

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Teach for America

Application ID: 13ES146531

Program Name: Teach for America – South Dakota

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 does an excellent job providing evidence that a compelling need exists in the targeted community. Data show that Native students living on reservations score well below basic reading and math levels. The application also includes documentation of a compelling need to attract qualified teachers. The applicant provides information showing that schools on reservations attract an extremely low rate of teachers. For every teaching vacancy, less than one application for employment is submitted.

(+) The applicant provides a clear description of the community problems that will be addressed. The proposed program is designed to place high quality teachers in reservation schools to improve academic achievement gaps for low-income Native students.

(+) The applicant chose to serve this population because of the high rate of poverty, low academic achievement among Native students, and the problems they face with attracting high quality teachers to fill teaching vacancies.

(+) The applicant described that the target community was economically disadvantaged including that there is an 80-100% unemployment rate, leaving 'virtually all children in poverty' in the target area.

(+) The applicant provides a clear description of AmeriCorps member activities and rolls. Members will serve as full-time teachers in low-income Native schools. Responsibilities include providing high quality teaching in the classrooms as well as organizing extra-curricular activities focused on preparing students for college.

(+) The applicant provides details describing why they would not be able to accomplish proposed interventions without the use of AmeriCorps members. This is a Member-driven program and it is likely that the proposed interventions would not occur utilizing existing staff and volunteers.

(+) The applicant is requesting 68 full-time education award slots that are directly aligned with the program design and Member activities.

(+) The applicant shows that their track record (evidence-informed) of impact will affect this current request for

AmeriCorps members in South Dakota. They use three examples of AmeriCorps members that have improved their students' performance in reservation schools.

(+) The applicant describes the impact of their past performance in reducing the gap between Native and non-Native students in South Dakota and predict they will reach 6,000 Native students and two-thirds of all Native students living on reservations in South Dakota. Seventy percent of students will make gains of a year or more of academic growth. This shows that their targets of performance are based on their past experience which makes them informed by the evidence they have produced.

(+) The applicant describes how AmeriCorps members will add value to the proposed program. Engaging Members as teachers will have long lasting impact on the communities. A significant goal of this program is for Members to continue teaching in Native schools. This is important because the lack of high-quality teachers is a huge barrier to breaking the cycle of poverty in the target communities.

(+) Performance measures include diagnostic tests and end of year assessments as well as a new Student Achievement Measurement System which focuses on a continuous measure of goals attained. Numbers of students completing the K-12 program are also tracked. They also plan to track the number of teachers completing the two-year commitment. Having well designed performance measures will assure that the program results relate to their goals and objectives and are on track for success.

(+) The applicant does a good job describing how the performance targets were determined. For example, the applicant utilizes past program data measuring student achievement goals.

(-) Sources of data are not identified for the unemployment rates, dropout rates, or college graduation rates. There is also only minimal data on the reservations targeted. Without sources, the information is not reliable to use for establishing need and the intervention proposed.

(-) The applicant does not describe the target population within the K-12 programs. It is not known if all the schools are K-12 and if so whether teachers are going to serve all grade levels or just older youth. They only say they are assigned to high-need schools. Interventions and proposed methods will vary by age group so the applicant needs to be more specific in order to evaluate their project.

(-) The impact of the AmeriCorps investment is not clearly stated.

(-) There is a lack of specific tasks that will be performed by AmeriCorps members. It is not clear what activities will result from their expected tasks.

(-) There is no indication of the timeline for reporting to CNCS (requirement of an annual report), or who is responsible to do this.