

**L.D. 1260, Resolve, to Study Expansion of Civics Education and
Engagement Through the Secretary of State**

**Report to the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
on the issue of moving staff and administrative services for
the Maine Commission for Community Service
to the Department of the Secretary of State.**

Respectfully Submitted

By

Department of the Secretary of State

and

The Maine Commission for Community Service

January 3, 2024



Department of the Secretary of State

Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State

January 2, 2023

The Honorable Tim Nangle, Senate Chair
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

The Honorable Holly Stover, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and Members of the Committee,

Chapter 42, as enacted by the Legislature in the Special Session, established a working group to, "study the efficacy, feasibility and benefits of appointing a deputy secretary of state to coordinate civics engagement and education matters and of moving staffing and administrative services for the Maine Commission for Community Service . . . from the Department of Education to the office of the Secretary of State." This committee allowed the report back deadline to be extended to January 3, 2024.

The Maine Commission for Community Service (MCCS) has decided not to move forward with the transition to the Department of the Secretary of State (DSOS).

We wholeheartedly support MCCS in their decision to proceed with a transition to the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) rather than my department.

Over the course of a year, several staff from my department and I met monthly and had many conversations with the Executive Director, Maryalice Crofton, and her staff to discuss the logistic and financial considerations of the transition. Through these conversations, it became apparent that perhaps moving to the DSOS did not make as much sense as either entity had originally anticipated. While there is certainly some overlap of goals when it comes to a passion and commitment to community and civic engagement across the State of Maine, there arose a number of issues where our two organizations diverged that ultimately shed a different light on the feasibility of transition to the DSOS. These involved issues of staffing and administrative oversight and support. For a more in-depth description of the discussions, please see the transition report from MCCS.

Ultimately, we only wish to see the Commission succeed – whether that was under our department’s jurisdiction, or another state entity and we have made this clear to MCCS as well. Therefore, we support MCC’s decision to transition to GOPIF.

Regardless of the Commission’s decision, we still do see a need for the new deputy secretary of state position.

One of the goals for the DSOS to expand current student programming our department currently carries out. We engaged with other secretary of state offices around the country who are developing rigorous civic engagement and community outreach programs which include enhanced relationships with local schools, strong partnerships with grassroots organizations, and teaming up with their respective state archives to provide students with experiential learning opportunities.

We would like to see those efforts replicated here in Maine. We see value in engaging with young Mainers to start planting the seed on the importance of getting involved in your community and state and ultimately, the impacts this has on maintaining our democracy.

Our office does not have a full-time staff person to oversee our student programming; therefore, as we continue to build out our programs to get on par with other states, a dedicated position will be required eventually.

In conclusion, we look forward to seeing MCCS grow and flourish under GOPIF and welcome any future collaboration with them.

Sincerely,



Shenna Bellows
Secretary of State



Volunteer Maine

The Maine Commission for Community Service
A Stronger Maine Through Volunteerism



December 29, 2023

The Honorable Tim Nagle
The Honorable Holly Stover
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Dear Senator Nagle and Representative Stover:

Last spring, *L.D. 1260 Resolve, to Study Expansion of Civics Education and Engagement Through the Secretary of State*, included a directive to “study the efficacy, feasibility and benefits ... of moving staffing and administrative services for the Maine Commission for Community Service, established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5, section 7501, from the Department of Education to the office of the Secretary of State.”

From February through December 2023, a task force comprised of representatives of the Maine Commission for Community Service (Volunteer Maine), the Department of the Secretary of State (SOS), and the Maine Department of Education (DOE) worked with a consultant to complete the study which we submit for your review. The findings and conclusions are supported by all three parties as you will see in all the letters submitted with this report.

There is no recommended legislative action with this report because on December 4, 2023, the Governor’s Office on Policy Innovation and the Future (GOPIF) contacted the Commission to discuss its legislative report requested by *L.D. 1934, Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine*. The report and accompanying legislative proposal would change the Commission’s fiscal agent from the Maine Department of Education to a new office of community assistance and keep the Commission within the Executive Department.

After some very thorough and intense discussions with all parties, including DOE and SOS, the full Commission voted unanimously on December 15 to give preference to the proposal in the LD1934 report. If the legislature decides not to establish that office, then the move to SOS on the timeline discussed in this report would proceed.

One result for which we are thankful is that either of the moves – to a new Executive Department office or to SOS – will reunite our budget and performance reporting under your committee. The Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government has been the Commission’s oversight committee since 1995 and we look forward to meeting with you to discuss any and all questions you may have about the reports and proposals.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your service to Maine.

Sincerely,

Luke Shorty, Commission Chair
Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, Thomas College



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

PENDER MAKIN
COMMISSIONER

January 3, 2024

Senator Nangle, Senate Chair
Representative Holly Stover, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Distinguished Members of the Committee on State and Local Government:

Public Law 2023, Chapter 42 directs the Secretary of State and Commission for Community Service to study the transition of the Commission to the office of the Secretary of State and submit a report on findings on December 6, 2023. The due date was extended to January 3, 2024.

The Transition Task Force, Maine Department of Education, Secretary of State, and our contracted consultant worked to modify the language in the report so it aligns with the Commission board's December 15, 2023 vote to give preference to a proposal to transition the Commission's fiscal agent to a new community assistance office that is to be administered by the Secretary of State.

This letter is to share with you the final language for the report.

The Department of Education would like to express gratitude to the Transition Task Force and Executive Committee. The proposal has the full support of the Maine DOE.

Sincerely

DocuSigned by:

Pender Makin

Pender Makin, Commissioner
Maine Department of Education

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Acknowledgments

Report Project Leads

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Maryalice Crofton, Executive Director, Maine Commission for Community Service

Report Oversight Task Force

Task Force Chair:

- Luke Shorty, Commission Chair, Maine Commission for Community Service
Executive Director of Strategic Initiatives, Thomas College

Members:

Maine Commission for Community Service

- Celeste Branham, Vice President for Student and Community Services, University of Maine Farmington (retired)
- Becky Hayes Boober, Prevention Specialist, Penobscot Bay Community Health Partnerships, Penbay YMCA
- Janet May, Coordinator of Transition and Adults, Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, UMaine
- Jenni Tilton-Flood, Flood Brothers Farm/Cabot Creamery Co-op Spokesperson
- Chelsey Fortin-Trimble, Associate Commissioner of Policy & Programs, Maine Department of Education (ex-officio)

Maine Department of Education

- Jessica Nixon, Chief of Operations

Department of Secretary of State

- Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
- Joann Bautista, Deputy Secretary of State, Policy and Legislative Advisor
- David LaChance – Director of Finance and Administration

A complete list of contributors to this report may be found in Appendix A. The Commission is deeply grateful to the many people who contributed their time and expertise to this project.

Acronyms used

MCCS Maine Commission for Community Service; the Commission

DOE Maine Department of Education

SOS Maine Department of Secretary of State

Introduction and Summary

Pursuant to the passage of LD1260, a Task Force was formed to study the feasibility of transitioning the Maine Commission for Community Service away from the Department of Education. The work of the Task Force is detailed in the following report. The scope of work included monthly task force meetings, stakeholder interviews and a review of practices from around the country. Upon conclusion of the study, the Task Force reached the following conclusions.

