

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

**Application ID:** 15ED169948

**Program Name:** Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

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 application very specifically details the percentage of time each member will be expected to spend on program activities, thus creating a clear picture of the scope of Members' experience and helping to align member activities with intended outcomes.

The applicant successfully demonstrates a positive correlation between an increased number of trained cultural orientation volunteers and increased client test scores by citing results of from Los Angeles program; this in turn supports the integrity of the applicant's logic model.

The applicant's extensive explanation of the efficacy of different cultural orientation service delivery models supports their strategy of introducing more structured, intensive services in the targeted partner agencies.

Local program sites have been carefully vetted and selected based on a demonstrated need to increase the scale of program delivery, and on evidence of strong management capacity. Adherence to these criteria helps to increase the program's potential for success.

The fact that Refugee Corps Members will be former refugees or "New Americans" may increase the program's credibility with the target population and have a positive effect outreach and recruitment efforts.

The applicant provide very clear and substantial proposed training activities including on-going support, written guidance, and eLearning opportunities to assist member growth and development.

The applicant explained clearly the proposed intervention to reach the outcomes of community immersion and self-sufficiency including recruiting and training volunteers to expand the scale and effectiveness of CO services.

Training opportunities around data collection and management will be available to the supervisors and Members to assist in the on-going measurement of the implementation and outcomes of the program.

The applicant clearly indicated the components of the program to lead to outcomes including refugee volunteer recruitment, training, and instruction leading to increased integration to society.

The applicant provided a strong explanation of the role of their volunteers including serving as speakers, assistants, mentors, and translators/interpreters.

The applicant took into account the preliminary evidence from their pilot project including data on satisfaction and client improvement when developing the proposed program design.

The applicant was clear on how they would leverage the use of the volunteers and Members to recruit in the community.

LIRS seeks a restructured CO program and a staff that will create a more enhanced CO program that ensures self – sufficiency and long-term integration of refugees, but lacks the ability to recruit volunteers and community speakers who are needed to enhance the program.

AmeriCorps Members will recruit volunteers, in order to establish a sustainable volunteer based CO program over three years and engage community experts as speakers, thus providing a network base for refugees.

Each site will have a specified number (10) of trained CO volunteers that can service the 13 sites; that means 130 volunteers to satisfy the staff and volunteer base that LIRS was lacking.

The applicant describes the distinct need for program improvement. Interviews of 53 (first year) refugees, and other survey reviews (Community Conversations Projects, 2011 & Minnesota statistical data analysis, 2010), suggests that the LIRS CO program is less-structured and less interactive, therefore offering a less intensive learning experience for refugees and at the same time, the program lacks a volunteers and community support base.

The applicant clearly details the role of the AmeriCorps Members. They will recruit volunteers, some of whom are first year recipients of the CO program to become active Members in the distribution of the services of the program or simply to be speakers at program events.

The contributions of the AmeriCorps Members are well aligned with CNCS National Performance Standards. The outcomes address the areas of weakness in the CO program.

The elements in the Logic Model are logically aligned with the appropriate dosage of interactions that stand to deliver the identified outcomes.

Each site submits a comprehensive training program. Training is provided at AmeriCorps and volunteer levels of the program.

The training satisfactorily addresses prohibited activities established by AmeriCorps, by reviewing the information twice to ensure compliance.

Members are also provided with networking opportunities as part of their service hours.

**Weaknesses:**

An absence of evidence-based data from like programs makes it unclear whether the expectation that Members will be able to add two new volunteers to each of 13 sites by the end of the first program year is realistic.

Beyond remote peer sharing opportunities delivered via webinars, the program will offer few chances for Members to share experiences and interact with peers. Therefore, the extent to which Members will have occasions to reflect

on their service and build networks is not clear.

Lack of data regarding the extent to which staff at partner agencies may be overburdened by caseloads, are unable to provide quality services, or the number of clients who do not have access to services makes it difficult to discern what may occur in the partner agencies and target communities without the proposed intervention. Therefore, the prevalence and severity of the problem is not well supported.

The applicant offers little evidence that the Members will engage in high quality professional or individual development experiences that can contribute to their career and personal growth; thus, interpreting the quality of the member experience is challenging.

The program description includes insufficient information regarding the type and frequency of training for supervisors, so it is hard to ascertain whether supervisors will be prepared to meet program expectations.

The applicant lacks clear, reliable, and diversified data to highlight the issues regarding refugee immersion and solely relied on self-report data. This does not provide strong support of the prevalence of the issue of immersion challenges and outcomes in the community.

The applicant lacks clear reflection opportunities available to the Members to assess their progress, growth, and development of their service opportunities and experiences.

The applicant does not provide a clear description of the supervisors training including the plan for training supervisors about prohibited activities.

The applicant does not sufficiently provide how they will encourage post-program active citizenship and active engagement for their Members. The intervention does not state if time is set aside for reflection.

Evidence to describe the quality of guidance Members will receive is lacking.

Although the core activities of the intervention is to prepare all t specifically support the effectiveness of the CO program and increase its outreach a training plan for supervisors is not present.

Whether AmeriCorps Members will learn job skills for the future is not present.

While there are opportunities to network, it is unclear if networking will be done with the National Service Network.