

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants

Application ID: 14AC157778

Program Name: New American Integration 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 describes the target community as being refugees and immigrants which account for almost 15% of the total Massachusetts population. Evidence provided to document the need is from the US Census American Community Survey which was conducted in 2012. It was found that 34% of immigrants in the state live below 200% of the federal poverty line.

The applicant provides clear and compelling evidence that Massachusetts immigrants who speak English in the home earn 2.5 times as much as those who do not speak English well (MassINC, 2005, *The Changing Face of Massachusetts*).

The applicant cites 2 studies that compare the earnings of immigrants and refugees that speak English as opposed to those who do not.

The applicant provides comparative data relating to the poverty rates of immigrants and refugees versus that of naturalized citizens. The applicant describes a causal relationship between language barriers, employability (lack of) and economic mobility (lack of) experienced by its immigrant and refugee client base. The applicant cites 4 studies that measure the poverty rates of the immigrant/refugee population within its service area. Those studies also describe the number of immigrants/refugees seeking instruction in English.

The applicant effectively demonstrates several obstacles (including economic status, English proficiency, and limited employment opportunities) confronting the refugee and immigrant communities in Massachusetts.

The labor force and literacy statistics provided address the need for employment and English knowledge in the particular areas of program implementation in and around Boston and Central Massachusetts.

The applicant provides persuasive evidence that services have not only been cut in the last couple of years but that there is a significant need for job readiness training, vocational English for speakers of other languages, citizenship assistance and English language interpretation for social services, to immigrant and refugee communities. One of the

problems identified by the applicant is that 80% of the rules have become very stringent often requiring individuals to have citizenship to receive benefits.

The applicant provides evidence of significant waiting lists for English classes for new citizens, demonstrating a need for additional training and support programs such as English classes for the target population.

The structured program provided by the applicant ensures that the Members provide a valuable service while at the same time pick up valuable skills that carry over to their everyday lives.

The applicant describes clearly that the successful outcomes will be higher employability, increased English proficiency and increased employment levels if the project is successful.

The applicant has previous experience with AmeriCorps, and reports achieving increasingly high results in terms of increased English proficiency, citizenship, and employment.

Members will provide at least 20 hours of civics instruction to 250 of the 900 economically disadvantaged adults who are receiving citizenship assistance.

The applicant provided a multi-faceted plan of action to prepare and equip AmeriCorps members to serve its target community in a meaningful way. For example, the applicant proposes providing and working with community-based social service providers to locate AmeriCorps members at their sites to provide interpreting services. This will help the clients access and secure supportive services right in the communities they reside. The applicant demonstrated an ability to effectively conceive a vision and plan of action that is responsive to the changing needs of the community it serves – while also preparing AmeriCorps members for future employment themselves. For example, the applicant described an emerging need of its client base (job readiness training) and as a result added a curriculum on job readiness.

The applicant convincingly demonstrates that the key interventions (such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and citizenship assistance) may be tied to the desired outcomes related to employment and citizenship.

The similar backgrounds and employment status of the AmeriCorps members and the program recipients are likely to yield better outcomes, due to similar perspectives and experiences shared by both groups.

The applicant in the past two years has been successful in addressing regional gaps in ESOL services and assisting students in demonstrating English proficiency gains.

The applicant provided compelling evidence that New American Integration Program (NAIP) members nearly tripled the number of students enrolled in sponsored English classes from year one's total of 466 students to 1,198 at the end of year two.

The applicant assembled a robust network of service providers to implement this grant in previous years. Certain benchmark goals were surpassed (tripled number of enrollees for English classes, for example). Others were also notable due to the quality of achievement. For example, the applicant cites the number of enrollees and graduates of the English classes provided, those graduates surpassed the anticipated competency levels.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide evidence to support its stated need that community-based organizations are usually not well equipped to ensure non-English speakers equitable access.

The applicant did not specify some of the goals of the training it is offering. For example, job readiness training is appropriate for the community the applicant serves, however the applicant did not provide specific goals of this offering, in contrast to other offerings.

The long-term goals of increased employment and citizenship are likely to be affected by many other factors not addressed in the program design (including the economic climate, potential prejudice, and competition for admission to schools and limited employment opportunities), and the applicant has not adequately addressed these barriers to success. As a result, the ability to attribute attainment of these outcomes (such as employment and citizenship) to the program intervention is uncertain.

The applicant diminished its ability to meet some of its performance measure targets in previous years, by its lack of planning for the common logistical barriers many community based programs encounter, by its own admission. For example, the applicant did not anticipate common needs such as childcare. This resulted in the applicant reducing the training hours for participants – a stated performance measure.

The applicant's earlier program did not achieve all of its goals (for example, it fell short in number of citizenship interviews and passing the citizenship tests).