

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

FY2012 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant Name: CIS of Central Texas	Application ID: 12AC133376
Program Name: Communities in Schools of Central Texas AmeriCorps	

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. This feedback is provided on a restricted basis and cannot be shared or distributed outside of your organization. We hope you will find this information helpful in completing applications to our future grant competitions. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of your application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

- CIS of Central Texas clearly and convincingly provides evidence about the impact of the dropout rate, the failure rate on the state standardized tests, limited English proficiency, pregnancy at a young age, homelessness, and other risk factors on the well-being of the four Texas counties targeted in the application. The sources for the data include the Texas Education Agency, the Intercultural Development Research Center, and the various independent school districts involved in this project.
- Although data is provided to substantiate the need, data is not provided for all of the counties proposed to be served through this project.
- The applicant describes in an effective manner how the AmeriCorps members will serve the Central Texas community while modeling service learning principles. Many of the Members are pursuing social work or counseling degrees, so they are able to provide intervention services within the schools at the same time they are participating in service-learning. This is an effective use of AmeriCorps members.
- AmeriCorps members will assist identified students with academic support including: academic goal setting and homework help, deficient skill development, classroom support, and meeting facilitation. Data have been kept and will continue to be kept to determine the effectiveness of these interventions in the academic performance of the identified students. The applicant strongly justifies the method of intervention that it has designed, as it has extensive past experience which documents success.
- CIS used evidence from extensive evaluation of its own networks over the years to come to the conclusion that their Communities in Schools model and mentoring work. Academic performance improves, risk behaviors decrease, and psychosocial development improves with these interventions. CIS outcome data support these conclusions. CIS targets students from grades 3 through 8, as research has demonstrated that these are the most vulnerable years to set the stage for future academic success or failure. The applicant provided data from past program years to document that this evidence-based approach to these community problems will have a demonstrable effect on the community and its problems.
- The application clearly and convincingly details the components of the experience the Member receives through CIS. There are opportunities for civic engagement as well as training and bonding activities;

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opportunities to link with local, state and national Members and organizations.

- The applicant uses relevant data such as drop-out rates, grades repeated, failed standardized tests, limited English proficiency, and social barrier factors from the Texas Education Agency and Intercultural Development Research Association to identify students "at-risk" for school dropout in four central Texas counties. This clearly establishes community need(s) for intervention.
- The applicant clearly describes how the availability of 96 AmeriCorps members serving for the entire year will enable 1,000 more students each year to receive mentoring and service contacts that would otherwise not be served because of staff and resource limitations.
- The applicant describes how AmeriCorps members will be a highly effective means of addressing community need(s) because of their specialized CIS training for providing individual and small group mentoring interventions. Additionally, AmeriCorps members are available to provide the mentoring for an entire year.
- The applicant describes academic support intervention activities based on involving students in setting personal goals, developing individual improvement plans, and signing written agreements of commitment to achieve their goals. This approach of monitoring performance towards goals is evidence-based and may increase the likelihood of success.
- The applicant clearly has extensive knowledge of the community needs and links AmeriCorps members to the activities that they would be most suited for. The applicant links the interventions specifically to each identified need that is individually designed. The interventions to increase educational success are coupled with community participation activities; this encourages the students to gain an understanding of how education can impact the community and the participants.
- The applicant has sufficient funds to support the AmeriCorps program through financial support from private foundations and governmental grants.
- The applicant was comprehensive in documenting the results that are expected from the use of AmeriCorps members.
- The applicant discusses a national study that successfully intervened with third graders by providing mentoring and support from adults to prevent students from dropping out. It then indicates that it will be working with elementary and middle school students. This link between the study and the service delivery is not adequately addressed.
- The applicant clearly describes how the three types of AmeriCorps members will be used in the program. This includes clearly stating their logic (sound) for using quarter-time AmeriCorps (generally social work and counseling interns); further it clearly describes how using quarter-time interns will enhance current service.
- Taken as a whole, this is a very good use of AmeriCorps members.
- The CIS Center Texas (CT) underwent an agency-wide evaluation and has implemented a measure resulting from the outcomes reported in the evaluation (targeting a minimum of 16 hours of contact). This is exactly the way evidence-based research and programs should work. It seems to have taken the feedback to heart and is incorporating it into this year's program.
- The 2012 CIS performance measures (70% of 750 students maintain a relationship for six months and increase

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academic performance), were developed based upon data from last three academic years. Again, this is how evidence-based research and program development is supposed to work; it is a model for others.

- CIS CT has a strong supervisory model, with a local Project Manager/Therapist providing daily oversight, weekly hour-long meetings, and ½ day supervisory training.
- The intervention that is proposed uses AmeriCorps members to leverage CIS staff in providing service delivery to the less emotionally at risk students and to recruit and manage volunteers. It uses Social Work and Therapist interns to provide one-on-one counseling, under the supervision of a CSI therapist, which is seen as an appropriate use of AmeriCorps members. This program directly addresses the need identified (drop-out prevention).
- General statements regarding the identification of at risk youth in Texas are used, however; the applicant does not clearly demonstrate why all four counties of Travis, Hays, Caldwell and Bastrop were specifically chosen. The applicant does not convincingly describe that these targeted communities are in the greatest need.
- The added value of the AmeriCorps Members' service is clearly delineated by setting mentoring sessions based on student needs. These needs include addressing behavior issues, academic needs and service projects. These services do not appear to be readily available to the schools without this program.
- The FT and HT members will be assisting students with academic support in core subjects. The selection of the students in need of this support is based on current failing grades and/or failed Texas State Assessment testing. This is an example of how identified needs will be addressed by an appropriate approach to resolving the problem area and affecting positive change.
- The applicant defines clear recruitment and training programs that provide for the growth of the mentor program and the service-learning component of this project. The recruitment activities that are described by the applicant include local recruitment fairs and presentations at area schools and civic groups. The training described includes a pre-service program including a retreat and a four-day orientation program, which includes specific training in skills in structuring support sessions, management techniques and crisis intervention.
- The applicant does not clearly identify ways in which the AmeriCorps members' activities will deliver the interventions in order to meet the anticipated outcomes based on the needs expressed. The applicant identifies the needs to be addressed to include low attrition rates. However, the outcomes reflect data regarding contact time between mentee and mentor. The link between these is not present.