

**APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design**

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

<b>Legal Applicant:</b> <b>Vermont Housing and Conservation Board,</b> <b>Vermont Housing and Conservation Board</b> <b>AmeriCorps</b>	<b>Application ID:</b> <b>11AC122117</b>
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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:** Though compelling evidence is provided regarding the need for affordable quality housing, the applicant provides no statistical support as evidence that the problem of threats to open spaces and ecosystems in Vermont communities. The applicant provides only limited statistical support (percentage of income spent on energy in the Northeast) as evidence that the problem of dependence on fossil fuels exists in Vermont communities. Members performance is continually monitored by supervisors at service sited identified for their skill in management. Members also receive support and guidance from VHCB staff and two performance reviews which is evidence that members will be supervised sufficiently to be successful in their placements. The applicant demonstrates an ongoing training plan that will give members the skills needed to have a productive service experience, as evidenced by monthly training topics connected to service activities and program success. No sample training by partner organization that would specifically address skills needed, so it is unclear how successful members will be in their particular roles. Applicant involves members in service activities throughout the year, including MLK Day, Make a Difference Day and AmeriCorps week, which is evidence that members will have a powerful service experience. The program includes activities that will support members in development of an ethic of service, such as reflection on service built into training and member recognition (in newsletters, list serve and End-of-the-year session) for their commitment to service. It is unclear if member and volunteer activities will have a measureable impact on community problems because of a lack of ambitious outcomes. It is unclear if housing placement services and financial literacy programs will be effective because no support is provided regarding the proven effectiveness of these approaches at addressing the problem. It is also unclear how effective the education on energy-efficiency will be because no data is given to support the effectiveness of this type of intervention. Lack of information on specific training that members will receive regarding their daily activities makes it difficult to assess how effective they will be in meeting program outcomes.

**COMMENTS:** Note on style: Please write out words, with the exception of acronyms, as it is tedious to decipher shortened words throughout the application. (+) Applicant addresses a number of issues relative to

housing and using of fossil fuels as evidenced by the issues being persistent within the community. (-) There is not a significant amount of information present on the issues within the community regarding the threats to open spaces. In contrast to the information on the two other identified issues, this area seems weak. (-) Applicant identifies the target area as Vermont, as evidenced by the percentages to support the need. (+) Applicant clearly outlines the work that service members in each area of the program will complete. (+) Several skill sets are identified for the Corps members to have as a part of this project. The applicant detailed from where AmeriCorps Members will be identified. (+) Applicant outlines a training program that addresses the AmeriCorps guidelines. Additionally, supervisors provide annual reviews that encourage and help members improve their performance. (+) Several indicators are presented that suggest this experience is a powerful one for the members, including 8 of 10 members identifying that they will continue to volunteer long after their term of service. (+) Applicant outlines a program that has numerous areas in which members can find value and enhance their skill sets. (+/-) The applicant states that, in the two year of the program existence, that 19,288 volunteer hours were logged in two years of the program, as well as engaging both young and older volunteers to assist in the project. (+) The supporting agencies that work with the applicant have hired 25% of the AmeriCorps members, identifying a need for appropriately trained staff to work with the agencies. (+) The applicant identifies a number of measures that will be met by the project, including physical changes to the environment and community and the emotional and skill changes identified by the AmeriCorps members. On the whole, the applicant seems to have identified a number of areas in which a problem exists in terms of housing and becoming more eco-friendly. There is sufficient evidence that AmeriCorps members can make a difference in the community while adding to their own skill sets and building camaraderie within the community. Though there was a lot of information about specific job descriptions, there was no real discussion about why AmeriCorps members are the best way to continue with the program. Outcome measures were extensive, which assisted in the viability of this application.

**COMMENTS:** (+) Applicant provides evidence of need to support the first program identified in the proposal, housing and homelessness in the state. For example, the applicant states a 22% increase in homeless shelter usage since 2008. (+) Applicant presents a history of success in training as well as supervising AmeriCorps members and provides statistics on their success (90% would recommend the program to others; 25% get hired by their sponsoring agency). (-) Applicant does not provide information about how recruiting AmeriCorps members is the best option to meet the goals presented in the proposal. The recruitment and training plan proposed does not identify how recruited members will have or acquire the skills necessary to address the three identified problems. (-) The problem identified as threats to open space and ecosystems is presented in a limited fashion without statistical data to support the applicant statement of an increase in population. In addition, the application does not provide information as to how AmeriCorps members will be trained to meet the expected outcomes of improved trail miles.

**COMMENTS:** Applicant amply identifies a community problem in its focus area of housing and homelessness within the state of Vermont, as evidenced by statistics and studies relating high home/rental prices, low median wages, foreclosure rates with a general dependence on fossil fuels. Although the statistics for fossil fuel dependence were more regionally focused, and the remainders were anecdotal

comments, I believe the relationship was established. Previous success of this project leading to its national recognition is indicative of the project's commitment to success, as is the noted waiting list of nonprofits seeking partnership and the number of such partners who have continued to thrive independently beyond the grant application period. The process for recruiting, training and supervising AmeriCorps members is well developed, including the targeted senior population and local communities. Evaluations from former AmeriCorps members show the interest in continuing their community service. There were very clearly identified, quantifiable measures against which success of the project could be assessed. Applicant program is well-designed, well-executed and has demonstrated its ability to be both pragmatic as well as innovated in its approach to the identified community problems as well as the targeted population.