

APPLICANT FEEDBACK - Program Design

2011 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: CNMI Public School System, AmeriCorps	Application ID: 11TT125399
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: The applicant outlines very detailed information on how workshops and feedback will be used to make this term of service effective. It was documented that they will measure surveys and other assessments, and allow members to have ownership on the design of their member development activities. The applicant proposes a detailed training plan. However, it is unclear how much time or where a member will provide service with the school system. The applicant list several items, but they don't provide a lucid picture of the direct service at the local schools. The applicant will host monthly meetings, peer response sessions, interviews and teleconferencing opportunities. The four-day pre-service training is very detailed and training topics will include tracking reading skills, teaching learning spiral, multiple intelligence and learning styles, STAR Reading First, and General Orientation. Additionally, the applicant will also facilitate an annual award and recognition ceremony and they will also disseminate a CD to each member that provides a permanent reminder of their service experience. However, it is unclear if the applicant can recruit the quality members it documents that are needed. The program plan proposes to recruit junior and senior high school students who have an excellent cumulative grade point average (GPA). However, the selection criteria of a grade point average of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale does not set the bar at above average and there was no other evidence presented to support that these student will have the capacity for this service position. The applicant does not adequately explain how the impact will be measured. The applicant provides a list of three core goals, but the expected outputs and outcomes does not seem to align with the defined plan. Overall, limited data was presented in many areas and simply saying all children will be on grade level by a certain year does not provide evidence of incremental success. Aside from reading goals, mentoring and counseling outcomes have not been clearly defined or examined for accuracy. For example, mentoring is cited as an important prong of the service that these members will be implementing. However, very limited information was presented or addressed in regard to expanding the capacity of these members to be effective mentors.</p>	
<p>COMMENTS: There is a compelling need to offer locally trained teachers to fill the teacher turnover rate of 11% annually. The recruitment process is well-defined with high expectation for selection of members. The measurement tools for achieving the expected outcomes of the project are not clearly defined. The application leaves vagueness for the how the project is going to actually prepare more local teachers.</p>	

COMMENTS: The applicant presents a strong case that there is a need to raise the scores of students in the CNMI attending the Public School System (PSS) that are reading below grade level based on local and national standards. The applicant also demonstrates the need to develop a local pool of highly qualified teachers due to an extreme shortage of teachers in the islands. However, the information presented on the community to support this need is vague. Severity of issues is not address by the applicant. 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 clearly states the community need for more trained educators in their community and is using an innovative approach to engage high school age youth as AmeriCorps members who will be tutors and mentors for younger students. This approach provides a learning laboratory for the members to decide if teaching is a career that they want to pursue. Members are also enticed by the potential scholarship opportunity in addition to their education award after their high school graduation. This solution appears to be a solid approach that will lead to measurable outcomes for student achievement as well as longer term to solve the teacher shortage in these communities. This program is likely to be successful because it takes the approach of engaging junior and senior high school students that are showing academic success in service to meet the local community needs of mentoring and tutoring younger students. By doing this the members take ownership of the needs and realize that they can and are part of the solution. The hope is that this will lead to members who graduate and use their education award and potential scholarship to become the next generation of teachers in their community. A weakness noted in the application is that the applicant states those wishing to become AmeriCorps members must also have high grade point averages in addition to the desire to become teachers; but they are only requiring an average GPA (2.5 out of 4.0 scale). This leads to some concern that the members may not have the qualifications needed to perform the task.

COMMENTS: Training and activities for the tutoring program are clearly described, but are so extensive as to be questionably appropriate. Some activities also appear to include tasks that are clerical, administrative, or more appropriately completed by teachers. The applicant fails to provide a detailed comparison of previous years activity levels with plans and expectations for AmeriCorps members in this proposal. It is also not clear how AmeriCorps roles differ from volunteers or why new members are necessary with thousands of local volunteers already recruited and trained to serve in AmeriCorps positions. While the applicant hopes to link AmeriCorps tutoring with future teacher preparation, there is no evidence that prior AmeriCorps members chose to become teachers or that scholarships open to all students for any major will lead to increased teachers. Without this data linked to prior years of service and without a clear and detailed discussion of the levels of training and activities required of prior members, the applicant does not present a compelling need that can be realistically met by this extensive plan for tutoring and teacher preparation.