

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Minneapolis Public Schools-City of Lakes YouthWorks	Application ID: 11AC124477
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: Because the program is inclusive and its members, staff, community members and volunteers share vital components (altruistic responsibility and character autonomy) that meld the links (equal but proportional human and technological responsibilities) of program design together, the result is expression of academic, professional and personal excellence. The foundation for this is made possible by the combination of innovative and forward thinking ideologies cultivated by the Minneapolis Public School District and the bright and talented previous AmeriCorps members and current program director, assistant directors and literacy coach who were and continue to be all engaged in meaningful activity that directly relates to the NOFO's objectives. The use of technology, as this program promotes, lends itself to a long-term measurable that should decrease dependence on government welfare assistance by directly supporting the intended beneficiaries: the students through education and the community through civic preparedness and involvement. The program design was excellent.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: The applicant has clearly established the problem ELL students have in gaining reading proficiency and how this affects their success in school, chances of graduating from high school and its potential negative impact on a student's life. The ELL status is a major indicator for identifying potential drop-outs. The need for support of ELL students in the middle grades is due to the lack of current programs for that targeted group. Although the rationale for choosing specific schools, failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress under No Child Left Behind, is given, the 12 site specific schools are not listed. The developed program provides intensive one-on-one tutoring to ELL students until optimum proficiency is reached. The members will be recruited from a diverse pool and must meet requirements that predict successful participation in the program. Extensive training and well planned support will help full-time members deliver intensive tutoring to ELL students in need. Volunteers recruited, trained and working closely with members will be a part of the solution. There is a high probability program goals will be met while respectfully maintaining non-English speaking cultures.</p>	

COMMENTS: These are the main strengths that led me to rate this application excellent across the board: The applicant plans to recruit diverse AmeriCorps members, including bilingual applicants, retiring employees, and people with disabilities. The applicant believes in a rigorous application and interview process, in order to ensure the candidates selected have a thorough understanding of the rewards and challenges of a yearlong commitment. The applicant plans an extensive 8- day orientation. During orientation the members will develop teamwork skills and a broader understanding of education issues, including the achievement gap and No Child Left Behind. The members will also begin a yearlong training series on effective ELL instruction and strategies for engaging ELL students. The applicant has a specific curriculum called, Civic Reflection Program, which is designed to have the members reflect on their service. The applicant hopes the members will develop civic responsibility that will last beyond their AmeriCorps term.

COMMENTS: Overall, this was a very strong application that clearly identifies a problem, builds upon past success and demonstrates the value of using AmeriCorps members for specific roles in their volunteer program. The application fails to provide references or citations that support their assertion of past success. There was also a great deal of discussion about the use of the new technologies in the tutoring programs without much rationale provided to support their use. The applicant does not clearly state the expected impact of these new technologies on student learning or tutoring impact.

COMMENTS: The proposal provided data that suggests that ELLs are not performing on up-to-par with non-ELLs and links that to dropouts. The proposal mentions that AmeriCorps candidates will complete the program and interview process on the AmeriCorps portal. In addition, there is an individual and group interview, online information session and an academic skills assessment. While extensive assessments are listed (several formative tools and MAP to monitor progress), the applicant did not provide an explanation of what the expectations would be for student performance based on those assessments.