Primary Conclusions

- I. Based on the Transition Task Force's work, the Maine Commission for Community Service could transition to the Secretary of State's Office by July 1, 2025.
- II. Based on the Transition Task Force's work, it is recommended that the Commission *not* become an independent commission or remain in the Department of Education beyond 2025.

Additional Conclusions:

- I. Immediately prioritize transition planning before the current Executive Director's anticipated retirement, including reclassification of the position and accessing funding to support the reclassification within the M CCS budget.
- II. Assess the actual financial staffing and system needs for grants management and fiscal reporting in the Secretary of State in order to support the operations of M CCS.
- III. SOS's Division of Finance and Administration should onboard a financial analyst dedicated to the Commission, allocate a half-time HR position specifically for M CCS, and increase administrative resources so the M CCS office administrator is full-time rather than half-time. Additionally, SOS should create a new deputy position who would "coordinate civics engagement and education matters."
- IV. Engage independent consultants to help DOE, SOS, and M CCS navigate transition challenges and ensure a process.

All conclusions have been endorsed by the Maine Commission for Community Service, the Department of Secretary of State, and the Department of Education.

Final Recommendation

There is no proposed legislation to implement the recommendations because, on 4 December 2023, the Governor's Office on Policy Innovation and the Future notified the Commission Task Force that it was proposing to move the Commission into the new office proposed in the report on *L.D. 1934, Resolve, to Improve the Coordination and Delivery of Planning Grants and Technical Assistance to Communities in Maine*. That report was submitted 6 December 2023 to the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government and the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs.

After fully considering the LD1934 report, the Commission voted on 15 December 2023 to support a fiscal agent transition from the Department of Education to the new office focused on assistance to communities. Central to the decision was the stronger alignment of missions.

In Appendix A of the LD1934 report, the proposed mission statement is “to provide coordinated and efficient planning, technical assistance, and funding in partnership with communities across Maine to support them as they navigate increasingly complex challenges.”

In 5MRSA c. 373 §7501, the MCCA mission reads in part “to foster the State's ethic of community service; encourage community service and volunteerism as a means of meeting critical human, environmental, educational and public safety needs throughout the State; address climate challenges through community service and volunteerism; serve as the State's liaison regarding national and community service and volunteer activities; foster collaboration among service agencies.”

MCCA would be open to a transition to the Department of Secretary of State if the new office did not materialize.

This Report

MCCA and partners on the Transition Task Force submit this report not only in fulfillment of LD1260's directive but, also, because some of the task force's work may inform discussions and decisions related to legislation proposed under the LD1934 report.

Background

The Maine Commission for Community Service was established in 1994 under Executive Order and then in statute (5 MRSA c. 373 §7501 et seq). The Commission was established as an independent agency with a fiscal agent. The governor-appointed Commissioners are responsible for building capacity and sustainability in Maine's volunteer and service communities through grants (particularly AmeriCorps), training and technical assistance to community volunteer programs, and promoting service as a strategy to solve local challenges.

When the State Planning Office was closed by the Legislature in 2011, the Maine Department of Education became the Commission's next fiscal agent. In 2019, the Commission began doing business in the public sphere as Volunteer Maine to clarify what type of community services it supports.

While the Commission and Department of Education have had a cordial and collegial relationship, their constituencies overlap very little and their missions are very different. Discussions of the best administrative identity (full budget authority, a new fiscal agent) became a formal exploration and study with the passage of *LD1260, A Resolve, to Study Expansion of Civics Education and Engagement Through the Secretary of State*, in the 131st first legislative session.

This study used structured interviews and outreach to the state agencies connected to this study (the Maine Department of Education (DOE) and the Maine Secretary of State (SOS)), along with fully independent Maine commissions to determine the benefits and disadvantages of independent commission operating structures. In addition to the review of structures within the state of Maine, the task force also conducted interviews with other state service commissions that could provide insight into potential challenges or opportunities for the Commission. The state service commissions were selected due to their similarity in host agency (based within a SOS or DOE), similar state investment or environment (rural and limited resources in nonprofit sector), or other factors the task force suggested be considered. Conversations with the staff and examination of the existing roles and capacity of the Commission were analyzed to provide a picture of the staffing capacity, needs, and overall structure in connection to the work and outcomes of the Commission.

About the Work of the Transition Task Force

Beginning in January 2023, the Transition Task Force met monthly to discuss and review information related to the possibility of transitioning MCCS out of the Maine Department of Education (DOE). Options for consideration included moving to the Maine Secretary of State (SOS) or securing budget authority for this independent agency/commission. The work was led by The SISGI Group, a strategy consulting firm familiar with state commission organizational structures, MCCS, and the federal regulations guiding national service and AmeriCorps.

The task force conducted focused interviews and outreach to individuals working in the DOE, SOS, Maine Arts Commission, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. The task force also conducted interviews with the Executive Directors of the Georgia, New Jersey, and New Mexico state service commissions. They provided insight based on their similarity in host agency (based within a Secretary of State or DOE), similar state investment or structure (rural and limited resources in nonprofit sector), or other factors the task force wanted to consider. Finally, Commission staff were interviewed. The discussions about MCCS existing roles and capacity were analyzed to provide a picture of the staffing capacity, needs, and overall structure in connection to the Commission's work and outcomes.

Transition Task Force

The following individuals were task force members and participated in the meetings and discussions throughout the research process.

- Luke Shorty - Transition Task Force Chair and Chair of the Maine Commission for Community Service
- Celeste Branham – Board Member, Former Chair, Maine Commission for Community Service
- Becky Hayes Boober – Board Member, Maine Commission for Community Service
- Chelsey Fortin-Trimble– Board Member, Maine Commission for Community Service
- Janet May - Board Member, Maine Commission for Community Service
- Jenni Tilton-Flood –Board Member, Immediate Past Chair, Maine Commission for Community Service
- Maryalice Crofton – Executive Director, Maine Commission for Community Service
- Jessica Nixon – Chief of Operations, Department of Education

- Shenna Bellows – Secretary of State
- Joann Bautista – Deputy Secretary of State, Policy Advisor
- David LaChance – Director of Finance and Administration, Department of the Secretary of State
- Thenera Bailey – The SISGI Group (Project Consultant)

Approach

The activities related to the research occurred via virtual workgroup sessions, digital document transmission, and online meetings or interviews. The task force met monthly to maintain momentum and work towards four project milestones:

- Milestone 1 – Transition Task Force Plan and Support
- Milestone 2 – Department of Education and Department of State Operational Review
- Milestone 3 – Executive Transition and Succession Planning
- Milestone 4 – Sustainability Audit

The standing agenda covered information for each milestone and guided the strategies in the work of the project consultant. Additional interview details can be found in Appendix B.

Commission Current Operating Structure

The Commission is attached to the Department of Education. The organization chart outlines the Department's current structure and depicts the Commission's placement (green asterisk).

