

**APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY**  
**2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition**

Legal Applicant: Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK)

Application ID: 14ES155893

Program Name: Arkansas AmeriCorps Future Teacher 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 Applicant relies on U.S. Census data for a current status of Arkansas' poverty, unemployment, and median income in comparison to U.S. rates.

The pre-schools targeted for this project are aligned with schools identified as "in distress" as defined by the State of Arkansas.

The magnitude of the defined problem is found in more than half of Arkansas counties. This project includes many of these are counties in its plan of work.

Applicant makes note of several studies that document interventions to address educational impacts of poverty.

The applicant has provided evidence that without the targeted support, 75% of the children in the targeted communities will score below proficient in literacy and math.

The applicant provides sufficient data to indicate which targeted communities (i.e., counties) are at-risk and the levels of poverty among pre-school children in those communities.

The applicant provides comparative economic data regarding the 40 counties targeted for the proposed Future Teacher Initiative (FTI) as compared to the average of the rest of the state.

The applicant describes the lack of resources that exist among many of the schools within the counties that children attend.

The applicant provides data regarding the percentage of students scoring below proficiency on the state Literacy and

Math Benchmark exams.

The applicant has provided research-based evidence that the proposed project will provide quality interventions to assist academically and distressed schools in helping targeted at-risk students achieve success in kindergarten.

The applicant describes a consistent Theory of Change that demonstrates a logical relationship between inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes.

The applicant has collected pre/post test data on previous years that test Kindergarten Readiness and provide evidence for gains in pre-school readiness over the course of the intervention.

The applicant does provide a consistent and appropriately-aligned Theory of Change that reflects a logical connection between inputs, activities, and short, medium, and long term outcomes.

The applicant has developed a well thought-out plan to assess and track growth of students who participate in the tutoring program through pre, mid, and post assessments.

Host Site Supervisors will meet regularly with Members to review activities and prepare for instruction and tutoring activities.

Community and parent volunteers are actively recruited from the targeted school districts by the Members.

The applicant well-documented that the project in previous years helped 92% of the children served achieve growth in at least three of the five areas of the Kindergarten readiness Indicator Checklist. This is an increase over the previous year's growth which was 82% growth.

The applicant provided evidence that the organization has had previous programs that have become embedded into the communities.

Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK) conducts other AmeriCorps projects and has experienced staff and leadership committed to the Program's expectations for Members.

The program conducted external evaluation and collected data locally for program-improvement purposes.

SEARK relies on established measures for documenting student achievement.

Applicant has implemented rewards and recognition programs to acknowledge FTI members on a regular basis to address, in part, the retention issue. The Applicant is implementing other professional development and engagement activities to increase Member retention.

SEARK promotes the AmeriCorps brand in numerous ways.

Weaknesses:

Applicant does not provide data on students' educational outcomes as a result of schools' inability to offer additional tutoring and/or enrichment services.

Data by school or targeted area from State Benchmark exams for math and literacy are referenced but not documented.

Data on rates of school failure in the targeted communities are not provided.

The Applicant notes that expert research in support of their educational strategy is available but does not articulate what that research entails.

The applicant did not provide poverty data for some of the targeted counties, therefore, it was difficult to determine the problem and need for the targeted region.

The applicant did not provide a correlating data to indicate how many schools in the targeted counties were ABC priority schools; therefore, it was difficult to determine why these schools were selected for the targeted interventions.

The applicant indicated there are issues of isolation with volunteers serving in rural counties, but did not address any solutions to resolve these issues.

The long-term outcomes for FTI members to choose teaching have no link to any planned activities or outputs.

There is no indication of support, training, mentoring, etc., for the FTI volunteers.

Training is provided by host preschool but there is no indication that there is a consistent training model followed.

There are no references to studies indicating Members' impact on instruction and tutoring—from literature, in Arkansas, or with targeted student population.

Unable to determine how direct correlation of improved Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist scores were as related to FTI members' tutoring.

The applicant is unclear as to its specific accomplishments in tutoring pre-Kindergarten children in the specified areas of literacy and Math.

Although the applicant cites how SEARK has provided support and assistance to schools in some of the targeted areas, no pertinent data was included regarding the program's overall accomplishments with the population in any related areas of primary education.

There are unclear messages about the purpose of the FTI program leading to confusion and questions among permanent staff.

There is no clear baseline data to benchmark performance goals.