

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Playworks Education Energized

Application ID: 15AC170626

Program Name: Playworks Massachusetts

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 provides well-supported data describing the negative impacts of bullying in elementary schools on both the bully and the victim. In a survey of Boston children more than 25% of children reported being bullied at school in the past year and most of them were ages 6-10.

A state law requires schools to develop bullying prevention plans. School resources are focused on standardized testing, resulting in a lack of the resources needed to develop anti-bullying strategies.

From October to June Members have a weekly two-hour training session which they attend together at a school site. Members also participate in two service workshops that focus on their service experience and inspirations, and in two national days of service.

These activities allow Members to establish connections with one another and help to build esprit de corps. The applicant presents a compelling case to address the problem and need regarding the prevalent issue of Bullying.

The applicant provides statistics and draws a picture of the negative impact on all parties. They provide a break down starting from Elementary School and all the barriers to prevent a student from learning.

The applicant provides well-documented Member training to include 135 hours of professional development to enhance their term of service, they also have a well-described pre-training and orientation program.

The applicant utilizes effective training that focuses on skill development, group management, inclusive play, conflict resolution among students and communication with diverse populations. This training demonstrates an approach which will be effective.

The applicant provides well-aligned supervision which is led by the Program Managers. The Managers are required to attend a training via the National Office. In addition, they will obtain additional supervision by the school principal for onsite support which will enhance the experience and provide a wider perspective.

The applicant effectively engage the Managers to support Members during weekly site-visits, provide ongoing mentorship, conduct formal performance evaluations, as well as meet with school administration on a monthly basis.

The managers also make themselves available for additional support outside of the normal working hours.

The applicant presents a unique and compelling plan for bullying interventions which would not otherwise be made available to local schools demonstrating need. The plan, which is also distinct from existing school staff activities, involves recess modeling/structured games, class game time, students acting as junior coaches, community engagement, teacher involvement in playtime, and continued intervention programming in partnership with Boston Public School's BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) summer school initiative.

The applicant provides a substantiated list of workplace skills AmeriCorps members will gain through their bullying intervention service such as lesson planning, group facilitation/management, youth development, mentoring, timekeeping, data collection/entering, conflict resolution, and community engagement.

The applicant describes a suitable, ongoing, meaningful reflection plan for Members including practice explaining their AmeriCorps service to others, 2 "service and motivation" workshops, 5 "goals and objectives" reviews and 3 formal performance evaluations, peer-to-peer learning with other Members during school site trainings, and "peer support" where Members rotate among school sites sharing lessons learned.

Weaknesses:

It is difficult to tell from the application what the Members or volunteers will do. For example, Member presence during recess is a key component in helping students feel safe but activities to be performed during recess are not adequately described.

Twenty Members are to leverage 100 volunteers and the topic of volunteer recruitment is included in Member training. There is a lack of specific information about how the volunteers will be recruited, trained, and utilized. The logic model does not include volunteers as a resource.

The logic model is difficult to follow. The description of community need is lengthy because it repeats the same information presented in the narrative. School level changes and student level changes are used as titles in several sections, which is confusing.

The Applicant states that Member training includes the Playworks curriculum but provides no specific information about its content or how much time is allocated for it. Other general training topics, such as cultural competency and peace promotion, are listed without any examples of activities used for effective learning. It is difficult to ascertain the adequacy of Member training without more specific information.

The applicant presents limited information on the role of volunteers in the bullying intervention program beyond stating that AmeriCorps members will recruit 100 volunteers to assist with the Playworks program, projects, and events.