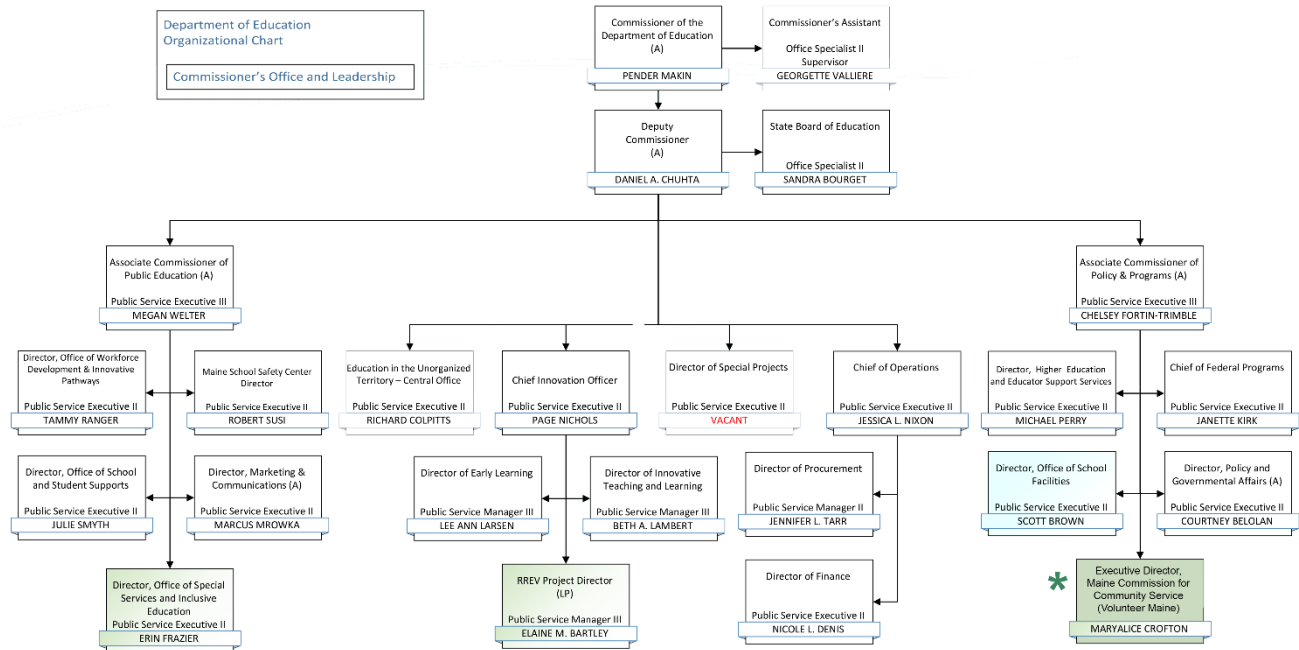


Figure 1- Department of Education Organization Chart

An analysis of the time required to carry out the responsibilities and duties of individual Commission staff members was conducted to understand better their current capacity and adjustments that may be needed under a new fiscal agent. Full details of this analysis are in Appendix C.

Conclusion: The Commission should not remain in the Department of Education

It is not recommended that the Commission remain in the Department of Education. The agency priorities, grant management, and administrative structure are not a good fit with the Commission's financial and administrative system needs. The Maine Department of Education, as with all executive agencies in state government utilize the Department of Administrative and Financial Services for all accounting support. The service center has procedures tailored to DOE's needs and routines but the same are not suited to MCCS requirements. MCCS operations and mission would benefit from a greater ability to more closely manage financial and administrative systems and limit hierarchies required to address routine concerns and issues.

Conclusion: The Commission should not request budget authority and become a fully independent agency.

Based on the interviews with the Maine independent agencies (see Appendix E), MCCS would not benefit from becoming a fully independent agency with budget authority due to the increased administrative and financial burden that would result. Though additional flexibility and autonomy would improve the operations of the Commission, the extra capacity provided by being affiliated with another agency will increase the long-term sustainability and operations of the Commission.

Conclusion: Review of other State Service Commissions confirms larger agencies pose more challenges to Commissions.

The challenges faced by MCCS in staffing, capacity, AmeriCorps knowledge, and fiscal and accounting support are common challenges experienced by state service commissions. These challenges are amplified in states with high rural populations, limited nonprofit or volunteer management sectors, and low financial investment from non-federal sources in the Commission operations. For other state commissions, the Secretary of State presents more flexibility, mission alignment, and resources than executive departments.

Through the interviews and a review of the commission network, it appears that the larger the agency hosting the state commission is, the more challenging are the implementation and barriers to operations faced by the commission staff, especially in managing AmeriCorps grants. Due to the unique nature of AmeriCorps funding and grants management, a host agency needs to be flexible and agile to allow the staff to utilize their grants management expertise and oversight in ways unrelated to compliance and program design. State agencies that have investment from the senior leadership in understanding the value of volunteerism and national service also provide a unique advantage to the sustainability and success of commission operations. Commission executive directors with greater autonomy and power within the agency can also manage the fast pace and unexpected nature of AmeriCorps and National Service funding. It also provides more opportunities for the commission to focus not just on AmeriCorps but other areas, such as volunteerism, climate, public health, and building services needed to support civic engagement in the state.

Conclusion: The Commission and Department of Secretary of State could mutually benefit from a transition.

The SOS already is comprised of three bureaus with very different functions including the Maine State Archives, the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and the Bureau of Corporations, Elections, and Commissions. A fourth independent entity with a distinct staff and mission could be an asset to the Department and allow the Commission to maintain its unique identity. There is a strategic alignment in civic engagement, civic education, and strengthening democracy.

More work needs to occur to fully understand if additional costs and administrative burdens will change with the loss of current DOE resources in a transition. This includes the service center, administrative shared positions, and other hidden costs that might not be known or evident in the day-to-day Commission management.

The current Executive Director is expected to retire six to nine months before a transition would occur, so it will be essential to determine what impact the departure will have on hiring, decision-making, and implementation of the transition. The impact of a new or different Executive Director will require further analysis, especially with the position being a part of the SOS systems. It will be critical to prioritize early transition planning before the current Executive Director's anticipated retirement, including reclassification of the position and accessing funding to support the reclassification within the Commission budget.

Ambiguities persist about MCCS's organizational structure post-transition to SOS, especially concerning reporting hierarchies and continuity of positions. With grant-funded positions ending, administrative support shared with DOE, and the transition of the person occupying the executive role, developing a clear organizational chart within the SOS structure will be essential. A new reporting structure will need to be incorporated and established for the operations and management of MCCS in alignment with the capacity and needs of the current operating channels at SOS. A deputy secretary dedicated to civic engagement and public education could smooth this transition as well by providing public facing leadership and advocacy on behalf of the Commission and facilitating connections with the other bureaus within the Department of Secretary of State and across state government.

Concerns could be further ameliorated by a longer timeline for transition of the Commission to the Secretary of State's Office to make that transition effective July 1, 2025. This timeline is suggested because of several pending projects in each office and the need for a smooth changeover, also allowing for overlap with the start of the fiscal and grant year for AmeriCorps funding. This timeline also allows the departments to develop adequate reclassification of positions and budget adjustments necessary for the Secretary of State to acquire the operations of the Commission. Both departments must re-evaluate and adjust staffing needs, specifically focusing on financial and administrative roles.

Summary Conclusion

Based on the Transition Task Force's work, it is recommended that Commission *not* become an independent commission or remain in the Department of Education beyond 2025. A move to the Secretary of State would be a positive choice for the Commission based on this study.

The Department of Secretary of State shares the Commission's belief about the potential synergy between MCCS and the Secretary of State's work. Secretary Shenna Bellows highlighted the strategic alignment in civic education, a commitment to engaging youth in civic life, and strengthening democracy. Though SOS is not currently staffed to manage federal grants and meet administrative requirements of the Commission, a transition timeline of two years allows the systems and mechanisms to be put in place.

