

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Catholic Volunteer Network, Catholic Volunteer Network	Application ID: 11ED123467
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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: A salient strength of this proposal is the applicant's plan to recruit a diverse group of members. The applicant is in the process of implementing a Racial Justice and Diversity Initiative that will likely bring in a diverse pool of candidates through the applicant's attention to Historically Black and Hispanic-Serving institutions/universities. While the applicant provides an acceptable sampling of identified problems in the areas of education, healthy futures, and economic opportunity, the applicant draws upon its own data - for example, the "CVN AEAP Survey 2010." As a self-serving source, evidence drawn from the applicant's own publications and studies does not reliably substantiate these identified problems. Additionally, the applicant does not define its locations or service areas. The identified problems span areas that are so vast that the applicant's ability to target and identify specific community problems is negatively affected, and the evidence provided for said community problems is generalized and not specific to the communities. It is of special concern that the applicant has failed in past years to meet 100% enrollment and retention but is asking in this proposal to expand its program. The applicant notes that many of the member programs do not have the infrastructure in place to support member numbers and have had to hire additional staff for this role. The proposal is an expansion on an already-existing AmeriCorps program, and with the applicant's own admission that some program sites do not have the infrastructure for the oversight of current levels of AmeriCorps members, it is particularly concerning that the applicant does not offer evidence of programs' or their own increased capacity to support such an expansion. Ultimately, the applicant outlines a program design that is logical and engages members in a wide variety of service activities. The applicant provides examples of member roles and activities that appear to be aligned with its descriptions of various community problems. The vast array of examples is tempered, however, by a general lack of specificity in the proposal and by the lack of outside sources or historical program data to substantiate community problems and solutions at the local level. A particular case for AmeriCorps support is not made. For example, the applicant does not appear to require volunteer generation as part of members' service experiences; rather, it states it "encourages" volunteer generation at service sites and local communities. Despite having an ambitious goal for the number of volunteers recruited and hours served, without the stated expectation that members recruit volunteers as part of their service, it is unclear whether applicant's program is making the most of this important aspect of AmeriCorps programming that amplifies the impact members have at their community sites.

COMMENTS: The application speaks to each of the required sections of the proposal but falls short in providing a clear description of the proposed program. Full background information and qualifications are not provided for several of the key positions. Inclusion of such information for all key positions is paramount. The application does not clearly identify the activities being utilized for each of the key aspects of the application nor does it include supporting data for the activities proposed to solve the identified problem. .

COMMENTS: The Applicant did not do a very responsive job in its narrative nor in the description of project design. The application does not include research, evidence-based practices, demographic information and other citations in the Problem/Need section that are tied to commonly known and verifiable resources in addition to Applicant's own CVN study (which is not universally known). Nor does it include census, county/city/state data, schools, homeless coalitions, health organizations, university and other research resources to support the identified need. The scope of the project is too vast and therefore minimized the presentation of the local needs. The application did not include sufficient information and detail about the target areas. The scope of the project and distance of the applicant to the local programs was also a problem. Without information from prior years or some indication of standardization of services evidenced, too much appeared to be left up to local sites and their partners. The applicant stated that it has yet to meet its recruitment targets but then expands the program based upon "increased community need." The applicant does not include program improvement measures in recruitment or show how it will more effectively meet recruitment targets and relate that increase to the targeted community needs. The application does not include specific Volunteer Generation information (by member) rather than by total program as this is a core requirement of an AmeriCorps program (specific and sustained volunteer generation). Additionally, there was not enough information about the service days, establishing workplans and recruiting volunteers. Specific outcomes from prior program years as examples were not included.

COMMENTS: Overall, this application was very thorough and included the elements needed in the Program Design. Applicant provides excellent data to support every area they are describing to be a problem and addresses the problems in each area in which it targets to serve. Applicant not only provided evidence and current statistics regarding the problems the targeted communities were facing but the selection of members and activities aligned to ensuring the programs' success. Recruiting strategies and member training was well thought out and as such member retention is not predicted to be an issue. Careful attention was given to matching prospective members' backgrounds, qualifications, and skills to the placement sites' needs as well as their ability to support the members professionally and personally and selection method of members is stated by applicant. In this application, AmeriCorps members are likely to be part of the solution to addressing the problems in the communities.