

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: United Way of East Central Iowa

Application ID: 14AC156587

Program Name: Youth Achievement AmeriCorps 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 applicant has experience implementing this program with the community.

The applicant has experience implementing the proposed program in the intended community.

The applicant provides adequate data to support the claim of an educational gap between low and high income children in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The achievement gap problem is clearly laid out using data from the school district.

The data sources used to demonstrate need are credible and recent (Iowa Department of Education, Gallup, Inc.) The data sources highlighted reflect the achievement gaps in all areas of interest to this application including, literacy, math and student engagement.

The applicant clearly articulates the need to decrease the achievement gap in school-aged children in the target communities and provides specific data showing the achievement gap between Cedar Rapids low-income children and families and higher income peers.

The achievement gap is severe and prevalent. In 2012, 50% of fourth grade low-income children were proficient in reading whereas 81% of higher-income peers were proficient. For eighth graders, the gap was 48% to 79%, and for eleventh graders, the gap was 66% to 91%. In math, the numbers were not much better. Fourth grade proficiency was 65% for low-income children and 86% for higher-income kids. Eighth grade was 54% to 87%, and eleventh grade was 66% to 90%.

The logic model provides a clear picture of the logic for this program.

The logic model is clearly laid out and most inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes are consistently described and

logically follow.

The program uses well-tested tools and interventions for the literacy portion of the project. Tools and interventions include the Read Ahead Program, the Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI), and the PASS Reading Enhancement Program (PREP) Program.

Replicating the survey results of PREP and the LLI to the Youth Achievement AmeriCorps program should ensure a positive intervention.

The intervention activities (LLI and PREP) appear to have data supporting their effectiveness at improving achievement, thus they are likely good tools to use for this program.

The applicant clearly and specifically lays out the proposed activities that will address the identified need of improving student engagement to reap greater academic success, as evidenced by the five specific interventions to be conducted on a daily or weekly basis.

Providing parent instruction and resources, while not specified in the evidence-base, seems to be a positive way of engaging parents in their children's early literacy development.

Providing 1:1 math tutoring or small group assistance will likely lead to improved achievement.

The applicant has implemented the proposed intervention in the Cedar Rapids community.

The applicant provides data to support claims of success in reducing the achievement gaps in literacy and math. The applicant states that 94% of children improved their reading scores and 100% of teachers whose students received literacy support stated that skills were enhanced.

As noted in the Past Performance section of the Applicant's narrative, the applicant has developed a thorough corrective action plan to address its prior challenges meeting identified performance measures.

Statistics and evaluation of reading and literacy improvements clearly show that the targeted students (and more) are being served and are benefitting from the service.

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides no information (other than income) that describes the context such as information on the setting (urban vs. rural) or on student demographics (language, ethnicity.)

The applicant provides data to support an achievement gap between low and high-income families but does not include data on why reducing this gap is important to Cedar Rapids.

The applicant provides information about the numbers of middle school students that received math tutoring and states that feedback from students demonstrated some interest in STEM. However, no research studies are presented

to demonstrate the overall effectiveness of math tutoring on the proposed population.

The applicant reports that some students demonstrated an interest in STEM careers after exposure to either tutoring or the summer STEM Academy. However, the applicant provides no other outcome data that supports past success on the math portion of the intervention.

The applicant indicates that three Members will provide services at the middle school and high school. Looking at the activities they are expected to provide and the number of students they will serve, it is not clear that the workload is balanced for those Members.

The applicant seems to be attributing part of the problem to a lack of engagement. Although the Gallup Poll shows an overall low engagement rate, the difference between the national average and the school district is not large (only a 3% difference). Thus, it is not a strong data point for establishing the problem of engagement within this particular community.

The evidence-base supporting the activities around connecting parents to resources and providing books and learning kits for the home is not provided in the narrative.

The applicant includes parental involvement in the intervention but does not report on past experience with this target audience.

The applicant provides little information about their past experience with parental engagement.

The applicant stated they did not meet all of its program-identified performance measures in year-two leaving a doubt if they will have the same issues with this particular endeavor.

The applicant includes a parental engagement piece in the intervention but does not indicate past experience or success with this target population.

The data showing performance on the math tutoring aspect of the program are ambiguous and do not clearly show success in solving the problem. For example, 92 students received tutoring and 34 students explored STEM careers.