In essence, the transition of the Commission to the Maine Secretary of State could hold great promise but would require careful planning, resource allocation, and a clear strategic direction. Considerations for budgeting, collaborations, and the state Legislature's understanding of the new arrangement are essential for a successful transition.

Appendix A. Contributors

Thank you to those who provided valuable insight and feedback into the making of this report.

State Service Commissions

- David Chene, Executive Director, Serve New Mexico,
- Rowena Madden, Executive Director, New Jersey Commission on Community and National Service
- Linda Thompson, Georgia Commission for Service and Volunteerism

Independent Commissions

- David Greenham, Executive Director Maine Arts Commission
- Kirk Mohney, Executive Director Maine Preservation Commission
- Ariel Ricci, Executive Director Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations
- Hunter Cropsey, Director of Operations Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations

Maine Department of Secretary of State Staff

- Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State
- Joann Bautista, Deputy Secretary of State, Policy and Legislative Advisor
- David LaChance, Director of Finance and Administration

Maine Department of Education

- Jessica Nixon, Chief of Operations
- Chelsey Fortin-Trimble, Associate Commissioner of Policy & Programs
- Nicole Denis, Director of Finance

Volunteer Maine

- Maryalice Crofton, Executive Director
- Michael Ashmore, Training and Program Development Officer
- Jamie McFaul, Grants Officer
- Kelsey Preecs, Program Officer, Volunteer Initiatives
- Nathan McIvor, Office Administrator
- Kirsten Brewer, Maine Climate Corps Coordinator
- Jake Hurner, Maine Service Fellows Coordinator

Appendix B. Notes About Research Approach

Interview Selection

The transition task force identified stakeholders who could speak to the benefits and disadvantages or provide necessary operational information to inform the study. The initial list included core staff at the Department of Education who had direct influence, supervision, or oversight of Commission operations. A similar stakeholders list was determined for the Secretary of State's office, including those responsible for policy, fiscal management, and general administration, as well as Secretary Shenna Bellows. For comparison and additional context, the Executive Director's from the state service commissions in Georgia, New Jersey, and New Mexico were interviewed to provide ideas on operational design within other states, challenges in their experience with transitions between or within state agencies, or similarities that the transition task force could use to inform or ease transition. Lastly, the task force also wanted to know if becoming an independent commission was better than transitioning into another state agency. Interviews were held with the directors of the Maine Arts Commission, Maine Preservation Commission, and the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial Indigenous and Tribal Populations to provide that context.

Questions and Format

The SISGI Group conducted open-ended interviews with all identified stakeholders to inform the research. These interviews included questions that were unstructured and built from the line of inquiry related to their roles within the agency, their perspective and insight on the value of the Commission remaining in DOE, transitioning to SOS or becoming an independent agency, and other critical information the interview participant could provide to inform the research and work of the transition task force. These questions covered a variety of topics, including current tasks and duties and the impact of incorporating MCCS, previous or historical reasoning for operations or positioning within agencies and the state of Maine, capacity to manage grants, programs, or other MCCS responsibilities and concerns about the transition of Commission systems, operations, or staffing.

The results of the interviews provided an in-depth perspective and concrete direction for the task force's analysis of the transition to the Secretary of State's Office.

Appendix C. Details of MCCS Staff Responsibilities and Duties Analysis

Commission Staff Responsibilities and Duties

An analysis of the time and duties of individual Commission staff members was conducted to understand better their current capacity and responsibilities. Through task tracking and interviews, each staff member's core duties were aligned with core areas of MCCS responsibilities. These areas were as follows:

- **Grant Writing/Management** - Activities related to securing and subgranting funding to operate programs or initiatives. Includes grant application/writing activities.
- **Program and Commission Operations/Program Management and Compliance** - Activities to implement the programming, support subgrantees, monitor participant eligibility, and assure that the grant or funding activities are aligned with regulatory requirements.
- **External Relations/Community Engagement** - External activities and work to engage stakeholders in the mission and vision of the Commission.
- **Financial Management** - Activities specific to the financial and fiscal responsibilities of grants and funding management, including activities related to interactions with state-based financial roles in the department and other state agencies.
- **Training and Technical Assistance** - Design, leadership, and oversight of training activities and technical assistance to sub-grantees, community programs, other stakeholders, and program leaders.
- **Policy** - Interactions with state and local government officials including elected officials, engagement in development and support of policy and research.
- **Internal Meetings/Admin** - meetings with other colleagues and MCCS staff and administrative duties related to the role, such as correspondence and record keeping.
- **Professional Development** – Participation in training and learning to build the skills and knowledge of the individual to complete their duties, increase their usable knowledge related to the work of the commission, or master an aspect of their responsibilities.
- **Communications Takeover** - Transitional period where the Public Information Officer position was vacant and duties related to that position were distributed among staff.

This analysis provided information to determine the necessary staffing capacity to continue operating the Commission within a new agency. It offered insight into any additional human capital that would be brought to another host agency’s operations. This supports the work towards a sustainability audit of MCCS operations. It also can be used to assess how funds are invested in staff roles and how understaffing plus current distribution of tasks impact efficiency and effectiveness due to lack of shared administrative and financial resources. Consolidation would free other staff to increase time towards community assistance and program development, time now used for administrative and fiscal management.

Commission Positions

Program Officer, Volunteer Sector Initiatives

Program Officer, Volunteer Sector Initiatives

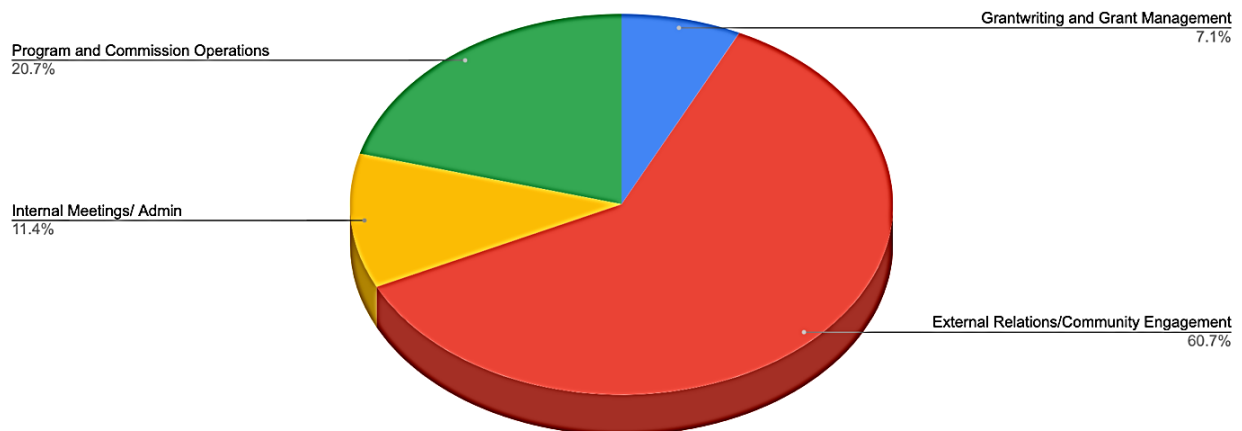


Figure 2 - Tasks and Duties Breakdown for Program Officer, Volunteer Sector Initiatives

From 2020 to 2023, this position oversaw a comprehensive approach to enhancing volunteerism and community engagement through training and technical assistance to community volunteer programs. In January 2021, the budget of \$139,000 focused primarily on COVID support and recovery by helping emergency management and county Emergency Managers to engage volunteers effectively and providing CERT training. (MCCS co-chairs with MEMA, the volunteer and donations emergency response.) This staff role also provided technical assistance and training to community volunteer programs working throughout the pandemic to address local needs. This work requires focused attention which the Commission is able to provide when federal funding

allows. The federal grant typically is available for 3 years in every 6 because the small appropriation rotates among the states.

