

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Teach For America

Application ID: 14AC156892

Program Name: Teach For America - Indianapolis

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 presents a compelling case for needing qualified teachers in the Indianapolis Public Schools, noting general areas of need as well as the specific requests of local school administrators (for example, the need for teachers to fill vacancies, the need for teachers in core subject areas, the need for teachers matching student ethnicity, the need to retain teachers).

The applicant provides data indicating that there is a need to improve the performance of the schools, indicating that only 32% of students pass high school exit exams in Math and English in the target district.

The applicant identifies the need as a deficit of highly-qualified effective teachers and has identified target schools that align with the Indiana Department of Education priority schools (schools scoring D or below) and provides the example that, currently, there are 28 special education vacancies in the district.

The proposed intervention is likely to be an effective means of matching AmeriCorps teachers with teaching vacancies in Indianapolis schools.

The applicant provides strong evidence that Teach For America (TFA) AmeriCorps members can impact the achievement of students in the schools. For example, KIPP, a public charter school went from receiving the lowest performance grade from the State of Indiana in 2008-9 to earning an 'A' rating in 2011-12 after AmeriCorps members began serving in the school.

The applicant reports that a public charter school serving students in grades 5-8 went from receiving the lowest performance grade from the the state of Indiana to earning the highest available grade following one year in which Teach For America was involved with the school.

The applicant reports that Teach for America AmeriCorps members perform, on average, within the top 25th

percentile of all teachers in the state of Indiana, based on high-performing classroom benchmarks.

The applicant provides strong evidence that TFA AmeriCorps members can impact the achievement of students in the schools. For example, KIPP, a public charter school went from receiving the lowest performance grade from the State of Indiana in 2008-9 to earning an 'A' rating in 2011-12 after AmeriCorps members began serving in the school.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not clearly distinguish between performance needs (what students need in order to reach high academic performance) and instrumental needs (intervention required to meet the performance need), making it difficult to know if the proposed intervention as depicted in the logic model is aligned with the need the applicant intends to address.

The need is not consistently described throughout the narrative and Logic Model. The applicant provides a lot of data (e.g. academic achievement or income levels) but do not clearly link it back to the problem of a deficit of highly qualified, effective teachers.

The applicant does not adequately describe in the narrative or logic model how TFA AmeriCorps teachers will expand educational equity in the Indianapolis School District.

Based on information provided in the narrative and logic model, it is not clear if AmeriCorps members are the "target" of the intervention, of if there is some other target in which change is expected to occur as a result of the intervention such as Indianapolis schools, math/science students, or students in Special Education programs.

There are inconsistencies between the narrative and logic model, making it difficult to determine if the intervention is sound and likely to be effective.

The applicant does not provide specific performance data or information demonstrating the extent to which the program fosters the ability of TFA-Indianapolis AmeriCorps members to serve as effective teachers, nor is specific data provided on whether TFA Indianapolis reduces educational inequity in Indianapolis. It is therefore difficult to determine past performance in these areas.

The information that the applicant provides is limited to academic achievement of the student participants and the performance of the schools. They do not provide information about past performance in the area of addressing deficits in teachers.

The applicant is a long-standing AmeriCorps grantee and did not include a Past Performance section in the narrative outlining the outcomes of previous programs.