

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Springfield College

Application ID: 15AC170297

Program Name: Springfield College AmeriCorps 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 submitted a very strong and well written application. The comprehensive research and data, along with the targeted model to be used were all in line with the number of Members/volunteers needed and the intended outcomes.

The applicant's data from the (MCAS) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System that 63% of third graders in Springfield, MA compared to 43% statewide were not proficient readers presented compelling evidence for the necessity of a reading program in Springfield, MA.

The applicant's reading programs' alignment to President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper" challenge speaks to the applicant's knowledge of the president's national initiatives to end illiteracy.

The Reading Corps model to combat childhood illiteracy was well documented and researched. With the applicant's established relationships within the community, and the past work with AmeriCorps programs, the proposed model should run smoothly and efficiently.

The applicant presented a comprehensive plan for initial and on-going training of the Members and volunteers and laid out the consequences for failure to follow program rules.

The applicant provides a clear description of the problem/need in their community of the reading failure and the lack of early literacy skills of at-risk pre-K children.

The proposed literacy interventions using the Reading Corps' theory of change is likely to result in successful program outcomes.

The training plan, which includes a week-long training at the Reading Corps Summer Institute at Springfield College, provides a high quality effective program detailing topics and activities throughout the Members' service.

The application clearly describes how the community need of children's low reading skills by third grade will be addressed by the proposed intervention to improve literacy-readiness of 3 to 5 year-olds. It provides research and documentation of the long-term effects, including a significantly lower graduation rate, of children whose third-grade

reading skills were low,

Further, it provided evidence of widespread poverty in the area to be served and cited research showing that children who grow up in poverty have lower early literacy skills as they begin kindergarten.

Convincing evidence that the need is severe and widespread in the community to be served is provided by recent data from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, the 2012 American Community Survey, and other cited research.

The roles of AmeriCorps members is fully detailed, showing the specific activities such as songs and games that they will use to support early-literacy skills such as alphabetic knowledge, vocabulary, book and print awareness, etc. It also explains their important roles in assessing students, compiling data, and discussing results with other school staff.

The application provides extensive evidence in the form of research related to the interventions included in Reading Corps as well as actual Reading Corps results from another state showing the effectiveness of the proposed program and a logical cause-effect between the activities of the program and the planned outcomes.

The program includes a robust training program for Members with a 1-week institute at the beginning of their service, followed by frequent and regularly scheduled training during their service term as well as observation and feedback.

The application includes the topics to be included in the trainings, showing that the Members will be well-trained to accomplish their objectives.

Training on prohibited activities is included at the beginning of the service term and reinforced throughout via observations and monitoring by Program Directors.

Members will reflect on their experiences by completing weekly journals which the Program Directors will review, provide feedback, and determine whether assistance is needed.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not provide adequate information regarding the Talk, Read, and Write with Me initiative with parents and how the data collected will be used to support the reading program with the intended population.

The applicant failed to state how supervisors will be trained to lead, teach, and train the AmeriCorps members.

The applicant does not provide any information about how Members and volunteers will be made aware of the program's rules and its prohibited activities.

The applicant does not provide any information about how supervisors will be adequately trained/prepared to follow AmeriCorps and program regulations, priorities and expectations.

The application does not include a comprehensive plan for supervisory training.