

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Institute for the Study & Practice of Nonviolence, NONVIOLENCE PROJECT	Application ID: 11AC124451
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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 offers valid and relevant local and state data on contemporary safety and security issues facing the communities targeted, such as the number of gun-related hospitalizations, assault and/or weapons offenses committed by juveniles and results of a recent internal survey. (+) The applicant introduces a recruitment strategy targeted at 18 to 24 year old who have experience in working with grieving or traumatized individuals and other team-oriented skills. By way of funding, the applicant also seeks to hire a dedicated staff person to aid in the evaluation of members. (-) It is unclear if the applicant seeks to target gang-related violence as its identified problem or youth violence in general within the areas serviced by the agency. (-) The applicant neglects to provide demographic information beyond blanket labels as evidence by the repeated usage of “Latino,” “Asian” or “Southeast Asian” residents. It is unclear if where in this region of the world that these residents are from and how any efforts to engage members of these communities would be structured. (-) Although the applicant explains the routes of supervision per cohort, the applicant neglects to include information about how often would members be supervised and/or member experience be evaluated in order to ensure continued member development and involvement in the communities to be serviced, respectively. (-) The applicant neglects to indicate how the experiences of members would be validated throughout the service period (ex. biannual and annual service rewards). (-) The applicant does not make a sufficient enough case for engagement of members to work with the communities targeted, including any potential connections to age, personal experience or ethnic origin of these communities (ex-gang members and potential gang member recruits) and the members themselves.

COMMENTS: Residents are seen as transient with over 25% of students changing schools each year which has a negative influence on the community and may be indirectly responsible for the high amount of youth violence resulting in 349 juveniles being arrested for assault and other weapons offenses in 2008. There were also 46 gun related hospitalizations and 22 deaths among youths in the target areas in 2010. The applicant proposes to directly address youth violence in the distressed communities. The amounts of positive role models in the lives of the youths in the targeted communities are limited. Thus, the applicant intends to use the AmeriCorps members to help reach some of the hardest to reach high risk youth in the city. Highly trained AmeriCorps members will use a nonviolent approach to facilitate discussions and mediations

between community residents to address violent related behavior and plan alternative programming such as school-wide events and role modeling the nonviolent lifestyle.

COMMENTS: +The applicant provides some data on the community needs, providing evidence of youth community risk factors, as defined by the CDC. Factors such as poverty level, juvenile crime data, gang involvement and transiency, demonstrate a need to impact on positive options for youth within the target community. The applicant describes a strong recruitment process designed to reach a diverse pool of AmeriCorps applicants. The training and orientation plan is detailed and comprehensive. A unique feature of Member training will be monthly exchanges with other organizations. The program model, with a focus on nonviolence training and conflict resolution, is likely to impact on Members' commitment to and engagement in ongoing civic participation. Conflict resolution skill attainment is transformative, resulting in different skills to resolve issues. These skills frequently carry over into daily life on an ongoing basis. Members will potentially utilize those skills in a variety of settings in the future. The applicant clearly identified the service slots for Members, including roles within three teams impacting on Schools, Community and Youth Opportunity. Together, the teams represent a comprehensive systemic approach that is likely to have an impact on violence reduction efforts.-The applicant does not explicitly address how the program will impact on Members' ongoing civic participation during and after the completion of service. The applicant does not identify quantifiable measures for a majority of the outcomes identified. It is not clear how success will be measured.

