be used to pay volunteers and/or additional AmeriCorps and Commonwealth Corps member stipends for service performed in connection with projects/initiatives (nor are volunteer or service member hours an appropriate source of match).
 - v. Any staff listed in the budget (request or match) will be required to undergo the appropriate criminal history checks.
 - vi. Fringe benefits (including, but not limited to, FICA, Worker's Compensation, Retirement, SUTA, Health and Life Insurance, IRA, and 401K) may NOT be included.

2) **Consultants & Contractual Services**

- a. **Definition:** Services that cannot be provided by any employees of the organization.
- b. **Considerations:**
 - i. **Consultants are not required to undergo NSCHC.**

3) **Supplies and Materials**

- a. **Definition:** Project-related supplies and materials.
- b. **Considerations:**
 - i. MSA will not provide funding for food or refreshments.
 - ii. MSA will not fund more than \$1,000 for the purchase of volunteer appreciation items (e.g., t-shirts, mugs, etc.).
 - iii. MSA will not fund the purchase of equipment (see page 9).

4) **Travel**

- a. **Definition:** Costs for any official business travel related to the project (e.g., mileage reimbursements, ride share, public transportation).
- b. **Considerations:**
 - i. MSA can reimburse sub-grantees up to the federally approved mileage reimbursement rate, but sub-grantees should report mileage at a rate consistent with their organizational policies. This rate is currently \$0.70 cents/mile. If the federal rate changes in 2026, sub-grantees may use the updated rate.

5) **Occupancy**

- a. **Definition:** Costs of space for staff, volunteers, meetings, etc., used directly for project planning and implementation.
- b. **Considerations:**
 - i. If you are claiming a portion of your office space, you must have a clear, written cost allocation methodology distinguishing YCPI usage from other general usage of your office space.
 - ii. For any costs associated with your own space (whether rented or owned), there are very specific federal guidelines that must be followed. Please discuss with MSA.

6) **Communication**

- a. **Definition:** Postage, community outreach, printing, delivery costs, etc., needed for the project.

7) **Other**

- a. **Definition:** Special costs related to the individual project. Costs not listed in any of the above categories.
- b. **Considerations:**
 - i. **Please note Page 9 for Prohibited Use of Funds.**