

Illinois Citizen Corps Council Frequently Asked Questions As of November 15, 2010

CITIZEN CORPS APPLICATION PROCESS:

How do I start a Citizen Corps Council?

The National Office of Citizen Corps, located within the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), oversees the Citizen Corps program. Its website is www.citizencorps.gov. Located there is the ability to register your Citizen Corps Council. Information needed includes the Chief Elected Official (CEO) information for the sponsoring jurisdiction and the CEO's choice for the Citizen Corps Point of Contact and their information. Once this information is submitted through the website, it goes to the State of Illinois' Citizen Corps Program Manager who will make contact with the registered Point of Contact regarding further registration details.

What is Illinois' specific rules regarding registering a Citizen Corps Council?

In an effort to provide equitable support and information to new Councils, the Illinois Citizen Corps Council has developed minimum standards for approval of local Councils within Illinois. These standards are based on federal grant guidance as well as guidance that a group of local Citizen Corps Councils developed to further strengthen the program.

Within 6 months of the jurisdiction's approval on the citizencorps.gov website, that Council must submit a number of items to the Illinois Citizen Corps Council, represented by the Citizen Corps Program Manager. They include the Initial Council Application, a Council mission statement, letter of support for the program signed by the Chief Elected Official (CEO), ordinance or resolution supporting the program, and a roster of Citizen Corps Council members with very specific membership discipline representation. All of this information can be located within the Initial Council application portion of the www.ready.illinois.gov/citizencorps website to include samples for each of those areas.

If this information is not submitted within 6 months, then the Council will be considered on Inactive status and not eligible for any grants or support for the program. Furthermore, if another entity within that jurisdiction were to register on the citizencorps.gov website at a later date, then they would be able to pursue Active status.

What are the status levels of Councils in the Illinois?

An Active Citizen Corps Council is one that has met the above requirements to fully register with the Illinois Citizen Corps Council. To maintain Active status, each Council must submit the Semi-Annual Programmatic Report each January 15 and July 15. This report is basically a continuation of the Initial Council application and is updated every six months. The report template is available on the www.ready.illinois.gov/citizencorps website under the Existing Council section. If the jurisdiction has an open Citizen Corps grant, then it also must submit the BiAnnual Strategy Implementation Report (BSIR) each January 15 and July 15 to continue on Active status and to receive continued grant reimbursement. This report is emailed to the Point of Contact with respect to the grant and is not readily available on the web. All reports are to be submitted through the citizen.corps@illinois.gov email address.

A Council on Probationary status is one that has met all the requirements to register its Council but is not keeping up with the due dates of either the Semi-Annual Programmatic Report or BiAnnual Strategy Implementation Report (BSIR). While on probation, a Council will not be afforded the regular benefits from the Illinois Citizen Corps Council such as conference attendance, regular communication, and grant reimbursement if applicable. To regain Active status from probationary status simply takes submitting these reports.

A Council on Inactive Status is one that has registered with the citizencorps.gov website prior to the new standards existence, which was February 2008. Councils that existed prior to that date were required by July 15, 2008 to submit a version of the Initial Council Application along with all its attachments. There was not a “grandfathering” clause for those Councils that were already registered. A council on Inactive status did not take steps to submit its reports by that date or at any time since with respect to the January and July due dates. A council can gain Active status at any time by submitting the Initial Council Application along with all of its attachments listed above in the second question.

GRANT APPLICATION & FUNDING:

How do I receive funding for a Citizen Corps Program?

Funds are only disseminated to organizations with an officially registered Citizen Corps Council on the citizencorps.gov website, which is a requirement in the federal Citizen Corps grant guidance. In addition, Illinois has placed further standards on Councils in order to streamline program and reporting requirements. If all standards have been met every July 15 and January 15, then the Council is considered on Active Status and is eligible for grant funding. Please see the standards informational guide at http://www.ready.illinois.gov/citizencorps/documents/Existing_Information.pdf for details on what standards need to be met.

When are the grant application deadlines?

Grant funding cycles are dependent upon when the Department of Homeland Security provides funding to Illinois' State Administrative Agency (SAA) which is the Illinois Emergency Management Agency. The current established timeline for grant opportunities requires that a Council needs to be active by September 30th in order to receive a grant for the next calendar year. The process has been application availability in an October timeframe for a performance period of the following calendar year (January through December).

The Illinois Citizen Corps Council will notify active Citizen Corps Councils via e-mail to the Citizen Corps Point of Contact with grant information as it becomes available. Only those active Citizen Corps Councils who have been fully approved as a Council via the standards guidance will be eligible for grants. If there are pending or inactive Councils near the time that grant funds become available, they will be notified via e-mail of the timelines they need to meet in order to become eligible for the upcoming grant applications.

If a Citizen Corps does not want funding will they still need to follow these standards?

The Illinois Citizen Corps Council instituted a Standards Sub-Committee to manage this and other local Council questions. The standards were set in order to provide guidance and to authenticate Council programs within the State of Illinois. The intent of the Sub-Committee was to allow non-funded organizations to utilize the Citizen Corps logo and materials, attend training such as CERT Train the Trainer and participate in the Annual Conference provided they also adhere to the standards set forth by the sub-committee and complete the reporting requirements (minus the BSIR report) on the same time schedule as funded Citizen Corps programs.

If a Citizen Corps does was previously Inactive and now wants funding, what needs to happen?

