

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Sierra Nevada Alliance

Application ID: 15AC170606

Program Name: Sierra Nevada AmeriCorps Partnership

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 and succinctly explains that the proposed efforts will restore degraded watershed and increase community stewardship as a result of a number of specific and tested activities that each have identified and numeric goals.

The applicant provides compelling evidence, including relevant statistics and historical causes, explaining the extent and scope of impaired watersheds within the Sierra Nevada region and the deleterious water quality and public health impacts that are resulting from the current conditions.

The data presented as to the extent and scale of the situation which the proposed project addresses is well-described and from high quality sources.

The applicant clearly explains that AmeriCorps members will work in five distinct element areas and provides clear and measurable goals for each element.

The training plan for Members will result in new and increased knowledge of specific environmental topics and will prepare Members for life after AmeriCorps.

The applicant has completed rigorous internal evaluations utilizing online survey tools and interviews to gauge the effectiveness of their past programs on changing participant's behavior and the results have been overwhelmingly supportive of their methodologies.

By providing Members a two-stage orientation including a five-day training program before their service even begins, the applicant is providing a very thorough program to ensure that Members are equipped to succeed in their work.

By having to pass a quiz regarding prohibited activities, including the consequences of non-adherence, Members will fully understand the rules and prohibited activities before initiating work.

The supervision program is comprehensive in that it provides for regular communication between staff supervisors and Members utilizing site visits, emails and phone calls as well as oversight provided by an on-site host supervisor

who is required to complete a minimum of three evaluations to discuss progress and satisfaction.

The application provides substantial data confirming impairment of watersheds in the Sierra Nevada and lack of funds to address them, as well as the limited population base and lack of community resources for stewardship activities.

Strong evidence is provided, including external peer review and scientific studies that the program as designed both contributes to environmental restoration of watersheds in the Sierra Nevada and environmental stewardship in the community.

A substantial amount of useful and diverse training is provided to AmeriCorps members, both general and pertaining to their site assignments. The two-tier training program appears well-designed to provide a grounding in the overall program as well as more site-specific information that will be needed to carry out their assignments.

The program provides strong opportunities for reflection, shared service, and other connections among Members even though they may be working at different sites through shared projects, blogs and newsletters, and periodic program activities throughout the year.

The proposed watershed restoration, education and outreach, volunteer recruitment, and resource attainment interventions form a logical and holistic approach for addressing restoration of impaired watersheds in the Sierra Nevada and improvements in community environmental stewardship of these watersheds.

The applicant effectively cites specific, relevant, and reasonable current data from reputable sources to substantiate the prevalence and severity of the watershed degradation in the Sierra Nevada.

The applicant clearly describes the scope of proposed activities of Members watershed restoration, education and outreach, volunteer recruitment, and resource attainment interventions and the proposed activities of volunteers with respect to watershed restoration, including clear descriptions of the specific range of activities to be conducted and distinct restoration targets for Members and volunteers.

The applicant provides clear evidence of the success of the program in achieving watershed restoration, as measured in terms of percentage improvement in ecological function, and cites a relevant study to support expectations that educational activities will improve stewardship behavior.

The applicant makes a compelling case that AmeriCorps members will provide watershed restoration and stewardship services that would not otherwise be provided due to inadequate support by the state government and lack of resources on the part of local governments and nonprofits.

The two-stage training plan includes a comprehensive set of activities and topics, including core training supplemented with tailored on-site training, involving substantial commitment of time and resources, indicating that AmeriCorps members will be well prepared for their service.

The applicant clearly identifies several opportunities for Members to establish connections with each other and with the broader National Service network, including participation in annual SNAP events, regional events, and national events.

The applicant provides an analysis of the challenges associated with recruiting Members from local communities and describes intentional activities intended to address these challenges, demonstrating a clear commitment to recruit

from the local community.

Weaknesses:

The application states that supervisors will be trained, but not what the topics of training will be, how long the training will be, or whether it will cover the AmeriCorps Program and regulations. While SNAP staff are available to support them, there is only one required check-in during the year and an evaluation at the end, which may not be sufficient to ensure consistency among host sites and partners.

It is difficult to determine specifically what employable skills will be gained by Members since each member is deployed to a different host site and will be doing different things. No data is provided on after-service employment for previous years of the program.

The application does not address how the activities of AmeriCorps members will differ from those of the existing staff of the partner and host site organizations, adding value in ways that go beyond increasing the volunteer and funding base.

The applicant provides an inadequate analysis and description of the root causes of the watershed degradation in the Sierra Nevada and, therefore, does not establish whether the proposed interventions will be durable over the long-term.

The applicant provides insufficient evidence that community environmental stewardship is inadequate and contributes to the watershed degradation in the Sierra Nevada. The socio-economic data presented in the application are not relevant as evidence of lack of environmental stewardship.

The application includes inadequate details regarding the community education component of the program, including target audience, setting, and curriculum.

The application lacks sufficient explanation of how the education component of the program will be new to the target communities and will enhance existing learning opportunities.

The applicant provides inadequate detail regarding the supervisor training to be received, and the lack of formal training and feedback during the service year suggests that supervisor training may be insufficient to ensure consistently high quality supervision.

The applicant provides inadequate explanation and evidence that skills and experience gained by Members through their service will be relevant to and valuable for future employment.