

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Minnesota Council on Crime and Justice, Veterans for Veterans' Justice	Application ID: 11ND124851
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: This is a very well written proposal with a clearly defined target population. The training plan and program activities are designed to prepare a participant for success. The proposed organizational structure for the Veterans for Veterans' Justice program provides a robust set of entities for recruitment, training, supervision and program activities. The program will focus its recruitment efforts on veterans who understand the factors that may be influencing other veterans who are involved with the criminal justice system. While the program is designed to prepare its participants for individual success, it does not directly address outside influences that may hinder that success, such as employer attitudes about veterans with criminal records. The program cites evidence that similar programs have been successful.	
COMMENTS: I believe this program would work. However, the application lacks specific goals and ways of obtaining those goals. There is little information regarding how this program will work and how effective this particular program will be. There is also a lack of information regarding how the targeted veterans will succeed after release and how the program will continue to help them.	
COMMENTS: This is a unique approach to the identified problem within targeted area. The applicant demonstrated a compelling need and is proposing to address a problem in a way that is not being performed in any other state. The applicant demonstrated and provided a highly probable successful strategy to address veterans within the criminal justice system. The applicant illustrated support from both identified states and from the target area Judges. In my professional experiences, as a former Deputy Superintendent, the Strategic Planner for the Indiana Department of Corrections, and the former Criminologist for the Indianapolis Police Department, I find their ability to obtain the support and participation of the target area Judges, compelling and significant in and of itself. A strong and thorough recruitment plan was presented and several examples and supporting data were given to support and encourage the need and desire of the communities and the community legal system to introduce and implement alternative sentencing options for veterans within the criminal justice system.	

COMMENTS: (+) The applicant clearly identifies the negative effects that incarceration and criminal records have on veterans seeking employment and uses statistics and research to support this information. For example, the applicant notes that according to one study, 73% of employers conduct criminal background checks. Additionally, there are over 200 collateral sanctions or barriers to government or state licensed jobs for those with criminal records. (+) Psychosocial and economic factors which contribute to veteran incarceration and recidivism rates are identified. These factors include those associated with military service, such as erosion of support networks that existed prior to deployment, developing a chemical dependency, PTSD and the inability to relate to civilian service providers. (+) Because of shared experiences and familiarity with military culture it is easier for vets to relate to vets. The program acknowledges this and has incorporated significant outreach efforts to recruit members from the military community. Veteran recruiting sources will include regional National Guard and Reserve units and the Minnesota State College and University System via their military support services departments. In addition, one indicator of program success will be to have at least 50% of year one full-time sources slots filled by veterans and to increase this percentage each successive year. (+) As stated above, the program has a comprehensive and ongoing training program. This program also prepares members for transition after AmeriCorps. Topics addressed at end of service may include professional networking, informational interviews, life after AmeriCorps, job search skills, and resume building. Providing transitional training enhances the positive outcomes of the volunteer experience. (+) Opportunities for fellowship and socializing with other AmeriCorps members provide a sense of connectedness in the shared mission of community service. (+) As more volunteers and stakeholders are identified the composition of the community advisory committee will change to be more representative of its community members. The committee will help steer the strategic direction of the program. (+) Incorporated into the program are measures which build and sustain community engagement and service. Each member creates and implements individualized engagement and service learning plans designed to affect a change in the community. Collectively, Corps members identify and participate in at least 2 service learning projects in their community throughout the service year.

COMMENTS: Overall this was a sound proposal. The applicant indicated that there are a high number of incarcerated veterans in Minnesota and Wisconsin and discussed the problems many of these individuals face upon reentry. Proposing to have veterans work with veterans will build bonds between them and members will serve as positive role models for the ex-offenders. Member training and orientation is extensive and will result in members attaining the skills and knowledge needed to be successful. There is opportunity for reflection and for members to organize and be engaged in community activities, thus promoting an ethic of civic responsibility. Partners have agreed to commit funds in order to host a member ensuring buy in and support for that member. The organization has a track record of success and it can be inferred that this program will also be successful. The major drawback is that the outcome measures the applicant hopes to achieve were not documented in the first 30 pages making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.