

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Inspiring Minds, Inspiring Minds	Application ID: 11AC124291
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: It is unclear as to whether college students that are not of the community, will be able to determine the psychosocial needs of the “unique cultures of the individual schools” without substantial involvement of parents or families. However, the management skills of graduate students interested in AmeriCorps membership may be able to overcome this aspect. The applicant presents a narrative that is heavy on the side of filling tutor positions rather than overall achievement and impact for the community. Although the applicant does a good job of demonstrating that the substandard educational problem exists, there is no resolution derived from the program design that supports the use of an AmeriCorps member specifically, as a valuable tool for resolving the community's problems. The objectives, as laid out in the Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity (NOFO) appendix handbook, do not align with Inspiring Minds objectives. Furthermore, the use of innovative methods is not addressed clearly as an effective use of AmeriCorps membership nor is there discussion regarding the specific number of hours that members would be expected to volunteer.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: The applicant establishes poverty as the root cause of the basic problem of poor academic proficiency among students in the Providence Public Schools. It is unclear what the focus of the program is trying to accomplish, meeting the needs of the students in the district or helping the school district meet federal educational requirements. While the applicant gives a detailed account of their programs' successes over the past 47 years, engaging poorly performing students and improving school and district scoring, it is not clear how the AmeriCorps participation will directly contribute to the community. It is clear members will be contributing to Inspiring Minds program functions however; the cadres' role seems to be supporting the Inspiring Minds program's operational capacity with limited community engagement. This calls into question whether or not members will have a powerful service experience. The recruitment plan clearly targets service-minded applicants with the background to be successful in the program. The requirements for acceptance into the cadre are not given. The orientation, training and supervision plans are strong; they will give members the tools they need to fulfill their roles and meet expectations.</p>	

COMMENTS: The applicant plans to target a diverse population through social media, community groups, employment media, minority media outlets, and local colleges and universities. Specific recruitment efforts will target students leaving school with an education degree. The applicant expects a program of this nature to be an attractive incentive for a post-graduate student seeking a meaningful immersion experience. The applicant clearly lays out weekly and monthly training meetings during pre-service and throughout the year. The content of the meetings will involve opportunities for training, coaching, support, and feedback. The applicant makes a good case for recruiting recently graduated education majors on their way to becoming teachers. The applicant does not illustrate how AmeriCorps members are uniquely working in part for a college stipend, making them highly effective role models for furthering education through programs like AmeriCorps.

COMMENTS: The plan for addressing the problem outlined makes sense. A program led by a former AmeriCorps member and building on an established program seems like a great approach to address this particular problem. The application does not provide strong rationale, beyond the director's previous involvement in AmeriCorps, for using AmeriCorps members to support the tutoring program proposed. The applicant seems to have a program already in place using other volunteers and it is never made clear why AmeriCorps members would be better suited to this program. The applicant also does not provide good references to support their claims of past success in schools or clearly reflect what the gains meant academically.

COMMENTS: This proposal intends to build on an established program and model of recruitment, training and supervision. The organization appears to have the procedures and capacity to continue / expand this program. In particular, there is a connection to a national service alumni network that the organization maintains. There are clearly specified pre-service training, monthly content training, monthly civic-related training, weekly school and individual meetings as well as individual coaching opportunities. Plus, the proposal states that the organization will target recent college graduates and provide them with a bridge between college and teaching. There is evidence to support the effectiveness of the tutoring interventions that are currently ongoing. However, the data provided are not cited from any source. There is a nice focus on specific skills that can be measured for students receiving the tutoring, such as oral reading fluency or initial sound fluency. The proposal indicates that there is a data sharing agreement with the school district that allows the organization to compare the treatment group with the rest of the students in a particular classroom or grade-level. This will provide the program with access to necessary metrics to gauge how they are doing. Yet, while there is a clear expectation of the program's goals related to serving more students, there is not a clear goal of how the tutored students will perform at the end of or through the course of the program. The proposal states that students receiving the tutoring will out-perform students not receiving the tutoring on key assessments, but it is not clear how this specifically addresses the student proficiency scores. The proficiency cut-scores that the state values are only from one assessment.