

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Duluth Public Schools, Minnesota Alliance with Youth Promise Fellows	Application ID: 11ES124479
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: This application used recent and relevant data to show that graduation rates were non-sufficient in Minnesota, especially among racial minorities and students with low socio-economic status. The description of the training was extensive with other ninety hours of training including the pre-service institute, monthly trainings and professional growth. This dedication to training was important in showing the commitment to the AmeriCorps members. Also very important was the sustainability plan and the diversity of funding.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: The applicant presents a compelling case that school drop-out rates are high and that there are clear identifiers that exist as early as middle school. Further, the applicant links the problem to 217 schools in Minnesota based on their reported drop-out rates. Proposed activities clearly address the needs of students identified and the applicant provides a rationale for the need of AmeriCorps members to address the problem.</p> <p>The applicant describes the qualifications of the members to be sought and this is in direct relationship to the responsibilities of the members in the project. The training appears extensive and relevant with data being presented that 96% of previous members agreed that the training prepared them for their positions.</p> <p>Although the training appears extensive, it seems to have missed one aspect that could be important and that is training around age appropriate strategies for 6th to 10th graders. Supervision does not appear adequate in that it is only provided at the host site and not beyond this by the Alliance. The applicant clearly provides opportunities for members to experience a powerful service experience leading to the possibility of continued civic participation. The applicant provides meaningful measures of performance directly related to the areas that members are to address: improved academic performance, school attendance, and behavioral. The applicant did not provide performance data from the previous program when it used 80 members to implement the drop-out prevention program, making it difficult to assess whether or not this program is successful.</p>	

COMMENTS:

(+) The Project details, evidences and addresses a problem, by providing a thorough, detailed response to all of the information requested. The Applicant provides a clear and highly compelling description of how the proposed activities will achieve the anticipated results, supporting ideas and objectives with comprehensive plans explaining and connecting ideas to objectives.

COMMENTS: (+) The application discusses alarming evidence of the identified problem in the target community, highlighting the fact that 82% of White students graduate from high school while numbers of non-whites approach numbers nearly as high for those that don't graduate. The achievement gap is exacerbated by the scores of Whites that leave the ailing public school system.

(+)The applicant is confident about their ability to recruit qualified members for an expanded corps (in 2010, they had over 600 applicants for 80 positions) and expresses reasonable criteria to ensure the members will have appropriate backgrounds, qualifications and skills to success.

(+)The application provides ample evidence that the program will provide AmeriCorps members a powerful service experience that leads to continued engagement in active civic participation. Members will have access to pro bono coaching and training from "AmeriCoach" a Statewide nonprofit that helps members use their year of service as a time of deep reflection on what they can contribute through civic engagement. Each member can be matched with a professional coach for bi-weekly phone calls to identify their passion and purpose for life, and solidify plans to make their vision a reality.

(+) The applicant makes a case that engaging 300 full-time members (expanded from 80) to fill in the gaps where school have limited resources, will avail the potential for each member to assist at least 30 youth that are possibly on a track to dropping out of high school. The members will serve 9,000 youth each year and over a three year period, reach at least one-third of the 6th - 10th graders in Minnesota who are not on track to graduate.

(+) The applicant performed an aggressive search for an effective model to use in planning activities in which members will engage to effect a measurable impact on the identified problems. The applicant identified the Diplomas Now program as a successful model to implement. Activities will include effective measures, such as providing attendance coaching and monitoring students for truancy to increase attendance.

(-) The applicant did not discuss data related to the previous AmeriCorps program administered by the organization.

(-) The applicant did not provide pertinent information about the Diplomas Now model that will be used.