

# APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

## 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Iowa State University

**Application ID:** 15AC168806

**Program Name:** Iowa AmeriCorps 4H Outreach 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 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 applicant clearly explains the lack of supplemental programming for youth in isolated rural communities and communities with high poverty rates throughout Iowa. The applicant's 4-H program is designed to supply this supplemental programming to increase academic achievement, including STEM topics, and to promote healthy behaviors in locations without other out of school program opportunities.

The application provides examples of previously selected sites which gives a clear understanding of the characteristics of communities that will be helped by the program.

The applicant makes clear that Members will provide the 4-H programming to communities that have little to no access to out of school educational learning experiences.

The sites will be selected based on such need indicators as rural population, percent of children at or below poverty level, lack of alternative programming, as well as, schools in need of assistance, and percent of youth with below grade level reading and math scores. All Members will be involved in direct work with youth to deliver the programming.

There is a strong member supervision plan, including supervisors working with Members individually to set personal goals and regularly review progress and performance.

All Members are required to present a webinar for other Members that explains their site activities, and Members have the opportunity to network at state-wide trainings.

The applicant provided a descriptions of the community problems by discussing that Iowa AmeriCorps 4-H Outreach proposes to have 50 AmeriCorps members who will deliver positive youth development opportunities.

Activities will occur at approximately 18 sites across Iowa. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for the improved engagement of 90% of students completing AmeriCorps 4-H Outreach supported youth programs. The applicant also discussed that this program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of Education and Healthy Futures.

The applicant provided details to show how the community need is prevalent by discussing that just under half (44%) of Iowa youth report they do not exercise on a regular basis, and 28% of Iowa youth are classified as obese (Kids Count, 2013).

The applicant provides details to show interventions and roles of the AmeriCorps members by describing that Members will work with host site organizations (partners) to holistically address their identified community needs.

The applicant further discussed that these interventions will be provided to youth through academic skills in safe and supportive environments while strengthening community connectedness.

The applicant provided distinct evidence to show that their proposed project will produce significant contributions to their theory of change. All Members will work directly with youth to deliver programming using the 4-H principles and practices of positive youth development.

These activities vary with each site involving full- and part-time Members who serve based on the duration and dosage of the programs provided, their experience, and on community needs and population.

The Logic Model provided is strong and very comprehensive because the applicant provided inputs, outcomes and activities to address the project problem. The applicant also discussed that the problem of lower academic achievement and limited access to enrichment activities will be addressed with expected outcomes of improved academic achievement and increased participation in post-secondary experiences.

Compelling evidence is provided by the applicant to show high quality member training that includes rules involving prohibited activities. Additional high quality member training involves program staff presenting a mandatory orientation to all AmeriCorps member host sites via remote access technology.

The applicant discussed that this presentation will include a discussion of the AmeriCorps programs, policies and procedures, and the corresponding rules and regulations for CNCS, and prohibited activities.

The proposed supervision trainings shows strong evidence of being successful and effective in providing guidance, support and allow AmeriCorps supervisors to follow program priorities. Supervisors will be expected to attend a mandatory orientation that covers AmeriCorps and program goals, expectations, regulations, reporting requirements, and prohibited activities for Members and volunteers. The applicant also discussed that supervisors are required to sign a Prohibited Activities document verifying understanding and intent to comply.

The applicant provided compelling evidence to show how AmeriCorps members will gain skills that will be valued by future employers by discussing that Members are required to attend the Life after AmeriCorps training in the spring; which includes strategies to maximize a National Service experience on resumes and in job interviews.

Strong evidence is provided by the applicant to show how Members will develop connections with each other. The applicant discussed that these connections will be seen through member training designed to encourage networking with other Members and emphasizing the sense of belonging to AmeriCorps.

The applicant also discussed that at state-level trainings, Members are brought together to network and learn as a team and to reflect on their service.

The applicant also provided strong details to show they draw applicants from their local communities by discussing that AmeriCorps 4-H Outreach Members are almost exclusively recruited from the host site communities.

The applicant clearly described the need for in-school & out of school programming and summer programs to rural communities.

The Community Need is thoroughly explained with sufficient evidence of the importance of programs that enhance community involvement; and the dynamic results for schools and students who engage in the STEM Curricular.

The Theory of Change and Logic Model is clearly devised and addresses the concerns and needs of the program in the communities. One important factor is the 4H model because of its worldwide notoriety. The 4H model lends creditability to the program.

**Weaknesses:**

The applicant does not provide detail on the types of activities that will be undertaken by Members.

Though the application and logic model mention in-school activities (as well as after-school and summer programs), there is no discussion of the content of this aspect of the program.

The application says that there will be 1550 volunteers involved and that Members may recruit and train them, but there is no discussion of how the volunteers will be recruited or what the volunteers' role will be.

Though the application's evidence base describes one national study on the positive impact of 4-H, and the results of the applicant's prior evaluation which showed self-reported increased positive attitude and engagement, there was no link demonstrated to some specific desired outcomes identified in the application. For example, there was no evidence to support the positive impact of the program activities on such proposed outcomes as improved academic achievement, increased understanding of STEM or increased knowledge of healthy food choices.

The applicant makes only a general statement that member training on development of the specific programming will be provided on an as-needed basis by the local sites, which does not ensure consistency in delivering effective evidence-based programs. Ongoing training is also not built in to the program. The application states only that other trainings may be offered on an as-needed basis.

The applicant states that Members are most often recruited from local site communities, but there is no description of a recruitment plan or any detail provided of how potential Members are identified.

The applicant provided minimal details to show how the community problems would be addressed by the program.

The applicant did not provide relevant data to show how the community problem of education is prevalent and severe.

The applicant provided minimal details to show interventions at each project site.

The applicant did not provide details to show how their interventions are likely to lead to the outcomes identified in their theory of change.

The applicant did not provide details to show how member reflections will be used to reflect on their meaningful service experiences.

The most significant weakness is the program's ability to successfully retain surveys for two years in a row. The applicant does not reveal a method of change to produce sufficient survey results.