

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Dane County Human Services
Program Name: Partners for After-School Success

Application ID: 14AC155998

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 aptly identifies the community problems/need to be addressed in the services to be provided by AmeriCorps members and recruited volunteers. The specific needs are clearly identified, specifying a persistent gap in academic achievement of youth, disparity of community services among racial groups and the unemployment rate.

The applicant references a current document to aptly support the need of the community related to their 25% unemployment and the 54% family poverty rate for African-Americans in Dane county (Wisconsin Council on children and Families, 2013).

The applicant effectively references two current research documents affirming the severity of the need to address chronic school absenteeism as an essential element to successfully climb from grades 6 to graduation (Building A Grad Nation, John Hopkins School of Education, 2013 and A Report on Absenteeism the Nation's Public Schools, 2012.)

The applicant cites seven sources of data as well as Census Bureau data to support the need to provide literacy, tutoring and after school activities to remedy school attendance, reading level and high school graduation rates.

The data shows more severe levels in the geographic area to be served—Dane County—than in the rest of the state or nation and is compared to larger regions for almost all indicators.

The applicant sufficiently describes the gap in academic achievement among the targeted populations of children of color and economically disadvantaged students.

The applicant also identifies several causal factors, such as social skills, family instability, peer influence, risky behavior, etc. that also are underlying factors causing persistent school achievement gaps.

The applicant discusses the poor academic proficiency of students in Madison versus all of Dane County, comparing ethnic and socioeconomic differences.

The applicant clearly cites sources for the data they present, which they relate to other correlated variables such as unemployment, crime and health, indicating the probability of poor life outcomes due to lack of educational achievement.

Overall, the applicant provides well-supported information about the extent and severity of the need in the specific communities they propose to serve.

The applicant presents significant strengths of their Members in their delivery of highly effective services as a means to solve community problems. This effectiveness is referenced in data noting measurable community impact. The applicant delineates three research informed factors which are critical to program success, the effectiveness of members' services and attaining outcome goals. These are clearly specified to encompass: student access to services and their participation in the services, quality programming, and the promotion of a strong partnership among the school and families.

The applicant details the high quality and effective services delivered by the AmeriCorps members focused on solving problems in making the program services available, accessible and attained in the target sites, which are strategically positioned in low income neighborhoods where poverty exists and resources are scarce. In addition, they express the fact that program strategies are research based, which is confirmed in the evidence section.

Strategies are clearly detailed and explained in the Logic Model and in the narrative stating evidence-base, scaffolding curriculum building self-esteem and social awareness. Strategies are also noted for middle school students to include social awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making.

The Logic Model worksheet divides the inputs between the out-of-school component and the tutoring component to clearly lay out the different activities and expectations.

The applicant sets realistic long-term outcomes relevant to closing gaps in educational achievement.

The applicant provides a thorough narrative description of the component within the program design and how the program will operate and to what purpose.

The program emphasis on student engagement to prevent truancy and dropping out of school shows focus on a critical need, and the applicant addresses factors for low academic achievement, citing the importance of student confidence, including various strategies that go beyond the need for just literacy, including the sequenced, active, focused and explicit (SAFE) social learning programs and STEM tutoring.

The applicant proposes to address the identified problems by enhancing student school engagement and building reading skills. In the model they propose, both appear to be within the capabilities of AmeriCorps members. This will be accomplished through an after school implementation.

The academic supports used by the Members appear to be more effective as they will be aligned with their classroom

learning. Schools are to be used as host sites, and teachers and administrators will participate collaboratively and cooperatively in program design, development and delivery.

The applicant provides compelling evidence-based information about the frequency and duration of the tutoring sessions the Members will hold to enhance effectiveness.

The AmeriCorps members will be inculcated in a wrap-around services model, focusing on their two main intervention approaches, which underscores the applicant's stated whole child philosophy..

The Members will implement high quality programs such as Second Step, which may be effective and easy to learn to use with the students.

The applicant succinctly details the fact of successful past performance as referenced by the program exceeding the target output measures in tutoring and in after school programming in each of three years of the program. In addition, they reference the fact that in 2010-2011 the tutoring outcomes were grade promotion and gains in grade point average (GPA), which the program met, indicating 97% of tutees being promoted and 81% of students making GPA gains, which the program met.

The applicant met its output targets in tutoring and attendance for the past three years.

The applicant states that the project has a history of reliable performance in demonstrating positive outcomes in literacy gains with the target population.

Results from the past three years demonstrate consistent academic gains made by students who participated in the tutoring and after school programming.

The applicant also has applied process evaluation measures to address ongoing needed program corrections in order to achieve project goals and objectives.

Weaknesses:

Comparison data with the national levels in delivery of academic services to various ethnic groups is lacking related to student achievement.

The applicant does not provide substantial current and relevant research to document the severity of the need to be addressed. The applicant does not provide the date of the WI State Department of Public Instruction data report they reference to substantiate the severity of students needs related to school performance. The 2006 research study referenced to support the need related to low graduation rates was not published within the last six year; therefore, its relevance is questionable.

The applicant did not provide any data to support the social environment, relationship and emotional causal factors that it states are underlying the persistent school achievement gaps.

Not all data elements for the county are compared to state and national levels and trends, to show the severity of need

in the local area in comparison to other areas.

The Logic Model worksheet lists two different counts for the number of members in the program model, 35 for the out-of-school component and 33 for the tutoring. This difference is not explained in the narrative that states there will be 35 total in the program model.

The narrative exclusively focused on services to a targeted population comprised of economically disadvantaged students and children of color experiencing educational achievement gaps, but the Logic Model refers to sites that are racially diverse with high levels of poverty or in rural areas with limited resources and emerging poverty.

The narrative also did not indicate that the targeted populations included all at-risk youth in danger of experiencing academic failure, including youth of color and impoverished youth, but the Logic Model does, and further states that the program historically has served 70% to 78% in its targeted population.

Medium-term outcomes suggested for tutoring in the Logic Model are actually short-term assessments of reading level attainment, so mid-term outcomes are missing from the Logic Model for the tutoring component, and even for the assessments.

The narrative is absent discussion about the use, function and interaction of volunteers to support the work of the AmeriCorps members. As the applicant proposes to recruit 1300 volunteers, this is a large input. There is also no mention of the number and function of the volunteers in the Logic Model.

The discussion of the AmeriCorps members' use of academic enrichment activities becomes somewhat diffuse in the presentation of the details.

The applicant identifies the fact that they did not meet student attainment targets in the first year of the program, stating that of the 82% of student tutored, only 62% made the target gains.

The applicant failed to meet two outcome measures in the first year after adopting national performance measures.

The applicant failed an 80% outcome target for secondary engagement last year.

The applicant demonstrated no internal measures to survey and collect data for feedback from staff, stakeholders and students on performance.