

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Dane County Human Services, Partners for After-School Success	Application ID: 11AC123139

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.

COMMENTS: (+) The applicant states that the program will respond to problems in the education focus area by placing AmeriCorps members at 23 school and community based host sites in predominantly low-income or resource scarce communities. The program will address the educational needs of middle and high school youth through tutoring and after school programming. Identified problems include county student engagement and academic performance data. For example, the program will address student engagement/habitual truancy; during the 2008-2009 school year, 4% of one school district's middle school and 15% of high school students were habitually truant (absent without an acceptable excuse for part or all of five or more days during a semester). Evidence is also provided clearly demonstrating that habitual truancy rates are significantly higher for students of color. (+) The applicant uses reading proficiency scores from the state proficiency tests across all county school districts to clearly demonstrate that academic achievement is directly impacted by poverty. (-) The applicant proposes to provide reading and math tutoring. However, they only address need and outcomes for reading proficiency. (+) The applicant will effectively recruit 35 full-time AmeriCorps members to address the academic and after school programming needs at host sites. (+) The applicant has a comprehensive training plan starting with a four day orientation and continuing throughout the year. Members will meet weekly for three hours of training with the director. Additional training will include hands-on training with host site and Red Cross Disaster Preparedness training. (+) Each member will be adequately supervised with a host-site supervisor. Supervisors will be experienced youth workers trained in AmeriCorps and program policies, protocols and activities. The program director will regularly communicate with supervisors to ensure a supportive member experience and compliance with AmeriCorps rules and reporting deadlines. (-) The applicant does not clearly describe the academic requirements of applicants. (-) The proposal does not clearly designate who selects or hires participants or who tracks and evaluates their participation. (+) The program provides training, activities and weekly supervision that is all clearly designed to keep members on track and invested in active civic participation. For example, members assist in all phases of volunteer recruitment, management and recognition, and become more involved as their term progresses. (+) The applicant will effectively use AmeriCorps members and volunteers to continue the successful activities of the current program to serve middle and high school youth who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing academic achievement problems. Out of 700 students served, 99% passed on to the next grade and 63% maintained or increased their GPA. (-) Math and/or

reading tutoring curriculum or strategies are not clearly described or demonstrated to be research-based. Details on how to raise performance to 100% using new or improved strategies were not described. (+) The applicant clearly identifies and documents targeted community needs such as low academic achievement and poor student engagement. (+) The applicant has proposed effective solutions to meet identified needs. For example, teachers will identify students in need of tutoring based on grade, test scores and classroom performance and AmeriCorps members will provide research based tutoring services to middle and high school youth. (+) The applicant uses the success of the current program to demonstrate AmeriCorps members are particularly well-suited to deliver the solution. (+) The applicant clearly outlines anticipated outcomes related to the needs and proposed activities. For example, at the end of each year of the grant, youth who participate in the program will demonstrate improved school engagement measured by school attendance and improved academic performance measured by reading ability. (-) The applicant does not identify any modifications for the new program based on past experience. Additional details were not provided about current program success in order to determine the effectiveness of this plan of action. It is not clear that the program has any new strategies or enhancements.

COMMENTS: The applicant offers a compelling case for implementing the project based on the poverty rate of participants, truancy rates among middle and high school students and academic performance on state proficiency tests among economically disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students. However, the applicant does not provide definitive data that clearly defines how the problem was chosen. The only references cited relative to selection of the problem is from comments made by two political leaders. The applicant outlines a specific training timeframe with supporting activities that participants will be engaged in as noted by a focus AmeriCorps rules, site responsibilities, professionalism and team building. All activities are commensurate with the needs of the project and the intended purposes of the grant. Other noted highlights of the training plan include weekly meetings with the project director, and continuous professional development from October to May. Through the identification and selection of outcomes measures, the applicant has aligned the project with the needs of youth within the target communities. Identifying a full-time member for selected sites who will work in conjunction with teachers during the academic school day and after school programming denotes a project that has the potential of meet the needs of participants.

COMMENTS: (+) The applicant proposed effective solutions to meet identified needs using teachers to identify students to be served via grades, test scores and class performance. (+) The intervention strategies used by the Members were research based. (+) Professional training provides Members immediate benefits in hands-on experience and long term benefits for potential careers in service oriented fields. (+) An exit survey is conducted to evaluate success and develop strategies for improvement. (-) Insufficient evidence is provided to demonstrate that the program partners utilize the program design, materials and resources in a continuum of service to participants after the year of implementation with PASS. The end result is a lack of clarity that the problem is actually effectively being addressed. (-) Insufficient data is provided for the proposed summer program activities.

COMMENTS: (+) It is clear that the additional use of AmeriCorps members will impact this program. For example, the additional AmeriCorps members will enhance the capacity of host sites located in low income, rural and ethnically diverse communities to serve students that would not receive support. (+) The applicant provides significant evidence that volunteers will support the community service projects. They include an example, such as 300 volunteers delivered food baskets. The applicant has included specific measurements for their outcome performance measures. For example, they include the output of 35 members who will provide ongoing after school programming to 5400 youth over the three year grant cycle. This will be tracked using attendance logs and school attendance data. (-) The applicant is proposing to address educational issues in their county. They do not include verification of students attaining GED's or a diploma. The applicant does not include detailed information on their annual review. (-) Very little data is included on the amount of increased time or educational improvements the additional 35 staff members will provide. No evidence is included as to why 35 additional staff is required to supplement their current program.