

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: City of Albuquerque Mayor's Office

Application ID: 14AC156792

Program Name: Running Start for Careers: NM Governor & Mayor Initiative

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 Running Start for Careers program was chosen by stakeholders representing both public and private interests to address the New Mexico secondary school dropout rate that is extremely high.

The city of Albuquerque's dropout rate of 65% is 13% higher than the national rate. The state's rate is only 5% higher than the city's.

Justifications for choosing this pathway to help students graduate from high school is well documented by statistics indicating low youth employment in high poverty pockets as well as citations that include high incarceration rates for dropouts and their need for assistance from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid.

The applicant has compelling statistics on dropout rates and unemployment rates for youth ages 16-19 and 16-24, respectively.

The applicant presents evidence that 20 AmeriCorps members delivering math, reading tutoring and mentoring to 500 students at 10 high-risk high schools in Albuquerque and the state of New Mexico will definitely have a substantial impact to effect changes to better their communities.

AmeriCorps members can directly support the goals of this program by servings as mentors and tutors to the student participants, which meets the goals of the AmeriCorps program.

Students who identify with a mentor do significantly better in school and retention is higher when one adult knows who they are and what their needs might be. AmeriCorps members can effectively be that person.

The use of AmeriCorps members is an effective way to meet the goals of this program. Members can address the problems of student drop outs and poor academic skills by being a presence in the lives of those targeted students.

Members can find and train community volunteers to supplement and support their work as well as serve as liaisons to the business community.

The proposed project has the potential to increase graduation rates.

The frequency of the intervention at targeted schools support the anticipated outcomes.

Involvement of community partners increases the chances of positive outcomes.

The planned caseload of 25 students per AmeriCorps member is reasonable and should insure that each student is given enough individual attention to make each student successful.

The procedure of using AmeriCorps members as math and reading tutors and mentors for disconnected youth in order to support proficiency gains is aligned and reasonable.

The applicant also maintains that Running Start for Careers (RSFC) has collected two full school years of implementation data, and that during those two years, graduation rates rose between four to twelve percent at four of five of the initial participating schools.

The applicant maintained that 100% of seniors in the first class of RSFC graduated. Moreover, program graduates are working in film and construction industry careers.

Weaknesses:

Data is anecdotal regarding the success of the applicant's model.

None of the studies cited compared similar programs.

There is no data on numbers served and goals achieved during the pilot year.

The applicant proposes a reasonable project to yield academic gains and lower drop-out rates, however, no detailed data is provided to support claims related to the problems addressed.

A list of selected sites was not readily provided in the application.

The applicant assumes that there will be no difficulty in the recruitment of 200 community volunteers. Recruiting 200 community volunteers to serve for each of the three years is an ambitious goal.

The applicant has not clarified how they will insure that AmeriCorps members will have the necessary skills to tutor in the academic areas indicated.

Details related to the training and active hands-on learning that RSFC utilizes were not provided in the application.

The staff to student ratio is quite high which could affect anticipated percentage of students who succeed as a result of this intervention.

The applicant showed no information on the success of the participants.

The applicant indicated that they have had this program in the Albuquerque School District on a limited basis and they stated that their experience formed the basis for bringing this program to scale. No data was provided to support this conclusion.