Although federal funding for this work has ended and the services to volunteer programs are severely reduced, a notable legislative goal would be funding a resource hub similar to the one proposed in *LD666: An Act to Support Community-based Volunteer Organizations* which was passed but not funded in the first session of Maine’s 131st Legislature. A Volunteer Resource Hub would support community organizations by enhancing skills, data infrastructure for pro bono work, and aiding volunteer management, especially in rural areas.

Grants Officer

Grants Officer

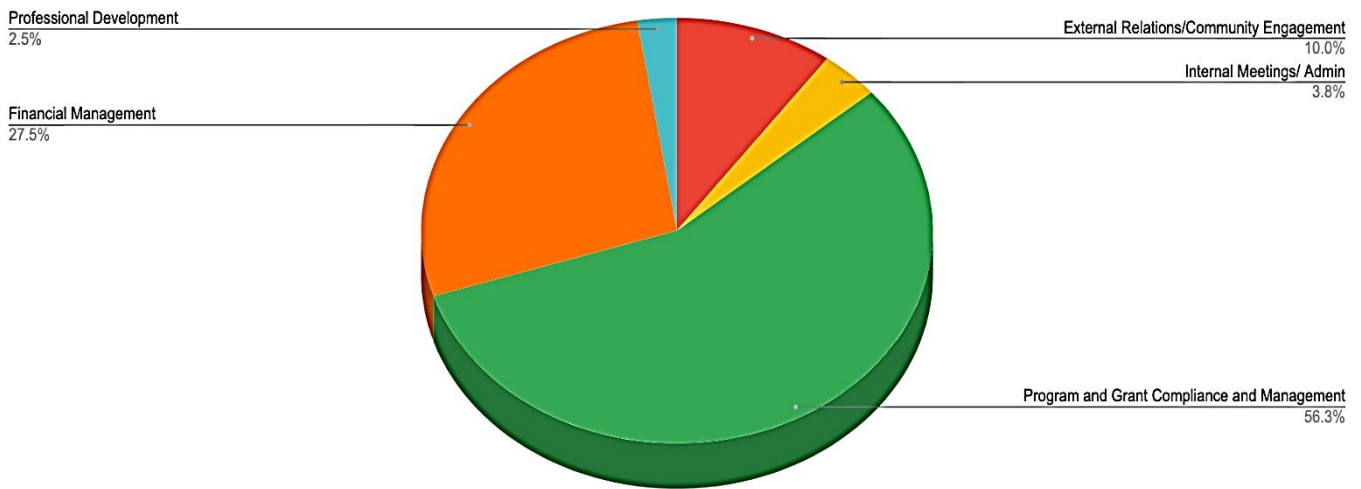


Figure 3 - Tasks and Duties Breakdown for Grants Officer Position

The Grants Officer role is responsible for all AmeriCorps grant functions post-award. The Commission manages eight AmeriCorps operating programs and three planning grants. Tasks cover subgrantee oversight, financial monitoring including match reports, onsite compliance reviews including eligibility of participants, assessing performance, compiling federal reporting, responding to federal spot checks of compliance and eligibility, and tracking frequent changes in federal AmeriCorps policies and regulations. Grant management relies on two systems -- one governs the federal-state relationship including applications, awards, and enrollment of eligible participants; the second pertains to the state-to-subgrantee relationships and covers financial management (budget, expenditures, reimbursements, invoicing), participant records, performance reports, and subgrantee management of partner sites. The Grant Officer is responsible for

reconciling the state accounting system with the grant management system and submitting federal financial reports.

Climate Corps Coordinator

Climate Corps Coordinator

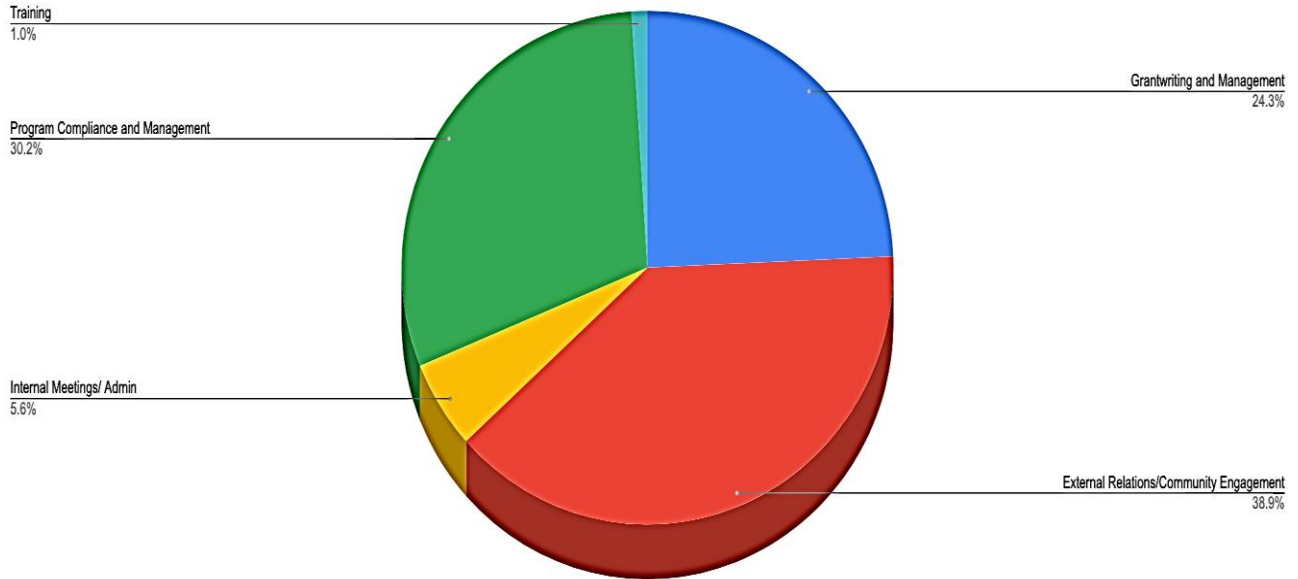


Figure 4 - Tasks and Duties Breakdown for Climate Corps Coordinator

The position is responsible for implementing three aspects of Climate Corps implementation: granting the limited state funds appropriated and providing technical assistance to the grantee; identifying other federal funding sources to support adaptation and climate education activities; developing a network of community programs engaged in the work and providing training as well as technical assistance to them. This role is designated as the Commission representative on two nationwide collaborating groups that share successful models and community volunteer service strategies. Through these committees, the coordinator has ensured a rural state perspective is included in the position papers and model policies that are developed in response to requests from federal policymakers. The coordinator is also a member of the Climate Council’s community resilience subgroup that is updating state strategies.

