

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: City of Dubuque, Partners in Learning AmeriCorps Program	Application ID: 11AC123354
--	---

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: Although there is little question that the need exists for intervention in the Dubuque City schools, the application does not appear to be well-thought-out. It mentions many criteria for selection of participants but not how they would weigh all the criteria. It mentions a 94% retention rate from the 2009-2010 SY but then mentions exit interviews from 2009-2010 regarding continued civic engagement but gives no numerical data to back up comments. It mentions the lack of improved student performance in the 2009-2010 SY on both goals for that year but does not substantiate how this new project would rectify that difficulty or how badly they missed their targets. The overall approach is not well defined. Finally, the application does not flow in a logical manner nor does it have enough detailed information for the reader.

COMMENTS: (+) The applicant is proposing an AmeriCorps program that will address the problem of low academic performance of students and the need to engage families. The closing of several private schools has increased class size in the Dubuque Community School District, adding to the need for resources. Specific data on annual yearly progress are provided that support the stated need, as well as a description of how schools are chosen to receive AmeriCorps member services. Adding to the problems facing student achievement is an increasing immigrant population that has limited English proficiency. (-) The applicant has presented a general description of recruitment, selection, placement, training and supervision and does not provide specific information that would represent a dynamic plan for ensuring the greatest impact. The amount of time members spend in orientation and training is not clear and "frequent and regular" contact does not present a thorough supervision plan. The applicant has presented a community problem, supported by relevant data from the targeted service area, and does not further indicate how the AmeriCorps members will actually address the problem or how they will have a measurable impact. The applicant does not provide enough detail to evaluate whether the proposed program is an effective use of resources and whether the members will actually have the desired outcomes.

COMMENTS: + The applicant recognizes the need for more parent involvement and neighborhood

outreach to increase student achievement, and proposes to use Members to reach those goals. + The applicant presents thorough demographic data documenting the diversity of the City of Dubuque. - It is not clear who presents at the monthly trainings or whether all Member levels attend them. + Emphasis is placed on recruiting diverse Members and all recruitment materials reflect the desire for people from diverse backgrounds and those with disabilities. + Members take a Civic Engagement Survey at the beginning and end of their service year to indicate commitment to continuing community service. A 10-year follow-up study confirmed that Members tend to stay active in their communities. - Quarterly recognition activities give Members the opportunity to thank volunteers as well as receiving thanks while reflecting on their service. However the applicant does not provide any description of the recognition activities. - Although the Partners in Learning AmeriCorps program has been operating in Dubuque for a number of years, no evidence of increased student achievement because of Member involvement is presented. - The applicant states that Members will recruit and support at least 500 volunteers serving more consistently with a goal of 6,000 hours of service but provides no description as to how this will be achieved. - No evidence is presented which indicates increased or maintained reading and math achievement by students receiving Member academic support. - It is not clear how increased parental involvement or student achievement will be measured.

COMMENTS: The applicant clearly and fully demonstrates the need within a specific target area. The applicant utilizes standards and current status set by No Child Left Behind to demonstrate the need in the targeted schools to improve academic skills. In addition, the applicant utilizes current census data to clearly demonstrate the poverty levels of the targeted communities. The applicant goes further in demonstrating that past efforts to improve conditions in the identify areas have not been effective. The applicant has a history of utilizing AmeriCorps Members in an effective manner within the community. The project will place members within a program already experienced in working with the target population as well as AmeriCorps Members. Members will be recruited locally including within district families. This will assist in developing a team that will culturally mirror the community. The project offers a comprehensive training and orientation process to assist members in the transition into their service. The project provides for opportunities for the members to process their service learning experience through supervision and monthly check-ins. The benchmarks for members during supervision to determine member successes were not described. The monthly training sessions will provide the member with professional development opportunities, peer support and increased service opportunities. The project provides for site supervisors to increase their skills in member management issues and support from the Program Director but fails to identify benchmarks. Members will recruit and support at least 500 volunteers with a goal of 6000 hours of service; this process is vague in its structure and overall goals for the identified service area. Members will work directly with the identified educator to develop an academic support plan for the project student. Members will meet with the educator weekly to monitor and adjust the academic plan. The overall goals and measures for student progress are not fully described. This will make it difficult to determine successes in increasing the student's academic progress.

COMMENTS: The community needs to be addressed were compelling and documented. The applicant's plan for recruiting AmeriCorps members for the program is feasible. The applicant's program design lacked sufficient detail regarding the type of training offered. Even though the applicant shared a detailed

11AC123354

(Page 3 of 3)

recruitment method, nothing was mention about recruitment of potential members through well-known HBCUs and African American Greek Organizations outside of the community. With the data collected, the applicant indicated that sixty percent of the students complete the academic support programs. The applicant did not share how much growth would be expected. The applicant implies that the program design will have a measurable impact on student's academic performance but this is not supported with data of assumed growth or actual growth from past performance.