COMMENTS: The applicant presents convincing evidence from different sources of the existence of the problem of youth/gang violence in the city of Providence RI despite a decline in homicides over the past 5 or so years. Evidence includes statistics from the police department about gang membership and activity, the Kids Count Fact book about gun-related hospitalizations and deaths by firearms, and the city's ranking as 84th out of 239 large cities for homicides. The applicant indicates other communities that it plans to target but provides no evidence of the identified problem in those areas (Pawtucket, Newport).The applicant identifies qualifications, experiences, and perspectives for AmeriCorps members that will be critical to ensuring impact in the community, including experience or interest in working with grieving or traumatized victims and offenders, backgrounds similar to that of the target community, commitment to its mission, and ability to work in a team environment. The connections that the applicant has maintained with former participants will be especially helpful in recruiting AmeriCorps members that have relevant experience, motivation, and appreciation for the applicant's approach to reducing gang violence. The applicant describes an intensive orientation and training program that will help ensure that members are able to take on the roles and responsibilities of the assigned program components. Although the applicant describes in adequate detail how supervisors will interact and receive professional development, the description of how AmeriCorps members will be supervised is vague and, at monthly intervals, unlikely to be adequate to ensure critical monitoring and improvement of individual member performance. Although continued engagement in civic participation should be enhanced by the applicant's provision of weekly professional development and reflection sessions to help AmeriCorps members better understand the meaning of service and gain skills that will be useful beyond service, the applicant does not explicitly address this critical aspect of the AmeriCorps experience. The applicant presents a compelling case that AmeriCorps will greatly enhance its ability to address the community problem of gang violence by enabling it to offer employment opportunities to youth

who have been through the applicant's programs and by supplementing its existing programs and services in schools and the community. Having former participants and former gang members engaged in the effort will be especially critical to the success of the effort. The applicant provides clear, detailed descriptions of activities in which AmeriCorps members will engage and how these activities will supplement or complement other programs and services that the applicant provides to reduce youth and gang violence. For the school component of its proposed program, the applicant identifies educational outcomes that activities of members will help achieve, such as lower disciplinary rates and violence in targeted schools. The applicant presents little evaluative information on its Choose Peace Project, a program that has been in existence seven years and that will be a key activity in which AmeriCorps members engage under the school component of the proposed program. The applicant focuses its description of impacts that activities of AmeriCorps members in the community component on process and it is unclear as to why the applicant does not or considers it inappropriate to address community impact as it did with the school component. For the issue of youth/gang violence, the applicant aptly describes each of the major elements of its program and connects each in a logical flow. This begins with the extent to which youth/gang violence is a problem in the target communities and how the problem can be effectively addressed through the proposed roles for AmeriCorps members and volunteers. Such roles and responsibilities are designed to help bring about culture change in schools and communities to promote nonviolent resolution of conflicts and to provide opportunities for young people as alternatives to negative choices. The applicant does not clearly describe the problem(s) that the Youth Opportunities component is designed to address in that all of its focus in the Statement of Need is on youth violence.

COMMENTS: (+) The applicant presents a compelling community need, although data are not presented for all of the proposed service areas. Planned activities are appropriately targeted to address these needs and build on the organization's success in addressing youth violence. (+) The organization has relationships in the community that will be an asset in recruiting a diverse corps and recognizes the opportunity to promote AmeriCorps enrollment as a "next step" for youth who have been involved in the organization's programming and are ready to assume a leadership role in the community. The applicant has a range of internal and external resources that can be applied to member training and had a sound training plan that includes pre-service training, shadowing, field trips, and monthly professional development and reflection sessions. (-) The applicant does not adequately explain a screening and selection process that will enable them to assess each candidate's suitability for the program. The only mention of concrete supervisory structure indicates that each member will meet with their respective supervisor on a monthly basis and attend monthly all-staff meetings. There is no information included about on-site supervisory availability. The applicant does not address how members' continued civic engagement will be encouraged or supported, or specific programmatic elements that will promote it. (+) The applicant cites indicators of past success and community recognition as validation of its approach and sees AmeriCorps as a means of expanding capacity and providing more intensive service to at-risk youth. (+) The applicant cites indicators of past success (reduction in levels of violence client satisfaction, self-reported learning of targeted skills) and community recognition as validation of its approach and sees AmeriCorps as a means of expanding capacity and providing more intensive service to at-risk youth. (-) The applicant's explanation of projected outcomes for the school team could be clearer. The intent of lowering disciplinary rates is vague due to no baseline data being provided in the needs statement and no targeted degree of improvement specified. It is not specified how the goal of 80% of the students exhibiting evidence of attitude or behavior change would be measured. Similarly, the targeted degree of change is not specified for the community team's outcomes of increased time between violent

incidents, increase in number of mediations, more community-led events, and more family participation.