Maine Service Fellow Coordinator

Maine Service Fellow

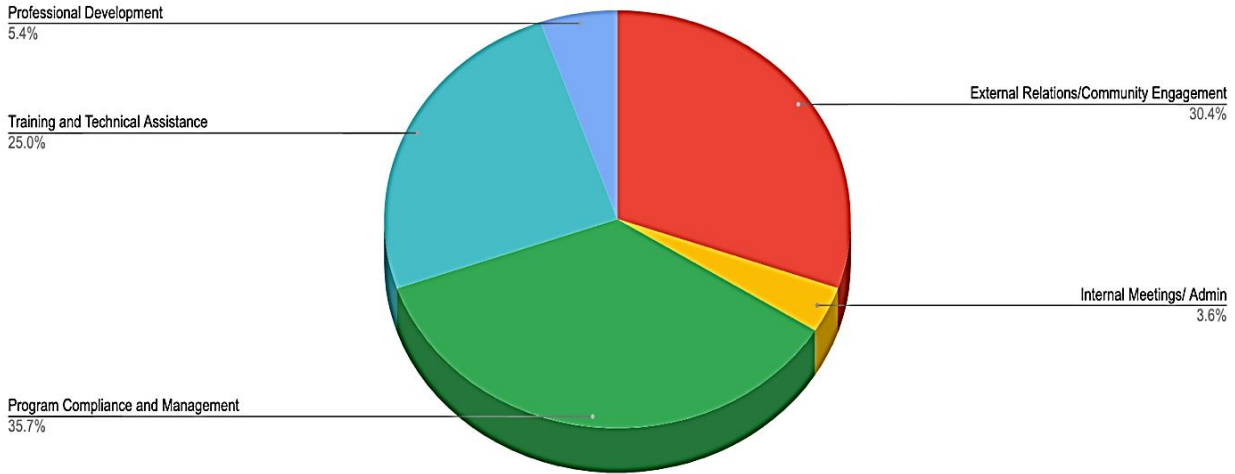


Figure 5 - Tasks and Duties Breakdown for Maine Service Fellow Position

The position is funded through November 2023 to set up and launch the Maine Service Fellows program. The duties include outreach to eligible communities, supporting the Maine Service Fellows Advisory Committee, drafting policies and procedures for program operation, helping rural communities draft work plans and recruit Service Fellows as well as provide supervision and training to the Fellows during service. The Climate Corps Coordinator will assume responsibility for the program after November 2023.

Secretary Specialist (Admin)

Secretary Specialist

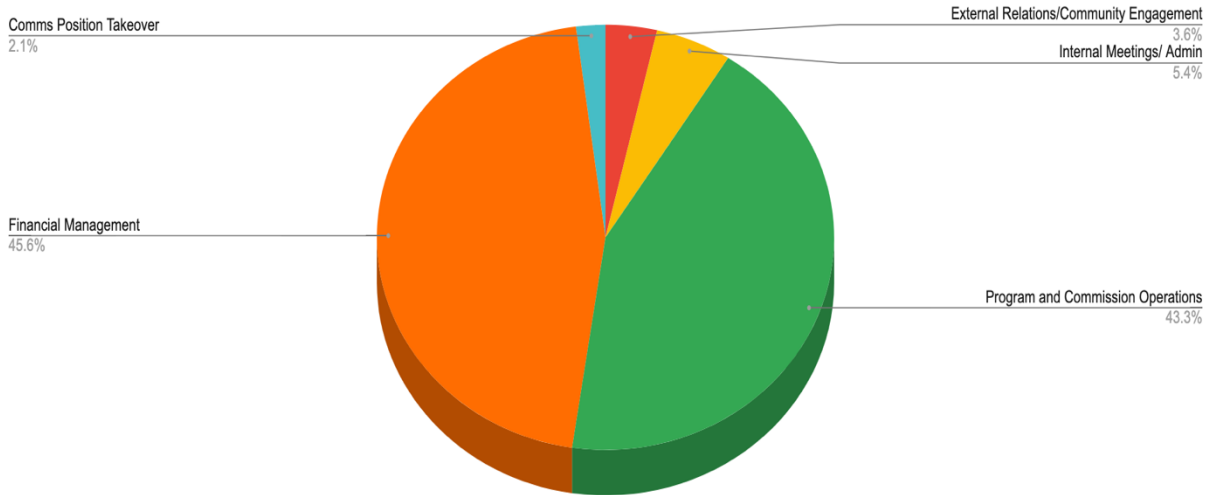


Figure 6 - Tasks and Duties Breakdown for Secretary Specialist

This position is the one referenced as the Commission Admin in this report. It is a permanent 1.0 FTE under the Commission headcount but shared with another office within the DOE because MCCS funding only covers 0.5 FTE. This limits the availability of administrative support to MCCS. There's a clear need for additional full-time administrative support as the current workload only allows minimum tasks to be completed each week with no spare capacity for emergencies or other work usually assigned to an administrative support role. With a schedule that splits the time 50/50 each week, the position also does not have consistency in the ability to respond to communications and tasks, which then requires other Commission staff to incorporate administrative tasks and duties into their work. The Task Force finds that funding must be secured to bring this position to full-time at the Commission and SOS noted it would not be tenable for the DOE and SOS to split a position.

Program Development and Training Officer

Program Development and Training Officer

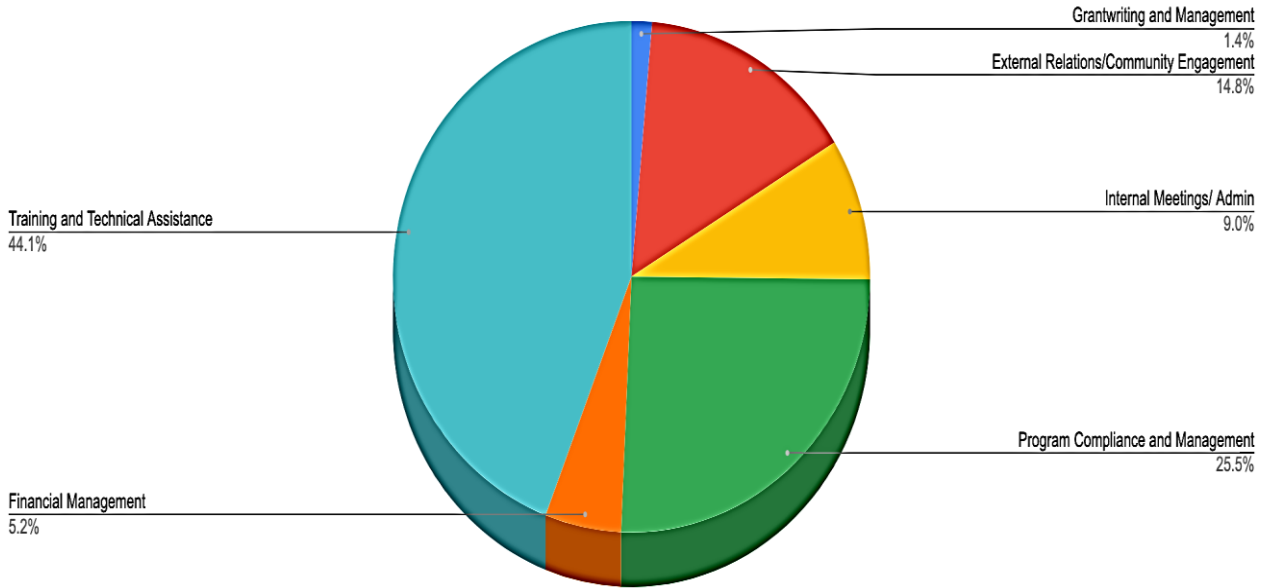


Figure 7 - Tasks and Duties for Program Development and Training Officer

This position leads overall AmeriCorps program development, training, and support. Community agencies that want to operate AmeriCorps programs work with this person to understand requirements, identify models to meet the identified need, and design a program that can be successful in a grant competition as well as ready to stand up within 13 weeks of an award. After grant awards are made, programs go to the Grants Officer to determine if they “can” do something (compliance), and they come to the Program Development and Training Officer to determine “how” they can do something within the regulations and design (coaching). This position is the single point of contact for planning grants and is focused on continuous improvement and coaching with programs.

