

# APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

## 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK)      **Application ID:** 15AC167319

**Program Name:** AR Smart Start AmeriCorps Tutoring

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 summary 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 application documents a compelling case for the need for the proposed project by using current and relevant information points on the target group from local sources, as well as statewide comparisons. The added information about the local economy is tied to the project by two recent citations clearly relating the situation in the area to the project - children in need of academic improvement.

The training plan described is substantial, including a three day comprehensive orientation and then academic instructional training at school sites. In the orientation, Members first receive information on AmeriCorps prohibited and unallowable activities, then this is reinforced with roleplaying scenarios to ensure understanding.

Site supervisors' training is detailed in the application as an orientation and post-year follow-up assessment. This is reinforced at the beginning of the year with a memorandum of understanding with each site detailing program requirements and prohibited activities. Classroom teachers and reading and math specialists provide direct supervision of Members, training and selection of activities and are involved in the Member midyear and end of year evaluations.

Members' are challenged to review their experiences monthly by writing a "success story" for the program director. This is used to reflect on the meaning and value of their service. It will also offer the supervisors a glimpse of each Member's experience and a chance for intervention if needed.

The establishment of a Google networking site for the project is described in the application. This will allow Members to have instant contact with peers throughout the state. The incorporation of the sharing solutions with fellow Members should lead to a strong esprit de corps.

The applicant provides relevant data to document the needs/problems in the areas to be served making a compelling case of widespread and severe problems in the target community.

AmeriCorps members will provide sound, value-added services to the target community by enhancing existing services provided by teachers in the target schools and providing additional services to the target community with community service projects directly focusing on ameliorating cited community needs.

Training activities for Members provide a sound approach with qualified personnel conducting the training.

The Community service 101 training shows the commitment the program has to effectively leverage and engage community volunteers in the program.

The three-pronged supervision strategy provides a sound approach to supervision; the principals' buy in is an effective approach to ascertain success, especially in rural schools, without putting too much on the plates of teachers who assess Corps Members but do not have the added responsibility of directly supervising them.

Reflection through journaling and networking with each other through the SEARK AmeriCorps Google networking site is a sound plan especially since it is woven throughout the term of the service and the journals are submitted to the program director.

The applicant clearly defined the proposed problem to be addressed by the program. The applicant took time to develop a correlation between hunger, poverty and low performing schools and academic performance.

The applicant cited various academic and statistical data on hunger, poverty rates and the performance of the schools which they expect AmeriCorps members to serve as tutors.

The applicant clearly described how the implementation of timed intervention scoring to determine if the tutoring is being effective has been proven to be an effective strategy for making adjustments and changes as needed to assure students stay on target for reading and math competency.

The applicant clearly described how the proposed member training will be specific and targeted for the proposed intervention; Members would be trained on CNCS policies and prohibited activities, demonstrate their understanding through practice while in training, community service, five basic reading skills, common core grade concepts for math and tutoring strategies.

**Weaknesses:**

Although relating that Members will be recruited from the local community, sufficient information is lacking relating to the actual recruitment efforts that will be conducted in the program.

The applicant did not state the expected grade level achievement of the students involved in the tutoring program within the specified timeframe.

The applicant did not specifically state how they would recruit Members from the target area they expect this program to serve.

The applicant did not explain in sufficient detail how the volunteers would be recruited, trained and for what purpose they would be used in the proposed program.