

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: College Now Greater Cleveland

Application ID: 14AC155749

Program Name: Ohio College Guides

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 application presents clear evidence of need, citing college enrollment rates among adults age 18 and above as averaging 15 percent (and as low as 6 percent) in the 10 target communities, well below state and national averages of 20 percent.

The narrative uses national data to make a strong case for need based on low income status in the 10 communities, noting the positive relationship between income and college enrollment. The service area reports a combined average median income of \$36,535, significantly below the state average of \$48,071 and the U.S. average of \$52,762.

The applicant provides appropriate information concerning the community in terms of poverty, income, and college attendance rates. Included are national and state levels.

The applicant indicates that the 10 communities being addressed have low college enrollment rates, an average of 15%. Some are as low as 6%.

The applicant satisfactorily shows the need to improve post-secondary school transitions in the target community, and provides specific data on the link between lower socio-economic status and college enrollment, as well as the lower socio-economic status of the target area.

College Guides is a proven program that has been successfully implemented and delivered with AmeriCorps members. From August 2010 to June 2013, the College Guides program engaged 179 AmeriCorps members and served 65,726 students, surpassing its goal of 47,800. More than half (7,097 of 13,821) of eligible seniors who served during this period went on to enroll in post-secondary training.

College Now Greater Cleveland has offered the College Guides program for the past 6 years with considerable success. The narrative reports impressive success from August 2010 – June 2013 when AmeriCorps members served

65,726 students, exceeding enrollment goals.

The applicant reports that it has exceeded its goal of serving 47,800 students. Its 179 AmeriCorps members actually reached 65,726 students.

College Guides has been developed based on evidence in the main areas of program focus (readiness, college applications and visits, financial planning, and persistence to completion. The well-designed program is based on a Theory of Change that is well substantiated and has delivered robust results.

The applicant is adopting the “College Guides” program. AmeriCorps members will be trained in the interracial strategy associated with this model. It includes the college admission process, college entrance exams, college visits, and the need for persistence.

Training and quarterly discussions as part of reflective groups will be conducted to support staff and participants.

The applicant proposes an intervention with specific citations for individual benchmarks or steps in applying to college.

The logic model is separately defined for each specific target group.

The logic model and Theory of Change are well-aligned and focused on measurable, direct outcomes.

More than half of eligible high school seniors who participated in the program (7,097 of 13,821) continued on to post-secondary training following program completion. The program reports a 100% enrollment rate with 91.5% retention.

The applicant indicated that its experience will enable it to provide 1,700 hours of service at a cost that is 41% less than traditional methods.

Of the 13,821 students served in the 12th grade, 7,097 enrolled in postsecondary education which was just below its goal of 8,365.

Since 2009, the program has had a 100% enrollment rate and a 91.5% retention rate.

The applicant exceeded the target number served in total (absolute numbers), and surpassed the basic performance goal of 50% of their program participants completing two or more milestones, with 56.3% completing two or more milestones.

Weaknesses:

The application defines communities at the city or town level, but does not identify specific neighborhoods or schools within the target communities. This information is important to ensure the intervention will be implemented in areas of need within these communities.

While the applicant provides poverty data and low college attendance rates, it does not establish a strong relationship between the two areas. It does not identify how the lack of interest or knowledge about college results from high levels of poverty.

The applicant indicates that one of the target areas are first (college) generation students, but no data is provided on the need to address first generation students in the area. While this can be assumed given the overall statistics on college attendance that are provided, the dots are not well connected on the specific target audience.

The design of the intervention remains unclear. Both content and the delivery process which will be used with students to enable them to “think realistically” about college and career are not described in sufficient detail.

The overall intervention has few studies that clearly support the full intervention model (as opposed to specific milestones – it is a comprehensive program or a “cafeteria” model where each milestone is separate?) and it is difficult to be sure if the program model proposed is the same as the ones in the studies cited. This is important to ensure that the outcomes are likely based upon the program proposed.

The lack of clearly defined levels of evidence (no mention of experimental, quasi-experimental, random assignment, comparison groups) makes it difficult to rate the number of studies at each level. While the terms “evidence-based” and “evidence-informed” are used, they are not defined.

The specific activities that will take place are not fully described; they are described generically rather than as part of a specific intervention.

Some aspects of the program design (e.g., mentoring) are not well discussed in the narrative.

No information is provided regarding how the interventions will be selected and targeted to meet the needs of particular students.

The information provided by the applicant is primarily quantitative in nature. While the number of students enrolled in college is noteworthy, information such as course completion and college retention would be extremely helpful.

The applicant did not meet their target of 60.5 percent enrolling in college (of their seniors); only 51.3 percent enrolled in a post-secondary program.