

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Brown University, College Guides Program	Application ID: 11AC125709
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 was very thorough in identifying the problem and supporting their statements. The training plan for AmeriCorps members was descriptive showing a strong dedication to the members, but did not provide a large balanced of information describing the exact qualities sought in an AmeriCorps member such as good communication skills, or prior knowledge of college admission processes.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: The applicant presents a compelling case that low-income, first generation students who have the potential to attend college, living in urban areas are less likely to attend college, or graduate from college. The applicant presents multiple pieces of data that supports this in the targeted communities. Staff examined local data for high school graduation, poverty and parental educational attainment and confirmed the need exists in Rhode Island urban districts for College Advising Corps. The recruitment process is clear and relevant to the problem to be addressed. Individuals are sought who can present themselves as role models, in that the applicant seeks out first generation college student groups and all full time members are college graduates. The training is comprehensive and definitely addresses what members need to know and be able to do to assist the targeted population. The applicant describes a well-defined system of supervision.</p> <p>The implementation of the activities is of concern since the applicant did not describe how members will identify students who are low-income, first generation students who are capable and qualified to attend college but are at the greatest risk of not attending college. Allowing members to look at transcripts is not sufficient enough to make these decisions. One full time member is assigned to CCRI. It is unclear how that individual will support successful transition into college, help students persist in their studies and ultimately assist them in graduating or transferring to a 4 year institution. The applicant presents multiple measures for evaluating the success of the program.</p> <p>Impressively, the applicant indicates that the provision of a CAC adviser in the past has increased the likelihood of students attending college (over 14%) when compared to students who did not receive a CAC adviser.</p>	

COMMENTS: There were many major and minor strengths identified in this application; and minor weaknesses identified.

(+) There is a very high probability and confidence that the requirements will be met and exceeded. The Project clearly 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.

(-) Additional information is needed regarding how the Applicant plans to identify and recruit students to be served by AmeriCorps Members.

COMMENTS: (+) The application provides ample evidence that the identified problem exists in the targeted community, citing high poverty rates and low percentages of high school students that apply for and attend college. (+) The applicant makes special note of disadvantaged students that are high-achieving and well qualified to continue their education beyond high school but do not consider attending a four-year college or if they indicated plans to apply, nevertheless, fail to do so. (+) The application includes a thorough discussion related to recruitment and selection of members such that members will have the appropriate backgrounds, qualifications and skills to succeed. Members are recruited directly from area colleges and universities. Partnerships with the career development centers enable the organization to host on-campus information sessions and promote full-time Member positions through a variety of media. (+) Full-time Members receive at least four weeks of Pre-Service Training (PST), including one week with the National College Advising Corps partners. Training topics include how to serve urban districts; strengthening knowledge of local communities, partner schools and districts; and the practice of college advising. (+) The application provides substantial evidence that the program will provide members with powerful service experiences that will lead to continued engagement in active civic participation: Pre-Service Training, which provides members with the skills they need to effectively perform their service and develop identity as AmeriCorps members; site orientation and training, which orient them to their high school/community-based service sites and provide them with specific information about the school, local community and student body; and weekly Learning Community meetings, which provide a format for regular reflection, training, feedback, evaluation and the development of esprit de corps. (+) The applicant cites the national student-to-guidance counselor ratio of 467:1 to make a case that engaging members is a highly effective means of solving the identified problem of low college attendance. The application notes that the average student spends 20 minutes per year talking to his or her counselor -- including time on the range of non-college-related issues such as scheduling, with low-income and first-generation students being particularly underserved. The deployment of 12 full time members to narrow the advisement gap is expected to increase awareness, preparation and college-going disposition of students.

(-) The applicant did not discuss a plan for identifying low income candidates for the program. (+) Activities in which AmeriCorps members and volunteers will engage are expected to have a significant and measurable impact on the identified community problem of low college access. A recent evaluation showed that students and the organization's partner schools were 14.4% more likely to attend college compared to students that were not involved in programs with Corps members. (+) The application evidences reasonable, quantifiable

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outcomes indicating expected increases in the number of low-income, first-generation high school students entering and completing higher education. (+) The application does a thorough job of linking need to project activities, which are expected to produce intended results, and the holistic picture for the program indicates a well-thought out design. The applicant provides a thorough justification for proposed activities that are expected to address the identified problem of low college attendance. Activities such as College Club and awareness efforts are designed to facilitate increases in college attendance similar to those in the previous year (a 14.4% increase).

Finally, the application includes a thorough discussion related to recruitment and selection of members such that members will have the appropriate backgrounds, qualifications and skills to succeed.