

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: ServeMinnesota Action Network

Application ID: 15AC169167

Program Name: Minnesota Reading Corps - Metro

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:

AmeriCorps members will provide significant instructional support that is currently unavailable to young students (pre-kindergarten to third grade) in the target area because teachers in these schools are unable to offer individualized attention to their most needy students.

This intervention is supported by research that suggests if third graders do not develop reading proficiency, they are at-risk for falling behind significantly as early as fourth grade (Paige, 2005).

The supervision plan includes a comprehensive, multi-layered level of support to ensure the continued development of AmeriCorps members.

The model has been demonstrated to provide high quality supervision according to results of an independent evaluation conducted by the University of Chicago in 2013. With strong supervision support from both Internal and Master coaches, Members can continually improve their teaching skills.

The applicant provides a well-described plan for providing superior training opportunities for AmeriCorps members to develop teaching/coaching skills. These skills can be utilized in a variety of professional settings. Through participation in intensive training using an evidence-based program, Members learn key skills such as "professional communication, goal-setting, mentoring, and cultural competency".

The applicant presents compelling evidence of how the community need/problem is prevalent in the communities where the Members will target the proposed program (e.g., 96,000 children will potentially lack reading proficiency; 59% of those in the targeted areas are currently failing the third grade reading test; and one-third of the students in the target areas are English Learners).

The applicant's theory of change logic model clearly describes the interventions with well-aligned activities and outputs to address the Pre-K and K-3 literacy challenges experienced by the children that will be targeted. The model includes assessment of Pre-K students to identify at-risk status, daily one-on-one and small group interventions, progress monitoring for the duration of the program, six Members piloting the various interventions in family child care settings, 636 Members individually tutoring 25 K-3 students each, and volunteer coordinators managing the Target Reading Group who will provide supplemental practice for students in two Minneapolis high-

need schools.

The applicant provides a very clear and detailed overview of the skills that AmeriCorps members will gain based on the training component within the program. The training will include literary coaching and career building skills.

The applicant provides clear and comprehensive strategies for recruiting AmeriCorps members and volunteers from the communities in which the proposed programs will operate (i.e., recruiting videos, emails, online ads, posters, mobile apps, outreach to community organizations, churches, and libraries).

The applicant clearly describes the roles that AmeriCorps members will play in accelerating student reading levels and proficiency by grade 3 for targeted children.

The model is research-based, replicable, and aligns with nationally recognized, evidence-based interventions that deliver results regardless of the students' backgrounds. Evaluative studies and research through a randomized controlled trial, a study on the program's replicability and a quasi-experimental design evaluation present strong evidence that the model is very effective.

The applicant's description of the intervention is clearly described and likely to lead to the outcomes presented in the theory of change as supported by evidence indicating that children who read proficiently by the third grade are four times more likely to graduate from high school. Interventions to be delivered by AmeriCorps members are aligned with the National Reading Panel's recommendations, as presented in the model.

The data collected weekly by AmeriCorps members to monitor student progress will be used by school employees to effectively administer a multi-layered approach to coaching Members and students so that the program can be implemented across multiple sites.

Both member training and volunteer trainings are clearly described and comprehensive. Depending on their assignments, the trainings appropriately vary in length and subject matter. Additionally, Members are supported by an Internal Coach for day-to-day instruction, a Master Coach who supervises assessments and a program staff member who helps with logistics and training on AmeriCorps expectations.

A recent study evaluating this unique combination of guidance and support concluded that the structure is critical to the success of the program.

Weaknesses:

Some of the applicant's citations are eight to ten years old. In citing that 59% of the children are currently failing Minnesota's 3rd grade test of reading proficiency, there is no authority named to back up that claim. Other references to research lack a citation.