

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Just A Start Corporation

Application ID: 13AC146867

Program Name: YouthBuild Just-A-Start AmeriCorps Program

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. 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 the 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. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewers' Summary Comments:

(+) The applicant provides comprehensive and persuasive evidence that the identified needs for (a) maintaining affordable housing, (b) repairing housing for veterans, and (c) providing education services and job readiness/placement to disadvantaged youth exist in the two targeted communities by including reports from the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute/Citizens Housing and Planning Association; Cambridge Housing Authority 2012; FY 2011-2015 Cambridge Consolidated Plan; Chelsea Community Development Department, Chelsea Housing Authority; HUD's 2011 Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness; Soldiers' Home in Chelsea; National Coalition for Homeless Veterans; and the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

(+) The applicant thoroughly documents the extent/severity of the proposed need in the target communities for families, youth, and veterans through the use of recent data from diverse and reputable sources. For example, the Chelsea Community Development Department figures indicate "that many families are paying a high percentage of their income for rent (some over 50%), and over 40% are paying more than 30% of their income on housing [with the result being] that many low-income families share housing units, some with 10-12 people living in an apartment to keep housing costs down." Similarly, the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea reports that cutbacks to non-direct service staff have diminished its abilities to maintain this facility.

(+) The applicant clearly provides specific proposed Member activities within each proposed work area. For example, direct renovation and repair services include activities such as carpentry, construction, wallboard installation, painting, weatherization, landscaping, and other services, under the supervision of the YouthBuild staff. In addition, Members without a high school diploma will receive educational instruction leading to a GED or high school diploma.

(+) The application clearly describes the add-on contribution provided by AmeriCorps members in the area of providing services that are not within partner budgets that enable housing rehabilitation projects to go forward which might otherwise go unaddressed.

(+) The applicant thoroughly describes the evidence-based/evidence-informed nature of the proposed program interventions as being based on the national YouthBuild model as well as the applicant organization's prior grant-funded experience in the AmeriCorps initiative. For example, substantial evidence-based research documenting the success of this model is included such as R. Ferguson et. al.; A. Hahn and T. Leavitt; and the Center for the Study of Social Policy. In addition, the application includes substantial evidence-informed support of the proposed interventions by providing internal performance data demonstrating success using these strategies in prior AmeriCorps award periods.

(+) The applicant clearly states measurable community impact targets such as (a) program participants having the highest level of GED achievement compared to other national youth programs and (b) program completers being more likely than completers at non-AmeriCorps YouthBuild programs to have applied and been accepted to postsecondary education or training

(-) The applicant does not sufficiently describe how program impact will be measured. For example, the application does not adequately describe the written evaluation reports that housing partners and families as well as clients receiving service will fill out that are passed on to the program manager.

(-) The applicant does not include sufficient detail with regard to the specific roles and responsibilities of AmeriCorps members in the areas of providing service in their communities as well as rehabilitating housing for low-income families and homeless and disabled veterans.

(-) The applicant provided very little information on why the work to be performed on housing owned by public housing authorities was necessary or the financial need of the housing authorities. The main need was listed as projects "which might otherwise go unaddressed."