Executive Director

Executive Director

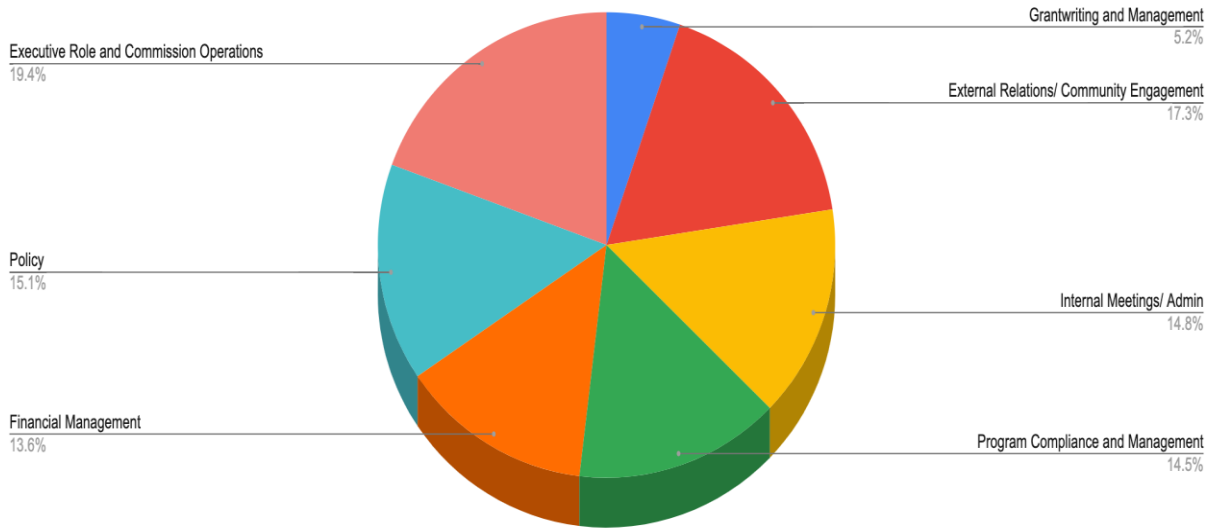


Figure 8 - Breakdown of Tasks and Duties for Executive Director

The current Executive Director role is primarily involved in all aspects of commission operations: federal and interstate relations, state interagency and elected leader relations, board support, communications, financial management, strategic planning, policy, staff supervision and assignments, and more. The position needs to be reclassified from Public Service Manager I, and the salary increased if moved into the Secretary of State’s office. The challenge will be finding the resources to support a higher salary and sustain it outside of the direct funding currently received from the Federal government. The current Executive Director is pivotal in integrating the Commission’s operations into the Department of Education. She serves as a key liaison with appropriate departments and agencies primarily to support financial management and executive administrative processes. She also brings a wealth of knowledge, having spent two decades in the role and within state government in Maine.

Findings

- I. Staff is reliant on the knowledge and expertise of the Executive Director and expressed feeling supported in their roles and responsibilities based upon the supervision they receive.
- II. With the expected retirement of the current Executive Director, the staff believes that the replacement's expertise and experience should prioritize Maine Government and Maine

knowledge over National Service and Volunteerism knowledge. There is concern and requests for further information on how the new role might look different in the SOS structure compared to the existing reporting and duties in DOE.

- III. All of the current staff believe that a move to SOS is an aligned and practical choice for the work of the Commission. They assume they will experience fewer challenges and administrative/financial barriers in SOS.
- IV. Every Commission staff role spends a significant amount of time on administrative and financial duties in the current operating structure. Administrative support is an area that needs additional capacity and resources. The current Admin role is part-time and shared with another DOE office so there is limited to no administrative support available daily to the Commission team. This creates a burden shared across the team when urgent tasks need to be addressed or individual duties require information from the Admin in order to be completed on time.
- V. Because MCCS receives a majority of its funding from federal grants, this has caused extreme uncertainty in the continuity of staff positions. A move to SOS must be supported by general fund support for finances, administrative services and the Executive Director position for ongoing sustainability and success of the Commission's work.

Appendix D. Assessment of Current Fiscal Agent Relationship

The correct next step for the commission is to transition out of the Department of Education. Though the original choice of the Department of Education after being part of the State Planning Office seemed like a logical one, several factors have made the operations of the Commission more difficult. This includes being a tiny program in a large agency with limited activity overlap.

While supporting volunteerism in schools is a shared goal, the DOE priorities and strategic plan are significantly different than the priorities and strategic goals of MCCS. The original thought was that the desire for a high level of volunteerism in schools would benefit by having the Commission within the DOE. However, school districts face unique challenges integrating volunteerism with AmeriCorps systems and grants due to their administrative burdens and staffing constraints. This has limited the opportunities for education agencies to access MCCS programs and funding.

The Commission's grants are significant for community agencies and the Commission but small within the context of federal funds DOE routinely deals with. MCCS funds also are subject to annual changes in federal requirements and grantees which makes the financial activity seem burdensome in comparison to grants to school districts. The grants administered by MCCS are considered small within the DOE, limiting DAFS's ability to invest a great deal of financial or administrative resources to support Commission staff in their grant oversight, reimbursement, and accounting. MCCS has significant federal grants management and compliance responsibilities that need support from a new fiscal agent.

The Commission's financial operations are deeply integrated with the DOE and both rely on the General Government Service Center for accounting and human resource functions. The Service Center does not provide financial analysts for the DOE which means the DOE has to directly staff and fund the work internally. The Service Center system and lack of available financial analyst support has caused challenges for the Commission with compiling financial reports, completing reimbursements to grantees, and filing federal financial reports. (The General Government Service Center is one of 5 Service Centers under the Division of Financial and Personnel Services in the Department of Administrative and Financial Services. Service Centers consolidate financial and human resource functions in support of 19 assigned agencies.)

The increased Federal ARP funds for education challenged the already-overburdened DOE financial systems to keep pace. However, even with all the current challenges in financial oversight and management, there are minor concerns about what unrecognized benefits would be lost in a transition to another agency. This is something that will need to be accounted for through the transition and underscores the requirement of a financial analyst at the Department of Secretary of State as a necessary component of a successful transition.

Appendix E. Findings: Independent Agencies

The task force conducted focused interviews and outreach with the Executive Directors of the Maine Arts Commission, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, and the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. These conversations focused on the benefits and disadvantages of operating as an independent agency within Maine. *Maine Arts Commission* operates under the Cultural Affairs Council with limited collaboration and a budget of over \$2 million. *Maine Historic Preservation Commission* transitioned and gained improved advocacy by becoming independent from the Department of Education, with a \$1.5 million budget. The newest independent agency is the *Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations*, with a budget of \$1.2 million.

