

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning

Application ID: 14AC155482

Program Name: America Reads - Mississippi

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:

Strengths:

The applicant provides solid evidence to demonstrate the need for tutoring in 50 target schools across 30 school districts in Mississippi. Specifically, the applicant provides compelling statistics related to poverty, free and reduced lunch and fourth grade reading proficiency rates.

The applicant's reference to the 2013 Literacy Based Promotion Act that addresses low literacy levels across Mississippi provides clear evidence of need.

The applicant satisfactorily articulates and provides relevant data regarding the need for improved reading skills of struggling kindergarten – third grade students.

The applicant satisfactorily articulates and provides relevant data regarding the correlation between high poverty, high unemployment (communities and families) to the likelihood of negative outcomes precipitated by a lack of proficiency in reading by the 3rd grade.

The applicant provided clear and solid evidence of the need for literacy interventions with children in K-3 in Mississippi schools.

The applicant cited a number of non-experimental studies to support the proposed Theory of Change and program model that includes using AmeriCorps members to provide interventions.

The applicant successfully and adequately documented the level of poverty in the community through data from the Casey Foundation (2013) and the Eau Claire County Work Group (2008).

The applicant successfully and adequately documented the correlation between poverty and the lack of school performance in kindergarten through 4th grade.

Although all of the performance measures in years past were not met, the applicant specifically addresses the past performance statistics and provides an adequate plan for improving performance in subsequent years.

The applicant demonstrated a continued commitment to the program model as evidenced by finding an alternate (if reduced) funding source and by maintaining partnerships necessary for the successful implementation of the proposed program model in the future.

The applicant successfully recognized that during the 2010-2013 grant cycle, the America Reads – Mississippi (ARM) programs' improvement targets of (80% to 90%) were unrealistic.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides insufficient evidence to demonstrate the need for increased opportunities for education and professional development for Mississippi residents.

The evidence to support the need for AmeriCorps members to solve community problems lacks statistical significance and does not meet the recency requirements.

The reasoning the applicant provided that links the planning and implementation of community service activities to student acquisition of critical thinking skills is unclear.

The applicant explained how the specific schools will be chosen based on their performance as outlined in the Literacy Based Promotion Act (LBPA); however the applicant failed to explain how specific students will be chosen as participants of the study unless the applicant is inferring that all of the students in the identified schools and grades will be study participants.

The applicant identified that ARM was not funded before and had not met outcome goals in years past.

The applicant did not provide sufficient evidence to illustrate that the intervention does meet the outcomes stated by the applicant.

Although four non-experimental studies were cited as evidence to support the proposed program model, the research methodologies of those studies are unclear.

The applicant has not developed more realistic targets for future studies.