

§7506. Maine Service Fellows Program

The Maine Service Fellows Program, referred to in this section as "the program," is established within the commission. Individuals who participate in the program are referred to in this section as "program fellows." The commission shall administer the program in accordance with this section. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

1. Program purposes. The commission shall establish the program to:

A. Increase the opportunities for individuals to devote a year of service to communities in the State; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

B. Attract to and retain in the State motivated adults who have completed a college degree within the prior 5 years to serve in positions where they can apply skills and abilities to projects for the benefit of citizens of the State; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

C. Provide rural and underserved communities in the State a resource to address critical health and human, public safety, education and environmental needs; and [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

D. Strengthen civic engagement of both the program fellows and community residents through solutions based in whole or in part in volunteer service. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]
[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

2. Program design. The program must be designed to coordinate with appropriate organizations in the served communities. Program fellows must be required to commit up to 20% of their time in the program to developing regional networks of volunteer programs whose common goals can result in mutual benefits. An entity may submit a proposal to sponsor a program fellow based on guidelines established under this subsection. Services provided by a program fellow may include but are not limited to services to address home evictions, to support workforce development, to mitigate and prevent substance use disorder and to promote mental health. The commission may identify other priority needs of communities to be addressed by the program and may make those services available to eligible communities. During the first 3 years of operation of the program, the commission shall ensure that program fellows focus on helping communities recover from the effects of coronavirus disease 2019, also known as COVID-19, and the related pandemic, while also addressing long-term issues that communities face. The commission shall establish guidelines for the program that include but are not limited to:

A. Limiting the eligibility of entities that may sponsor program fellows to local or county government, school districts, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations and similar entities; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

B. Establishing standards for local sponsors regarding supervision and support of program fellows during their service; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

C. Ensuring that projects and project proposals are well-designed and measure their impact and do not include partisan or political activity; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

D. Ensuring that program fellows are not used to replace positions eliminated or position hours reduced as a result of budget cuts by the sponsor; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

E. Requiring criminal background checks or other safeguards if projects involve working with vulnerable populations such as schoolchildren or if otherwise required to receive federal funds; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

F. Focusing the program on rural communities as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service's rural-urban continuum codes, except that the commission shall use criteria other than the codes for defining rural communities in Penobscot County; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

G. Authorizing private sector and local partner contributions to program operations for travel reimbursements or training costs; and [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

H. Any other guideline that the commission believes will benefit the program. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

3. Compensation. To the extent funds are available, the commission shall ensure that program fellows receive the following compensation for service:

A. A stipend set by the commission to achieve an annual income of up to 212% of the nonfarm income official federal poverty level. To the extent the stipend is paid from the General Fund or any other account of the commission, personal liability insurance and workers' compensation insurance, paid for from the same source of funds, must also be provided. Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, program fellows are not employees of the State for the purposes of Title 5, Part 20; [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

B. A program completion bonus that includes, to the extent established by the commission by rule, an educational loan payment in an amount up to 20% of the stipend value paid on behalf of the program fellow to the holder of the loan; and [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

C. An allowance to pay for individual health insurance not to exceed 2% of the stipend amount. [PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

4. Funding. The commission may seek and receive both private and federal funds, grants and gifts in support of the program. The commission may accept funding from other state agencies to support program fellows whose work will support and promote goals of programs administered by those agencies.

[PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW).]

5. Rules. The commission may adopt rules necessary to carry out the purposes of this section. Rules adopted under this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

[PL 2021, c. 676, Pt. A, §5 (AMD).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 155, §3 (NEW). PL 2021, c. 676, Pt. A, §5 (AMD).

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