

# APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

## 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Marquette-Alger Regional Educational Service Agency

**Application ID:** 15AC169279

**Program Name:** MARESA AmeriCorps

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 presents convincing evidence that economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities in the central Upper Peninsula region are failing to achieve proficiency in reading.

The applicant clearly differentiates the activities of the AmeriCorps members from the activities of the staff. Therefore, it is evident that the service provided by Members is critical to achieving the literacy outcomes defined in the applicant's theory of change: increased scores on reading assessments, increased number of students achieving benchmark and reading at grade level, and improvement in literacy achievement among students in the target population.

The applicant presents a comprehensive plan for initial and ongoing training of AmeriCorps members conducted by professionals skilled in their appropriate content areas.

AmeriCorps members' contact with supervisors is well documented in the application, and the guidance received from supervisors is well-designed to support Members' successful implementation of a literacy-based tutoring program.

The applicant demonstrates the need for Get Ready, Get Reading's intensive, small group literacy tutoring for preK-5th grade students whose universal screening of reading proficiency benchmarks of "just below" or "just at" classifies those students as least likely to receive Special Education or Title 1 services.

Training AmeriCorps members to administer, score, and interpret Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills likely will result in member skill development that will be valued by employers after the program concludes.

The applicant presents a well-designed plan for pre-service orientation that promotes a positive member experience.

The proposed member participation in site-based meetings and continuing education conferences support the criterion of networking and team building with other Members and AmeriCorps alumni.

The proposed participation in service events is likely to be effective in promoting member esprit de corps.

The applicant clearly demonstrates that reading proficiency for third grade students on statewide reading assessments in the Upper Peninsula service area are significantly below state averages. The agency "Get Ready, Get Reading" program will address reading needs of pre K-5 students to improve reading proficiency to benchmark norms.

The applicant presents a feasible plan for those students who are assessed not "at" but "close" to reading benchmarks by providing tutoring, individually and in small groups, to address individual student reading skill levels with assessment of progress made throughout the school year.

The theory of change and logic model align with the stated problem of children reading below proficiency level and thereby offering proposed interventions including tutoring to impact improved student reading objectives. Members utilize the DIBELS skill assessment tool to measure acquisition of early literacy skills for this age group.

The applicant will provide a comprehensive yearlong training calendar stressing training on AmeriCorps required rules and procedures, pre-service training, on-site experiences with teachers and school personnel, curriculum training offered by literacy experts, and monthly meetings.

Members clearly receive quality experiences at the school site by attending staff meetings, in-services, education conferences and institutes, interaction with teachers and other professional development in the field of education.

The applicant documents Members who have pursued degrees in education and/or careers in this field resulting from program participation.

Applicant has clearly documented recruitment efforts utilizing both local resources and web-based sources. One key partnership for recruitment is the local university.

**Weaknesses:**

It is not clear how including students with disabilities in the target population is consistent with the rationale of providing services to students least likely to receive special education or Title 1 services.

The impact of expanding the number of full-time AmeriCorps members from 12 to 15 is difficult to assess because the applicant does not indicate the number of students to be served beyond the previous two years' target of 600 students.

The applicant does not articulate an intentional plan for encouraging Members to engage in public or community service beyond their year of service.

Increasing student literacy achievement appears in short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes in the logic model, making it difficult to ascertain substantive changes across time in the program results and compromises the model's logical alignment.

It is unclear from the proposal when, how, and to what extent supervisors receive AmeriCorps training to ensure that AmeriCorps program regulations, priorities, and expectations are understood and able to share with Members.

It is not clear how the position of site supervisor receives training or instruction on AmeriCorps requirements including prohibited activities that would ensure their understanding of member roles and requirements.