During the interviews, it became apparent that agencies transitioning to independence must comprehend state Legislature dynamics and adapt roles for modern needs, such as emphasizing social media in marketing. They also need clear communication channels for accountability, as there is no option to lean on a more powerful or prominent agency to support and advocate for their needs within the state structures or systems. The autonomy of the independent agency provided more flexibility in decision-making and priorities but also created an additional administrative and capacity burden.

Budget constraints and cross-agency collaborations pose challenges for the *Maine Arts Commission* that could also be faced by MCCA if it were to operate as an independent agency. MCCA needs more funding opportunities and investment from the state, which would likely not increase if it were an independent agency. MCCA would also have increased administrative burdens, creating additional fiscal challenges. Getting agencies to understand the uniqueness of AmeriCorps and the federal grants that implement AmeriCorps legislation would not improve outside of a state agency, and more time and energy would be necessary to assure that MCCA

had access to the information and resources outside of their independent commission to meet state needs in programming and grantmaking.

The *Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations* faces hiring challenges and requires better operational resources, with a noted lack of legal services. These also would be issues that could impact the functional capacity of the Maine Commission for Community Service as an independent agency.

The hiring challenges that currently exist under the DAFS Bureau of Human Resources would be amplified if MCCS was totally independent because there would be no internal advocate. Most state systems, including access to legal, human resources, and financial support, were designed to be implemented and accessed through major state agencies. Independent commissions are sometimes left without answers as they exist outside of plans and operating policies for the systems they need.

Appendix F. Findings: Secretary of State

The DOE and SOS are considerably different in size. SOS is smaller, so the access to decision-makers, resources, and senior leadership would increase significantly for MCCA. Roles within the central office are well-defined, with the Deputy Secretary Policy Advisor overseeing legislative tasks, administrative rulemaking, and policies having impacts on the public; the Director of Finance and Administration overseeing financial aspects, and the Director of Communications overseeing high-level communications acting as the FOIA officer and handling public relations. Current infrastructure, such as the location MCCA operates from, pose challenges to a quick transition. These types of concerns must be defined before any move to SOS. The Commission's Public Information Officer role was vacant during the study's staff analysis portion. It will be essential to determine if the communications and public relations needs of MCCA can be incorporated into the existing strategies and structures within SOS.

The Division of Finance and Administration in SOS is understaffed, so significant capacity will be required to support a transition and grants management for the Commission. Concerns were raised about the staffing adjustments necessary, particularly a new financial analyst position and the recent retirement of the current accounting manager. At a minimum, this office would require at least two more FTEs—one additional person in the finance department, and .5 HR support and .5 Administrative support.

With the proposal to create a Deputy Secretary of State for Civic Engagement, a unique opportunity exists to align this role with the transition of the Commission to SOS. This position could oversee the commission's work and allow for a redistribution of resources and responsibilities currently within the Executive Director role. This would help to establish a more substantial footprint for MCCA within the SOS structure and operations and increase the capacity to serve more programs and communities.

Appendix G. Findings: Comparison of State Service Commissions

New Mexico

The research included an interview with the Executive Director of Serve New Mexico, David Chene. The commission in New Mexico has been through several state transitions and is a state with a high rural population and small nonprofit sector. Initially part of the Lieutenant Governor's Office, the commission moved to Children, Family, and Youth Development (CFYD) and later to the Department of Workforce Solutions. This last shift brought about challenges in integrating commission directors (board members) and aligning work despite the natural alignment of their objectives.

A major problem identified by the Executive Director was the knowledge gap within the department around national service and the exceptions for these federal grants, with an increased need for more understanding of the AmeriCorps cycle and requirements. Financial management is another concern, with the agency having a finance department, dedicated budget and grant analysts, and a high turnover in finance personnel. With the uniqueness of AmeriCorps, there are still gaps in financial expertise and reporting, leading to a desire for a grant officer position within Serve New Mexico.

Serve New Mexico oversees 11 programs, including one in public health. They face challenges with procurement due to outdated state rules and a lack of standard operating procedures at the Department of Workforce Solutions.

The commission, which moved from CYFD to the Department of Workforce Solutions seven years ago, historically reported to the Deputy Secretary but now reports directly to the Secretary. The commission operates with a high level of autonomy. It is no longer impacted by changes in administration, with the Director of Serve New Mexico no longer being a gubernatorial appointee.

New Jersey

The New Jersey Commission's transition from the Department of Education (DOE) to the Secretary of State brought significant operational changes. Initially a small program within the vast DOE, the commission found a better fit in the smaller Department of State. The better fit was partly due to the DOE's federal guidelines, which posed challenges in regulations and grantmaking for AmeriCorps. The transition allowed them to move from a grant and compliance-focused environment to a broader, more impactful one while retaining solid systems.

A key figure in this transition was the Assistant Secretary of State, who had been in the role for 30 years and took on the challenge of implementing the transition. The Governor's Office of Volunteerism, previously part of Human Services, also moved to the Secretary of State during this transition.

Key staff positions within the commission include the Executive Director (unclassified), AmeriCorps Administrator (classified and unionized), Deputy Director (unclassified), Program Officer, Jr. Program Officer, Recruitment Officer, Jr. Grants Officer, and Sr. Compliance Officer. The Executive Director oversees several initiatives including the MLK Commission, Hellenic Commission, Governor's Office of Volunteerism, and American Indian Commission.

The commission manages AmeriCorps Programs, the Volunteer Generation Fund, and the Public Health Corps. They've adapted to rely more on contracted hourly employees rather than state employees and benefit substantially from the Department of State's support, which includes providing staff for grants and allowing rent as match on the Commission administrative operating grant.

Financially, they face challenges with AmeriCorps rule changes and fiscal management, especially regarding the timing of member enrollment and grant periods which do not mesh with department operations. Despite these challenges, the commission has strong support from the Secretary of State and continues to advocate within the state to communicate with new administrations. The commission's operations now are more adaptable and better supported within the smaller, more flexible framework of the Department of State.

Georgia

The Georgia Commission oversees 21 programs, with each Program Officer handling 7-8 programs. Notably, the Executive Director directly manages all planning grants.

All Commission staff are involved in grant administration. A critical operational is the requirement for all programs to submit monthly financial reimbursements and the system is designed not to allow submissions if the previous one hasn't been approved. The commission has had to be very compliance-focused in managing their AmeriCorps granting due to limited financial support from the Department of Community Affairs and capacity and knowledge challenges due to high turnover in that department.

The commission benefits from using shared services such as legal, HR, and accounting support without the need for fundraising. However, it faces challenges from limited staff growth opportunities and an inability to offer salary increases.

Financially, the program is sustained and meets its federal operating grant match through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, housing grants, and a unique funding structure from Georgia Community Broadcasting (GCB). The GCB provides a 4:1 match on funds, amounting to \$3200. Additionally, it receives funds from General Revenue and collaborates with United Way and intermediary organizations to enhance the impact of its programs.

The organization is currently focusing on updating its Policies and Procedures Manual, and there is a need for new board members, who are all appointed by the Governor. Keeping these members engaged is also a priority. The commission faces high turnover, which presents challenges in maintaining consistent operations.