

**APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design**

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

<p><b>Legal Applicant:</b> <b>Project Transformation</b></p>	<p><b>Application ID:</b> <b>11AC125622</b></p>
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<p><b>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.</b></p>	
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<p><b>COMMENTS:</b> The application contains excellent evidence supporting the identification of a problem that will be addressed, but lacked additional evidence on measuring the impact of reading. The application does not demonstrate that any improvement was the result of the members’ involvement.</p>	
<p><b>COMMENTS:</b> The applicant provides substantial data that academic underachievement is linked to economically disadvantaged students and that these students advance their education at rates consistently lower than more economically affluent students and links this to the 9 targeted communities. Data was also offered that indicates the lack of summer learning opportunities for low-income students contributes to a reading gap between low and higher income students.</p> <p>The applicant identified 5 different methods for recruiting members, including outreach of former members in 35 states, contacting colleges and churches, seeking applicants from neighborhoods to be served, researching Internet sites for college internships and registering on the CNCS's on-line recruiting tool. Members receive a week of training covering multiple relevant topics. Weekly training's occur throughout the school year specifically addressing educational issues, e.g. nutrition, closing the achievement gap, and individual student needs. Members also reflect on their community service and civic engagement during these training's. Members are supervised by a trained employee on site, who interacts with the site coordinator (a member) and partner organizations. The applicant's director of programming and leadership development and the staff supervisors for the site support the site coordinator. However, the applicant does not describe the type of individual (background, qualifications or skills) they are looking to become members.</p> <p>Members will collaborate with members from other AmeriCorps agencies generating group projects, and developing an understanding that they are part of a national service movement. Members have opportunities to reflect on their service. Members collaborate with members from other AmeriCorps agencies generating group projects, and developing an understanding that they are part of a national service movement. Although members who are engaged in the after -school program are experiencing a significant service to students, it is unclear if members participating in the day camp program are as well. The primary method for measuring members’ involvement impacting the compelling need is by evaluating improved homework completion rates, increased grade performance in math, decreased grade retention, as well as attendance and program</p>	

completion. The applicant did not provide a means to identify if the students improved in reading, leading to a closing of the achievement gap between students from low-income and higher-income families. The applicant is not measuring the retention of reading skills over the summer as part of the day camp program but is only measuring if there is an increase in interest in reading.

**COMMENTS:** The Project details, evidences and addresses a problem, going beyond what was requested 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. Clear description of past and future paint a picture of a believable and impressive project.

**COMMENTS:** (+) The application provides sufficient data to indicate the need for services to remedy low academic achievement in the service area. The applicant presents 2000 Census data demonstrating high rates of poverty, single parent headed households, dropout rates and extreme numbers of limited English proficiency (LED) students in the service area (61%).

(-) The application includes a very vague discussion about individuals that will be recruited, and no selection process is described. For example, reading volunteers will be recruited from area churches, businesses and local organizations but detailed information related to qualifications and skills is not discussed.

(+) The application clearly indicates that training will be a priority for members. Training and orientation activities must be completed prior to a member's entrance into the field. Training will be provided by board members, educators, the local After School Network, and the area food bank as well as the director of programming and leadership.

(+) The application provides evidence that the AmeriCorps model has inspired beneficiaries to pursue posts as AmeriCorps volunteers and AmeriCorps members and alumni are offered opportunities to contribute to the applicant organization's program design and implementation; serve on the board; become staff members and donors; and become linked with partners for support and financial assistance. Members also have ample occasions to reflect on the benefits of their service activities and group service projects provide opportunities to share experiences with other area members.

(-) The application does not present a clear plan of engagement for the members nor is there discussion about the numbers of members needed to fill slots. The application merely indicates that the applicant organization expects to recruit a total of 1,200 volunteers each year, providing a minimum of 3,000 service hours.

(+) The target to provide at least 800 participants with individualized reading support is well suited to a corps of 1200 members that will read, one-on-one, with students.

(-) The expected impact of the reading program is largely qualitative (increased interest in reading) and does not provide any indication that students will actually read more or increase reading levels.

(+/-) Though the applicant expresses clear need for services in the target area, the application is not clear as it relates to the solutions that will be carried out by AmeriCorps members and volunteers. The application also lacks a clearly stated case for ways in which members are particularly well-suited to deliver the solutions. Some outcomes stated in the application lack strength as it relates to impact on the target population.