

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Tariq Khamisa Foundation, HOPE Works Mentoring Program	Application ID: 11AC125202
Below are the comments from each External Peer Reviewer that read and evaluated the application. While Reviewers did engage in discussion about their evaluations, consensus was not required as part of their review. Therefore, there may be differing views in their feedback on the quality of the proposal.	
<p>COMMENTS: The applicant describes 11 criteria for background but specific qualifications are not provided; only a general statement is provided that they are contained in position descriptions that are not a part of the application. The success of the first several years of this program in meeting its goals is evidence that it has created a plan that uses AmeriCorps members in positive ways in this community. The AmeriCorps members are involved at all levels of the community, from school events and classes to visits to the homes and community events involving the students. Being involved at so many levels, including evening and weekend hours will create a comprehensive experience for the AmeriCorps members that they can carry with them into other civic settings. Team building activities are used to promote positive experiences including participation in community service activities. Specific measurements are detailed by category of activity - needs and services, member development, and volunteer recruitment. The performance measures will be documented twice a year.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: The applicant presents a compelling case that an educational disconnect is one of the strongest predictors of youth violence, school failure, delinquency and gang involvement and presents detailed information demonstrating the need in each of the target communities. The proposed activities are clearly described and are structured to provide extensive support to the youth being mentored. The plan for recruiting members is well described and clearly states the skills that recruited members will possess. The applicant provides a detailed training plan that describes the topics that will be presented prior to members commencing their service. The supervision of members is described in detail. The applicant provides specific outcome measures that demonstrate the impact that the proposed activities will have on the identified problems within the target communities.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: This applicant shows a commitment to high quality training, appropriate materials, good understanding of the needs of children to have consistent adult involvement in their lives and a well-structured evaluation component to improve future efforts.</p>	

COMMENTS: (+) Applicant presents extensive data that documents the need for services and provides detailed data that documents the problems of youth violence, school failure, juvenile delinquency and gang involvement. (+) The characteristics, attributes and requirements for members which extend beyond specific educational or experiential criteria that is commonly used in job descriptions, and include items such as sensitivity to diversity, being a team player and problem solver and capable of effectively managing a stressful caseload is outstanding. This focus on "emotional" intelligence will yield a better prepared pool of candidates. (+) Applicant presents a comprehensive list of recruitment channels including college presentations and career fairs, flyers, and networking. Additionally, the applicant is putting an emphasis on recruiting within the neighborhoods where the mentoring projects are taking place. (+) The applicant is focused on adding diversity within their recruiting efforts - targeting members with second language capabilities, especially Spanish speakers as well as providing reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities. (+) All AmeriCorps members will receive initial high caliber orientation and ongoing training (specifically 10% of member service hours will go toward ongoing training). A detailed and thorough training plan and content is summarized in the grant application. (+) The utilization of AmeriCorps members will allow the applicant to offer hands on job training and engage young citizens in active civic participation. A more focused and condensed mentor to mentee model is available with the addition of the AmeriCorps members. (+) The program is organized to be a rich and rewarding experience for the AmeriCorps members. The activities are structured to insure meaningful connections between the members and the students they will work with through their homes visits, and school advocacy work. (+) The program is structured to support the AmeriCorps member retention. Stipends and allowances are provided to members. Additional benefits include health care benefits and mileage reimbursement. (+) Team building activities are conducted to build bonds among members and encourage team success, thus providing outlets for members to continue to learn and share. (+) The applicant has a solid track record (via current grant) and a 94.7% retention rate of members. (+) The applicant is experienced in providing the types of programs proposed in this grant request, having conducted more than 80,000 hours of mentoring in the past two years resulting in significant positive changes in the youth. (+) Specific and high quality measurable outcomes have been identified including commencement of youth/mentor matches, sustainability of mentor matches, improved school attendance and decreased disciplinary referrals. (+) The application draws the correlation between the risk factors for young people and the protective factors that contribute to resiliency including mentoring programs like the program being proposed and offered currently through their existing grant. (+) By utilizing AmeriCorps members, a more beneficial ratio of mentor to mentee can be implemented, resulting in richer relationships that can enhance significant and incremental improvement. In addition to the detailed performance outcomes, ongoing reports will be generated and ongoing evaluations will be performed. (+) Volunteer recruitment has been added to the program in order to maximize and leverage additional resources. Volunteer opportunities are plentiful and varied in order to capture a greater number of volunteers to assist in the work of the program. (+) Partnerships and collaborations (for example - San Diego Gang Commission, Crime Stoppers) have been developed that will likely enhance the functional outcomes of the program.

COMMENTS: The Applicant provides an excellent demographic description of the local communities to be served. San Diego is an urban city with an international border with Mexico, the population is ethnically diverse with a significant gang problem, and juvenile delinquency as assessed by arrests is the second highest

in the State. Escondido is a suburban city; the city has the highest violent crime rate among other cities in the Region and juvenile arrests have increased 24% in four years. National City likewise has a significant gang problem and rising juvenile arrests. The Applicant uses national and local data to make a persuasively compelling case that exposure to violence, gangs, and crime has a negative impact on academic achievement. Similar 2009 data regarding jurisdiction size, juvenile arrests, truancy rate, suspensions, free and reduced lunch, dropouts and safety survey are provided. Across the three communities truancy rate ranges from 16% to 49%. Middle schoolers surveyed report significant gang involvement and not feeling safe at school. The Applicant describes 11 characteristics for potential Members, but specific qualifications are not provided only a general statement that the necessary qualifications are contained in position descriptions that are not a part of the application. Additionally, the Applicant proposes to recruit Spanish speakers for a target community where Spanish speaking skills are needed. Additionally, the applicant plans to recruit Members from neighborhoods that the Applicant plans to serve. The Applicant's recruitment plan includes a multi-tiered selection process which includes a two-hour screening session, interviews and criminal background clearance. The training plan is well developed, extremely detailed and appropriate for Member activities. The supervision plan is adequate to provide support for the Members. Supervision includes monthly team meetings, school site visits and performance evaluations. The Members benefit from team building activities used to promote positive experiences including participation in community service activities throughout the service year. In further support of the Members, those Members returning for a second year are given a 15% increase in their stipend as well as a full-time Members receive health benefits. The Applicant makes a compelling case that AmeriCorps Members as opposed to any other group of volunteers are well suited to impact the identified problem in the community. Members can be flexible, capable of responding to volatile situations and skilled at structuring interventions. AmeriCorps Members create opportunities to engage youth that has a long range positive impact. The Applicant proposes activities to clearly address the compelling needs of academic support and positive adult connection with the youth. The Applicant details specific performance measures to include 490 youth/mentor matches; 80% of matches will be sustained for 60 hours; 70% of mentored youth will have improved school attendance and 70% of mentored youth will have decreased disciplinary referrals. Additionally, Applicant persuasively plans to provide 110 hours of training to full time Members and 80 hours to part time Members. Volunteer recruitment will be measured as well to include 77 volunteers providing 700 hours of service.