

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: University of Maryland, Baltimore County, The Choice Programs, UMBC EAP	Application ID: 11ED123277
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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 proposes an alternative-to-incarceration program whose likelihood for successfully addressing the identified problem of juvenile delinquency and court involvement is aided by a program design that engages AmeriCorps members, many still youth themselves, in providing a meaningful relationship for court-involved youth through activities and volunteers that address the youth’s community integration and vocational skill development. The overall program design is well-aligned and the described outcomes support effective measurement of progress toward the program’s ultimate goal of reduced recidivism. The program has exceeded its previous years’ target outcomes and performance measures and has been replicated, lending some amount of confidence that the program is a successful use of AmeriCorps members to effect community change and involve community volunteers toward accomplishment of the program goals. Member training, orientation and supervision are strengths in this proposal. The applicant provides a thorough schedule and plan for member training and orientation with relevant topics during the service year to ensure member success in their service work. Additionally, experienced members accompany new members for the first two weeks of the member’s work in the community before that new member is allowed to “go solo.” Even before being selected and beginning their training, potential members spend an evening shadowing current members to provide that candidate a hands-on experience of what the service opportunity would be like. Such a first-hand glimpse of the program is likely to allow candidates to self-select out of consideration or to feel fully informed of the commitment and, perhaps, more invested in their participation. The applicant presents an intense role for members but offers a comprehensive plan for supervision and close guidance by their Service Coordinators, who meet with them individually and in teams more than once a day; about 50% of the current Service Coordinators are themselves past Choice AmeriCorps members and are thus uniquely situated to supervise the members as they have first-hand knowledge of the experience of serving in the program. The applicant does not provide details on member selection, and this is a significant weakness in the proposal. Given the intensity of the members’ service in this program, the process for ensuring qualified and skilled members is an unfortunate omission, as this has a direct impact on assessing the program’s likelihood for successful member retention and community impact. Also significant: member schedules are hinted at but not clearly addressed. Members work on teams of 3 to provide caseload management to 30 youth, "facilitating 24-7 crisis response and evening and weekend services." Members' schedules and workload management are not made clear in the proposal, and this type of intensive work may leave little time for members’ own personal development or psychological well-being. The applicant does not

offer satisfactory plans to encourage members to practice self-care or engage in self-growth activities. The applicant also does not state how boundaries on members' time will be respected, and while the member is well-supported in his/her activities, the applicant does not establish if and when members have "down" time, which would seem important to prevent burnout and encourage program completion / member retention. While volunteer roles and activities are delineated, members' activities related to volunteer recruitment and generation are not detailed. It is difficult to assess the incorporation of this component of the AmeriCorps model without information on members' role in volunteer management or the number of volunteers that members are expected to recruit/oversee. Additionally, members and volunteers serving with the program engage in activities related to assisting the youth in meeting probation requirements, navigating the court system, advocating for them in accessing resources, and checking up on them to ensure they are remaining out of trouble. Unfortunately, the applicant has not provided evidence for how such activities and interventions address the problem of juvenile incarceration and court involvement; while it is a logical link, the applicant does not explicitly offer research-based evidence in support of the efficacy of such activities in reducing recidivism or juvenile delinquency. Finally, given the program's long existence, the applicant's omission of long-term data was notable and would have offered a strong measure of the program's efficacy. For instance, longitudinal studies on the youth who had been involved in the program were not mentioned and weakened the applicant's argument for the strength of its program in addressing the identified community problems.

COMMENTS: The problem addressed in the application is one that is in the forefront of the nation's consciousness. The application speaks to all of the required sections of the proposal. Current sources are not cited for all data included in the application. Insufficient attention was given all communities the application proposes to involve. Each element within each section of the application was not fully addressed. The application does not provide sufficient evidence of the problem the applicant is proposing to address exists in each included community.

COMMENTS: For the most part, Applicant has done a very good job on this proposal. There were many strong aspects in the presentation and program design, including (but not limited to) the extensive training, supervision and supports, the initial tracking experience, the two-week tracking, mentorship by an experienced senior peer, structured reflection activities, teamwork and short-term successes reported. The proposal did not utilize commonly known data resources to reference the problem/need (juvenile justice department, local service providers, long-term study outcomes, census data, city and county) The one referenced source was outdated (2002); if it was still relevant, that should have been discussed. The proposal did not include evidence-based practices, theory, research, etc. to support the Problem/Need section.. The qualifications for the project and targeted recruitment, interview and other "hiring" practices that would evidence an understanding that the members selected were well-suited for the project was not included This project seems like a very intensive case-management program. The proposal did not provide sufficient evidence that AmeriCorps or Vista volunteers have been successful in the past (retention or attrition data and supporting reasons). The presentations of service days and volunteer generation were much too vague for an AmeriCorps program; these are key components. Details of how service plans will be established and managed, the role/s of the youth/s and case manager/s, numbers of methods for generating volunteers and numbers of those who continued engagement as a result of their participation were not included. Short term

data sets of outcomes regarding youth who stay in their communities are presented, but there is no-long term data to support that this program offers long-term community solutions to deter juvenile delinquency.

COMMENTS: Supporting data to demonstrate the problems in the targeted communities was somewhat outdated. Also, this organization has run this program for a long period of time, however no current data was presented. The applicant describes a good program, however some details were lacking that weakened this proposal. This program is described to be very intense as members will be available 24/7. Due to lack of details to inform as to a proposed scheduled, it was unclear what downtime the members would have. With such long hours, this may pose burn out and possibly affect member retention. While training is provided, there was nothing suggesting training on self-care for members. Applicant does not include a solid system for measuring outcomes. There was nothing stated as to how recidivism rates in communities would be measured to determine program's success. There were, however other good information in the Program Design but some key elements were lacking to make this a strong proposal.