Please see the above question referencing levels of status. An Inactive Council can achieve Active status by submitting its Initial Council Application and all attachments at any time. Once those items are approved, the Council will be placed on Active status and needs to continue with all reporting requirements to maintain its Active status. Only those Councils on Active status will be considered for grant opportunities. The current established timeline for grant opportunities requires that a Council needs to be active by September 30th in order to receive a grant for the next calendar year.

What does “reimbursement grant” mean?

A reimbursement grant is a program in which the grantee (local Citizen Corps) receives funds as budgeted only after the purchase is complete and an invoice for the service/equipment accompanied by an Invoice Submittal Worksheet (also located on the Illinois Citizen Corps website) has been received by the grantor (state).

How long does it take to be reimbursed for expenses?

Once the proper documentation is received by the state, it is matched against the grant budget, processed by the IEMA office and sent to Comptroller’s office. Generally, the process from the State receipt of the expense reports to the check being mailed to the recipient will take approximately 21 days.

I have heard talk about “Tiers of funding” in the grant process. What are the “tiers”? If a council is in a lower “tier”, how do you bring your program to a higher “tier”?

Through the past processes of assigning grant funding, the State Citizen Corps Council has determined that grantees should benefit in the funding allotment if they are timely and complete. To facilitate the process, compliance metrics were put in place. If you are unsure where your Council qualifies, please look to the program documentation for your grant. To improve your “tier” rating, a jurisdiction must be responsibility to complete the requirements of the program. The evaluation which placed programs into tiers specifically evaluates past performance of the overall program. Higher performance in future funding cycles is the only method to bring the average score of a Council into a higher tier.

Have you talked about factoring population in the grant awards?

Yes, it has been discussed. Challenges with the process include the problems with monitoring effectiveness of programs, geographic boundaries are difficult to define for this type of program and outcomes/deliverables are difficult to measure based only on population bases.

Is there any information that is recommended by the state which should always be in a Citizen Corps grant application?

Start with historical program information and show how the expenditures from the grant will support the ongoing program operations.

Why are there some items on the Approved Equipment List (AEL) that the state won't approve on my budget?

There are multiple grants listed on the AEL list:

(<https://www.rkb.us/mel.cfm?filter=filter&subtypeid=549&CCP=1>). The listing must be filtered to the Citizen Corps Program (CCP) to look only for the items which are allowable under the Citizen Corps grant. Only equipment on the AEL Citizen Corps section is an allowable equipment expense. Be careful to note that the search function will take you out of the Citizen Corps filter.

REPRESENTATIVES/MEMBERSHIP:

We have a small program. If we don't have committees in all of our Partner Programs do we have to start Partner Program Committees as shown on the Semi-Annual Programmatic Report?

No, there are no requirements for local Councils to have any amount of Partner Programs in place. However, some programs already have Partner Program leadership committees in place and this is a method for them to report on those groups as well as their Council.

What qualifies someone to be a representative on the local Citizen Corps Council (fire, law, etc.)?

The intent is to have current, professional (paid or volunteer) representation from each of the disciplines required on a Council. Additionally, the intent is to involve a wide range of disciplines in order to broaden the scope of Council within the community. Qualified individuals will be identified to serve as members of the local Citizen Corps Council. The individual with primary responsibility for a discipline within the jurisdiction should determine whether the individual appointed satisfies the requirement. In other words, the Fire or Police Chief (or Sheriff), appointed EMA Coordinator, etc. will determine the representative for their respective discipline.

Can there be a partner program like CERT in a local jurisdiction without a Citizen Corps Council?

The answer is no. The spirit of the Citizen Corps program is to have an advisory body affiliated with a local unit of government to oversee all homeland security volunteerism initiatives like CERT, VIPS, Fire Corps, MRC, etc. While there is place online to separately register individual Citizen Corps programs like CERT, those registrations will not be approved unless there is a Citizen Corps Council approved and registered first.

REPORTING:

Do I need to have a letter of support, resolution and ordinance or will just one of them suffice?

You must have a letter of support from the Chief Elected Official with the Point of Contact and Council membership identified. In addition to the letter of support, you must also have either a resolution OR ordinance supporting the Council.

What are the biggest or most frequent mistakes on the Bi-Annual Strategy Implementation Report (BSIR) report?

The BSIR report is a Federal report required to show the compliance with Federal requirements. Past mistakes or omissions on the report include: Not choosing a member discipline; using expenditures rather than budget figures; expenditures figures are out of line from grant figures; answering questions for an area where there is no budgeted amount; not answering appropriate questions where there is a budgeted amount.

When there is more than one grant open, how should the BSIR information be reported?

BSIR reports must be completed for each grant separately. For every grant that is open during a reporting period, a BSIR must be completed by the end of the reporting period.

What standards will the committee utilize to determine whether a council is effective?

The subcommittee will not be judging the reports submitted to the state. A Council will be placed on probationary status due to a lack of reporting or non-utilization of grant funds only. The subcommittee will review application packets and reports in order to provide support to the Councils within the state. The committee will make recommendations to the Illinois Citizen Corps Council regarding the status of Councils. The Illinois Citizen Corps Council will determine status of all programs based on reporting and financial responsibility.

If a Council is struggling but working hard to start or continue activity in the programs, will they be judged as inactive by the committee?

No. Councils will be placed on probationary status due to a lack of reporting or non-utilization of grant funds only.

CITIZEN CORPS AND National Incident Management System (NIMS):

What are the NIMS requirements for Citizen Corps Programs?

NIMS does not specify requirements for programs. You must work with your local staff who are responsible for compliance. There are training and other suggestions related to NIMS on the www.ready.illinois.gov/citizencorps website that may assist you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS REGARDING THE ILLINOIS CITIZEN CORPS PROGRAM:

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