

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY
2014 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Playworks Education Energized

Program Name: Playworks National Direct

Application ID: 14ND156502

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 prevalence of youth bullying in the United States is variously reported in terms of gross numbers (3.7 million bullies, 3.2 million victims who experience moderate or severe bullying), in terms of frequency (every 7 minutes), in terms of percent of school-aged children involved (70-80%), and in terms of location (primarily at school). Statistics vary from state to state, school to school, and one means of measurement to another.

Documented results of bullying include poor academic performance, reduced participation in school activities, truancy, a lack of interest in school, disengagement from peers, delinquency, fighting, injuries, suspensions and suicide. As much playground bullying is also witnessed by students other than the target, it creates a general level of fear and anxiety, negatively affecting the entire school climate.

The applicant agency will target 104 high-poverty elementary schools in 14 U.S. cities. Schools will be selected where 80% or more students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches. Further selection criteria will be based upon the candidate schools' needs assessments of their own overall school environment, safety and bullying, as well as the applicant agency's meetings with school administrators and observations of recess.

The program itself focuses heavily upon student interaction outside the classroom, primarily recess, but also including athletics, coaching and in-classroom game time. In addition, there will be 1-2 community activities during the school year which involve parents.

The applicant has identified the issue of bullying to be what it plans to address and has included data from reputable sources including bullying.gov and from the U.S. Department of Justice. Data is provided at a national, state and city level for the targeted areas to be served. The data included supports the idea that bullying mainly occurs in schools. Given this, the proposal intends to implement school-based interventions.

The applicant provides a very detailed description of the need to address "bullying" in elementary schools, especially

during recess and out-of-class time. By deploying a group of trained AmeriCorps members at each of the 14 partnering schools, they propose to help reduce bullying through a series of proven interventions. As a result, the applicant states that it will promote safer school environments; and when students feel safe, they achieve better academically. Using statistics from the American Medical Association, (AMA), the applicant states that more than 3.7 million youth engage in some form of bullying; and more than 3.2 million children are reported as victims of bullying incidences.

The applicant provided excellent, relevant and recent statistics to support the need to address bullying, as well as the outcomes that have been proven as successful results based on interventions such as Playtime National Direct.

Playworks Education Energized proposes to implement a well-researched, 5 component anti-bullying program with which the applicant already has had successful experience. Implementation sites will be 104 high poverty elementary schools in the United States. These sites have not yet been selected and will come from high poverty schools to be screened to assure that anti-bullying intervention is among their priorities and to observe the pre-intervention characteristics of the schools' recess periods. Students in selected schools will have the opportunity for at least 96 hours of regular interaction with role models from among AmeriCorps members trained in conflict resolution, inclusiveness and positive problem-solving over the course of the school year.

Addition of a new sixth component, Community Engagement, to the original five is meant to include families and to reach beyond the school to the community. Expected outcomes include a heightened sense of belonging to the school community in families as well as students.

The applicant has included specific data from current research studies conducted on the effectiveness and impact of Playworks programs' on bullying within schools. Findings include a decrease in bullying incidences as reported by teachers and an overall impact in school climate. The applicant provided compelling data to demonstrate how AmeriCorps members were instrumental at the targeted schools in improving school climate by actively engaging with students during recess and at other times that are prone for bullying incidences.

The applicant presents a concise and rational discussion on how the 117 AmeriCorps members will be utilized in the 14 communities/schools. The Playworks AmeriCorps members will be deployed at these schools to work with students both in school, during recess and after school to demonstrate respect and other positive behaviors that make bullying socially unacceptable.

The applicant's Logic Model detailed and clearly demonstrated how the AmeriCorps members would be used through six key intervention components.

The applicant has a 10-year involvement with AmeriCorps State and National and reports extraordinary success surpassing its targets in 2012-2013. Matched teacher surveys from intervention and control sites showed 71% of intervention schools reporting increased school engagement. School engagement has been demonstrated to be one of the factors negatively affected by the community problem of bullying. Thus, an increase in school engagement is one of a constellation of factors providing a sign of decreased bullying. In the same year, the number of students reached was larger than the target.

The applicant has indicated that it has had a 10-year partnership with AmeriCorps which indicates positive past

performance. It has provided specific details regarding its current program status on a number of different grant initiatives. It has also included details regarding surpassing goals and expectations for the number of students it planned to serve. Its prior/current grant also focuses on bullying.

Additionally, the applicant has utilized AmeriCorps members to implement similar interventions to help curtail bullying. This clearly indicates some proven expertise in operating the type of program it proposes for funding.

Weaknesses:

Although the rationale provided for selecting cities in which school site selection will take place is a minimum of 50% eligibility for free and reduced price lunch, the applicant did not provide evidence that bullying is more prevalent in low income schools. The list of cities from which schools will be selected varies widely in the range of bullying prevalence obtained from student self-report from lows of 11% of students who report being bullied in Chicago and 14% in Philadelphia, to highs of 30% in Minneapolis and 35% in Portland.

The data provided lacks dates. In addition, the areas to be served are large and the data included is not site specific.

As the intervention sites have not yet been selected, there is only minimal statewide and/or citywide baseline information.

The outcome of Playworks' new component, Community Engagement, including 1-2 events per year, is not yet supported by experimental or quasi-experimental evidence.

The applicant states that 117 AmeriCorps members will be recruited from the targeted communities. However, they neither designated how many children would be assigned to each AmeriCorps member nor teams that would be assigned at each school.

The applicant states that the reason the number of students reached was larger than the target was attributable to larger than expected school size rather than the characteristics of the anti-bullying intervention.

While the proposal includes details regarding managing other grants and exceeding goals with number of students it served, quantitative data regarding positive impact for these programs is not included.

The applicant did not fully demonstrate what its main achievements have been under its 10-year state affiliated and funded AmeriCorps program.