

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Teach For America, Teach For America South Dakota	Application ID: 11AS125834
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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: The applicant adequately explains why they are proposing to use AmeriCorps members to solve the problem in the target area. It is stated that in the 2009-2010 school year, the high school made AYP for the first time. It was determined that the presence of the teachers from the program, who are AmeriCorps members, was the reason. Also in all, the schools in Todd County where the teachers from the program make up more than half of the teaching staff, made AYP last year. Teach for America (TFA) has had a very good success rate at providing quality teachers to inner city schools. Closing the achievement gap is at the core mission of this applicant. Even bolder, the applicant proposes to use 60 members to address an even bigger critical issue which would be the educational achievements of Native Americans. As detailed in the proposal, Native Americans have the lowest levels of educational attainment than any other ethnic group in the nation. Yet, the applicant does not provide enough detail on how the impact will be measured or reported on an annual basis. Outcomes measures are also not fully described. It is unclear exactly what is being measured or what end results are desired. For example, the applicant states that they will have 76% of their Corps members who will make solid gains with their students. First, this standard doesn't qualify if it is overall or reading solely. In addition, the applicant discusses the need based on state standards and other local district data. Conversely progress will be tracked based on internal gains measures as reported by Corps members. This seems to put the baseline and outcomes solely on the Corps members and it is unclear if this method is acceptable for other district and non-TFA teachers. The applicant has outlined a detailed and in depth training program which includes ongoing professional development. The training program begins with a one-week induction which will take place in South Dakota which will be followed by a rigorous five-week residential summer training institute. The institute will have summer school teaching and curriculum session as its foundation. Nevertheless, the applicant does not describe or provide detailed information on how opportunities will be provided for members to reflect and learn from their service. It is only stated that service discussions will take place to help members reflect on the problem or issues of the area. It is unclear when or how often these discussions will take place or the specific topics that will be discussed.

COMMENTS: A compelling need is presented and documented to attract highly qualified teachers to underserved, low income reservations in South Dakota. Past successes in recruitment of persons of color and

similar backgrounds have been documented in the current grant cycle. The applicant notes a successful alumni network of members upon completion of their service which keeps them connected and supports career development. A clear plan is presented for the activities of members to make measurable impact on the well-defined compelling needs of the targeted community. The proposed grant plan has expectation to exceed the success of the current grant cycle.

COMMENTS: The applicant presents compelling statistical data confirming the educational achievement gap students in low- and higher-income communities in South Dakota. Proposed activities clearly address the compelling needs of enhancing the learning experiences of low-income children and the applicant provides a rationale with data to support using AmeriCorps members to deliver the service; however measurable outcomes of service are not linked to the proposed activities. The plan for recruiting volunteers is clear and strong. The training plan seems effective, conducive to appropriate member development, and provides well-designed activities that promote an ethic of service and civic responsibility.

COMMENTS: The applicant presents a strong recruitment plan. They will recruit members that have a 3.6 grade point average. 89% of the students held leadership positions in their schools which will lead to quality trained instructors in schools where youth are continually showing academic failure in an effort to change that cycle. The applicant provides intensive orientation training in a residential program and then provides ongoing training and support for the members throughout the year which should lead to a very successful program. The applicant mentions alumni and that they will continue to work on educational needs in the communities but there is no detail or further information to evaluate the extent of the continued engagement specifically in South Dakota. The applicant has presented a well-designed program with proven outcomes that engages highly qualified members to work towards improving the educational needs of youth in these poverty stricken communities. However, the applicant does not provide any evidence that volunteers will be engaged to assist members in creating a successful program that leads to measurable impact. The recruitment of professional teachers as members to meet the needs of the low income communities in South Dakota is an innovative approach members will improve the achievement of youth and have a lasting impact on the community. There is no evidence provided by the applicant that the community members have been engaged in the program planning and this makes it unclear how the program could be sustained.

COMMENTS: Recruitment, orientation, training and supervision activities, developed as part of a long-term, nationwide teaching program, and applied to the targeted population since 2004, all demonstrate highly effective plans that are clearly linked to meet the compelling needs of Native American students in local, reservation schools. Although improvements in outcome measures for prior years are presented on a nationwide basis for individual student performance, only the overall school progress is presented for the targeted populations. No dates or region-specific evidence for the level of volunteerism by members, or the number of volunteers recruited in prior years, is provided. Member satisfaction and retention rates, as well as the satisfaction of local school partners, are exceptionally high. Members are strongly encouraged to make a lifelong commitment to eliminating educational inequality, and outcome measures demonstrate this success in both the targeted area and nationwide, low-income school districts. This application proposes to expand its

program to improve Native American educational performance state- and nationwide.