

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Experience in Action/dba Experience Corps, Experience Corps	Application ID: 11ND125013
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: Although the applicant does a good job of providing documentation of the organization's successes and strategically incorporates pieces of general findings or definitions from reputable sources, the lack of specific information in each of the 13 LEA's leaves the reviewer to make assumptions. The applicant does not provide additional clarity on the individual sub-grantees, their circumstances, the sub-grantee selection process, and sub-grant oversight. The applicant does a good job showing an inclusive and diverse composition of membership: older adults, racial/ethnic, socioeconomic and psychosocial representation. Reading excerpts from sub-grantees is helpful as it relates to the impact of membership as a service experience that promotes lasting civic engagement. According to the review, the member applicants responsible for tutoring are not necessarily required to take a reading/math competency test. The review also states that the members have a high level of basic tutor/mentoring skills. This portion is unclear. Having older adults as members counteracts this to some degree but their level of involvement has not been specifically established.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: In defining the problem to be addressed, many sources are cited affirming the detrimental effects of issues such as poverty, large classroom size and truancy on poor literacy skills. The lack of literacy at the third grade level is successfully tied to future academic failure putting students at risk of life-long problems which will negatively affect society as a whole. Thirteen target communities are specifically identified for support, statistics and rationale for why they were chosen. Orientation, training and supervisory plans the sub-grantees will adhere to are appropriate and adequate. There is no compelling evidence that AmeriCorps members will contribute more to the program than any other volunteers. Overall, the proposal ties together all the salient points required.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: The application is strong in the following areas. The applicant looks to recruit older adults. They plan to conduct outreaches to faith-based organizations, senior community organizations, public</p>	

housing resident associations, and AARP. The applicant reports word-of-mouth and personal outreach by current members has proven to be an effective recruitment tool. The applicant emphasizes the opportunity to transfer a member's educational award to a family member. This is a key recruitment tool due to the emphasis on older adults who may have already completed their education. Potential members are required to: have a HS diploma or GED, submit to a background check, and must submit personal and professional references. The applicant cites The National Research Council, Anne E. Casey Foundation and the National Assessment of Educational Progress to make the case regarding the need for children to read by the end of third grade. The applicant used an independent study to identify a problem and highlight Experience Corps impact on the problem. The applicant cites the Educational Resources Information Center report that notes that truancy is directly linked to academic failure and eventually dropping out of school. There were some challenges in the application. The applicant does not articulate in this proposal how the members will achieve a powerful service experience that will lead to ongoing civic and service involvement. The applicant notes the AmeriCorps members will be receiving the same training as Experience Corps volunteers, while this speaks of consistency between volunteers and members for the sake of effectiveness, the only difference noted is they expect the AC members to serve more hours and receive a living allowance. This statement seems to be saying that the members will be highly effective at solving the problem only because they are getting paid and they will put in more time. The applicant should explicitly outline why the members would be an effective tool to solve the identified problem.

COMMENTS: Overall the applicant has a robust program that appears to be tested and successful. It is unclear how AmeriCorps members (beyond their ability to commit more time) will be particularly effective. Although involving older adults is a good strategy for tapping into a community resource, it's not clear how AmeriCorps service would encourage lifelong service in the same way that it would with younger members.

COMMENTS: This proposal describes a clearly defined problem, reading by the third grade, which is supported by national data as well as site-specific data. The training and supervision that the members will receive appears to be good. The proposal describes a specific service experience for members, but lacks the power that might develop further civic engagement. For example, in Philadelphia, the subgrantee created a Member Advisory Council to provide a stronger voice for members and provide additional opportunities for leadership. However, this is not systematic to ensure that members outside of Philadelphia gain the same sort of additional leadership opportunities. The proposal states that the program will monitor student participation and completion in the tutoring program. Plus, there are instruments listed to monitor student learning. However, there are no clear indications of what the expectations or goals are based on these measures.