

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Mississippi Valley, BBBS AmeriCorps Consortium for Eastern Iowa	Application ID: 11AC123771
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: The applicant demonstrates previous relevant success as evidenced by their 2008-2011 initiative to recruit and engage volunteers in their primary mission, and exceeding their recruitment goals exponentially at 290% their expected goal, which means 1,405 volunteers over their three-year goal of 750. The applicant presents limited information about the needs to be addressed as evidenced by no concrete source information being provided. The applicant only provided generalized source information (i.e. Department or Organization the information was retrieved from), but did not specify specific studies or articles for reference. The training plan develops and trains new members through a series of classroom and on-the-job-training methods that provide both the theory behind the organization's initiative and hands-on training with an experienced member. In addition they will be mentored themselves with through the basic steps of registration, screening, creative matching, and in some cases specialized functions. The applicant outlines a feasible and effective member supervision plan as they are including direct supervision as their primary means, which allows members to have direct and immediate access to supervision if a problem, question, or other difficult situation arises that they need assistance handling. The applicant has a realistic plan for building the capacity to sustain the proposed service activities after the grant period ends. Key features of this plan are the acquisition of local funding and business sponsors, continued community support based on their success in previous years, and their ongoing strong partnerships with local schools and organizations.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: Applicant proposes a new enhanced mentoring initiative ("Life Navigators") focusing on improved academic performance and drop-out prevention. They will utilize their already-established and proven BB/BS infrastructure of training, standards and mentoring supports (and previous AmeriCorps program experience in general youth mentoring) for this endeavor, while also addressing additional program requirements specific to education/drop-out prevention.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: (+) The applicant's identification of community needs were compelling and well</p>	

documented.(+) The applicant had a well-developed and detailed training plan that seemed to be appropriate for member development; for example, specialized mentor training on dropout prevention and the current educational intervention strategies (Career Pathways Model).(+) Member supervision was adequate. AmeriCorps members will operate under the direct supervision of the Executive Director and/or Site Supervisor of their agencies. AmeriCorps members will receive three annual service evaluations. (+) The applicant did a great job of describing how they will recruit a diverse corps of members; for example, minority volunteers would be targeted for recruitment through partnership-building with local minority action groups, fraternities and sororities, affinity groups, social organizations, and congregations. Each BBBS agency will recruit their own AmeriCorps members from the communities they serve. Members will be assigned to specific slots based on three considerations: their level of education, their past work experience, and their familiarity with the community to be served. (+) Overall this was a very good application, which is likely to be successful based on past performance and documented mentoring success.

COMMENTS: A strong compelling need is made to generate volunteers to mentor minority youth within the Iowa target area. The applicant utilizes a variety of mediums to attract members and even seeks to tap into the vast baby boomer population. Retention rate was high over the last 2 years which suggest members are satisfied with the applicant's service philosophy. A noted weakness within the proposal details a lack of specificity regarding the number of members that participated in past community service activities such as Habitat for Humanity. In addition, the applicant does not discuss future initiatives to encourage members participation in an ethic of service or civic responsibility beyond the proposal. Despite these weaknesses the applicant has strong community ties, and varied funding sources that have the capacity to sustain the project after the grant cycle..

COMMENTS: AmeriCorps members will create and develop the new multi-county mentoring program "Life Navigators" as an "add-on" enhancement to the applicant's successful mentoring program. The program will mirror a similar, successful (sister) program from another state. The challenge for the members will be to (1) target minorities for volunteer recruitment, specifically looking for volunteers who are bi- and multi-lingual; (2) continue to build business relationships locally (3) coordinate training sessions for the volunteers they have recruited; and (4) continue to develop and execute a support system between the youth, parent and mentor.