

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: City of Davenport

Application ID: 14AC157311

Program Name: City of Davenport AmeriCorps/Youth Corps 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 clearly explains why the issue they seek to address, low graduation rates, is important to the state of Iowa and the community of Davenport, which is the targeted locality. The applicant clearly establishes the prevalence of low graduation rates in Davenport and thereby documents the need for an effective intervention in this city.

The applicant provides information about the prevalence of educational underachievement at every educational or grade level and established the connection between this underachievement and low graduation rates. Further, the proposal documents the existence of social and emotional factors among Davenport students that contributes to low graduation rates.

The applicant provides strong evidence to support adoption of an intervention designed to improve graduation rates in Davenport, Iowa, noting that the graduation rate in Davenport is one of the lowest in the state and also noting that all four high schools in Davenport are classified at Schools in Need of Assistance (SINA).

The applicant strengthens the case for needed intervention by noting that the academic problems that are evident in Davenport elementary and intermediate schools contribute to low high school graduation rates. Current information is provided that indicates a high number of Davenport middle school students drop out of school, and 3rd grade reading proficiency rates are lower in Davenport than other districts. All six intermediate Davenport schools are also classified as SINA.

The applicant cites a 2006 study of Davenport students, noting that local findings support a Gates Foundation study which suggests that there are multiple and complex reasons students do not complete high school.

The applicant provides information for the local context from the 2012 Census (for example, 1/4th of youth ages 0-17 live in poverty) and demonstrates that the need is prevalent and severe as compared to other nearby cities and

throughout the state.

All four high schools, six intermediate schools, and 16 of 18 elementary schools are designated as SINA by the Iowa Department of Education in 2013.

The graduation rate for Davenport schools, which is just over 10% lower than the state average, is further evidence for the need in this location.

A local survey conducted by the Search Institute in 2006, indicates that a majority of middle school students struggle with social and emotional factors (for example, school engagement; feeling valued; etc.). This supports the applicant's proposal to include activities that address social and emotional factors in their intervention.

The applicant does not always provide the source of the information making it difficult to evaluate its quality.

In describing the need for improvements in graduation rates, the applicant establishes a clear picture of contributing factors and the need to address them through a multilevel programmatic approach. The proposal describes the strategic deployment of AmeriCorps members at every identified level to address the multilevel problem.

The proposed multi-component, multi-level intervention, to include 73 AmeriCorps members providing "connective" services within Davenport schools, community centers and parks/recreation programs, coupled with the combined efforts of AmeriCorps leveraged volunteers serving as youth mentors and other existing service providers, is likely to be an effective means of providing supportive services to Davenport youth.

The proposed intervention, as a comprehensive community service model, is likely to strengthen community capacity to support improved high school completion rates of Davenport students.

The applicant proposes a sophisticated, multi-level, intervention that includes AmeriCorps activities at each school level. The activities proposed are appropriate for each age level (high school, intermediate school, and elementary school).

The applicant proposes to leverage community partners to further their impact. AmeriCorps members will connect participants to appropriate organizations to put participants in touch with available resources.

The applicant cites several studies, two meta-analysis reports (one of those includes mention of experimental design studies) and four additional non-experimental studies. Each of the studies provides current and relevant evidence supporting that the intervention will lead to the expected outcomes for this target population.

Much of the evidence from the meta-analysis reports is specific to the interventions that are proposed. For example, results from a survey from the 2006 Jobs for America's Graduates program is provided as evidence to support that activity.

The applicant has successfully implemented AmeriCorps programs for several years and has demonstrated success with recruitment and coordination of these programs. The applicant also documents the successes and outcomes of the Youth Corps program administered for two years.

The applicant's past performance demonstrates success in enrollment and retention of AmeriCorps members, and success in AmeriCorps recruitment, coordination, and support of 139 volunteers, thereby laying a foundation to achieve aims and outcomes associated with improving school completion rates in Davenport, Iowa.

The applicant has successfully implemented an AmeriCorps program since 2006 and provides details from its most recent Progress Report on enrollments and outputs. From their accounting, the program is run well and has high enrollment rates.

100% of YouthCorps members were either successful high school graduates or began the school year on track to graduate. This indicates that the intervention is leading to the intended outcome.

Weaknesses:

The survey of Davenport middle school students was conducted in 2006, making it difficult to know if the level of need in Davenport students has increased, decreased or remained the same in the ensuing years.

The applicant gives data to provide the local context and compares Davenport statistics to other Iowa cities but does not provide information placing Davenport in a broader context (Regional or National).

The applicant does not note or describe other interventions, programs, or services that may have been implemented in Davenport to increase high school graduation rates. Without information about other services provided to address the identified problem, it is difficult to determine the unique contributions this proposed intervention could potentially make.

The applicant does not provide a good baseline indication of Development Asset areas Davenport students lack; it is therefore difficult to know if the proposed intervention will be a good match in terms of providing the right kinds of supports to strengthen Developmental Assets of Davenport students.

The applicant does not provide enough detail about how the AmeriCorps members will make appropriate connections of at-risk youth with the planned services and interventions.

The applicant does not provide a strong rationale for how and why a model in which AmeriCorps members will connect at-risk youth with existing interventions will lead to improved high school graduation rates; it is therefore difficult to determine the potential effectiveness of the proposed intervention.

It was difficult to figure out how many AmeriCorps members were being requested. The narrative stated 73 and the Logic Model counts 77.

The meta-analysis cited evaluates 69 out-of-school time programs and mentions experimental design studies, but it does not give details that would allow for an evaluation of the quality of this evidence.

Some of the studies provided as evidence (for example, Partee & Halperin, 2006) are more than six years old.

The applicant does not report data/evidence to support conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention as a means to improve high school graduation rates in Davenport

The applicant provides limited information about the outcomes of past interventions, AmeriCorps or others.