

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Renewal Unlimited, Inc.

Application ID: 14AC156105

Program Name: Renewal Unlimited Inc. Fresh Start 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:

Strengths:

The need for services for at-risk youth is clearly defined.

The application describes a higher poverty rate of this age group compared to the total population of the county and a higher dropout rate compared to state and national averages, with limited services available to address this need.

The applicant provides county level data from reputable sources on dropout rates of youth, indicating a higher prevalence than both state and national averages.

Applicant stated that 1,154 of the 6,485 youth between the ages of 17 and 24 are living in poverty, which represents a poverty level of 17.8% compared to the overall poverty rate of 10.3% for all people in Columbia County according to the 2010 Census. This demonstrates a need for economic opportunity.

The applicant cited a 2013 Department of Public Instruction (DPI) report which indicated that 8% of youth do not complete their high school education; 6% do not attend school at all and do not work; and 31% of the school-age population qualifies for free or reduced lunch rates. Forty-nine youth from the school districts in Columbia County have dropped out of school, representing a dropout rate of 3.723% compared to the state average of 2.2% and the national average of 3.4%. This represents a need for youth education.

The applicant cited DPI and Kids Count 2013, which reported that truancy rates in Columbia County School Districts range up to 12.2%. Twelve percent more youth in tenth grade in Columbia County scored at a minimal proficiency level in each of the areas of reading and mathematics than did other tenth graders in the State of Wisconsin. Among the school districts within Columbia County, there were 15% more of the youth who are economically disadvantaged or who have disabilities that scored in the minimal proficiency category compared to other high school students, indicating a disparity for those youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This demonstrates a need for youth education.

The applicant reported that in 2010, there were a total of 45.6 juvenile arrests in the county. The applicant also cited a study done by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which determined that 8% of the youth within Columbia County are between the ages of 12 and 17; 41% of the youth between the ages of 18 and 25 engaged in binge drinking within the past 30 days; 35% of the youth used cigarettes in the past month; 18% used marijuana; 10% engaged in illicit drug use other than marijuana; and 7% of teens identified that they had abused alcohol or drugs in the past year. This demonstrates a need for youth education.

The applicant reported that the unemployment rate for Columbia County as of August 2013 was 5.1% compared to the rate of 6.7% for the State of Wisconsin and 7.2% for the United States which indicates that families in the county do have employment and could purchase affordable housing if homes were available. Columbia County is expected to increase its population 13.9% by the year 2020, and it is estimated that there will be a need for 1,250 more housing units during the next 7-year period. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; Census 2012; Dept. of Workforce Development, 2012). This demonstrates a need for economic development.

The applicant cited a 2013 report by the Wisconsin Realtors Association that indicates the current median value of housing is \$103,600, the median sale price of single family homes is \$134,250, and the median household income for the county is \$55,910. This demonstrates a need for affordable housing.

The applicant cited 2010 Census data that showed that 35% of families with mortgage payments were paying greater than 30% of their income toward housing expenses, and of these, 7.8% were paying greater than 50% of their income toward housing. This demonstrates a need for affordable housing.

The applicant has a long successful history of involvement in programs similar to the program proposed in the application.

The applicant has a long and successful history in housing construction, rehabilitation, education, employment and training programs targeting young adults/youth at-risk.

The applicant is a known and stable entity in the county.

The Applicant has a multi-year history with AmeriCorps programming.

The applicant is proposing 12 months of follow-up services to be provided to at-risk youth participating in this program.

The applicant cited a study completed in 2000 by M. W. McLaughlin that looked at 120 youth-based community organizations in 34 different cities from 1990 to 2000. A synthesis of this research showed that community-based youth programs can have a significant impact on the skills, attitudes, and experiences of young people. AmeriCorps youth members will gain valuable skills and solve community challenges.

Surveys of the youth who participated in the study indicated they had developed a greater sense of personal value and hopefulness compared to peers within their community that did not have the intervention of the youth programming. Follow-up studies of 60 youth indicated that they were firmly set on positive pathways as workers, parents, and

community members. The synthesis of the research concluded that community-based programs that focus on positive youth development are most effective with support from their communities.

The applicant cited 2010 data that reported that of the 131 YouthBuild Affiliates, 78% of youth completed the program; 63% of these youth obtained their GED or high school diploma; 60% were placed in college or jobs with an average wage of \$9.20 per hour; 25% enrolled in post-secondary education; and recidivism rates for court involved youth were 40 percentage points lower than the national average. The data also showed that the demand for services for at-risk youth ranged from 2 to 10 times as many applicants as could be accepted in most programs.

The applicant reported the data showed a return on investment of a minimum of \$10.80 up to \$43.90 for every dollar spent. Also, of the participants, 75% were in college or employed with an average wage of \$10 per hour up to seven years after program completion; 91% of graduates gave the program a highly positive assessment; personal change - a reliable process of personal transformation had been observed and defined; GED rates were higher than other national programs for high school dropouts; and an increase in college participation for YouthBuild students who obtain an AmeriCorps Education Award for their service. (Cohen 2008; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development 2003; Ferguson et al. 1996; Wright 2001; Hahn et al. 2004; Abrazaldo et al. 2009; Hahn 2007; Hazel and Philburn 2009).

The applicant generally met 100% of targets.

The applicant reported that in the past program year, 79% of the youth obtained their HSED/Diploma; 100% of the youth completed competency certificates in basic skills, independent living, work maturity, and pre-employment skills; 100% of the youth earned a certificate in construction skills; 100% of the youth achieved 92% of their identified goals; and 85% were placed in employment or post-secondary education.

The applicant shared its history of expanding youth employment services into various counties in WI. It has had extensive experience in working with housing construction; rehabilitation projects; education, employment and training programs for young adults, especially those at-risk or already involved in the justice system; and helping young adults achieve long-term self-sufficiency. It has a track record of providing similar services through a Department of Agriculture Child Care Food Program; HUD - Neighborhood Stabilization Program, Homeless Prevention, HOME Homebuyer, and Homeless Prevention/Rapid Re-Housing; Department of Labor - Workforce Investment Act for Youth Services; Department of Health and Human Services – Family Preservation Program and Head Start Programs; Corporation for National and Community Service - AmeriCorps; Department of Public Instruction - State Head Start; and various local United Ways.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not clearly demonstrate the need for affordable housing. Data presented supports the purchase of single family homes rather than affordable housing.

The applicant did not provide data to support the definition of affordable housing or described affordable housing as home purchases.

Data in the application did not support the need for affordable housing.

The applicant did not clearly demonstrate a need for training for careers in construction by presenting job vacancy information.

The applicant does not provide data to explain how they chose to provide construction training for youth instead of other job skills.

The applicant only presented estimates for future county jobs in construction.

The applicant noted very few building permits in recent years despite fee waivers for permits.

The applicant does not specify how AmeriCorps members will be effective to solve community problems when this applicant already provides similar services through other funding services.

The applicant does not provide sufficient and specific evidence supporting its model's impact upon the need for affordable housing in the targeted area.

The applicant reported that they have been doing services for 36 years but has not provided data on successful short-term and long-term outcomes especially with reported federal funding.

The applicant does not specify how this program meets needs that are different from the current housing program they operate.