

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** WA State Employment Security Department

**Application ID:** 15ES166920

**Program Name:** Washington Service Corps

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 significant strengths of the program design are the number of people who shall benefit from the program.

One of the most important strengths is the number of programs which will help the various needs of the community.

The program includes the veterans both as volunteers and participants. AmeriCorps has developed a unique concept and covers the whole needs of a suffering community.

The applicant clearly provides rationale for the need of a program that will address disaster recovery for the under privilege citizens of the community. The program design also addresses the need of financial education and literacy to combat predatory lending practices.

One of the most important components is the involvement in developing the social aspect of senior citizens. This innovative component could strengthen the community as a whole by investing in lives of senior citizens. The health care awareness component will also contribute community safety and help to aide in the fight of disease control.

The Theory of Change and the Logic Model meet the criteria because AmeriCorps has developed a measure to leverage community involvement and incorporate volunteers strategically. The veteran component will help in all phases of the logic model.

The applicant views on intervention and readiness will help in creating proactive measures to assist in disaster recovery, health awareness, senior care, and financial education.

The applicant clearly describes how AmeriCorps will produce significant and unique contribution by contributing Parkland clean up and increasing student learning in literacy and/or math skills. Work place readiness components will aid the community development by having more skilled workers from the low income population.

The applicant clearly states that member training and volunteers will adhere to the regulations rules and prohibited activities. The applicant does this by developing a performance management, leadership skills, and data collection techniques.

The supervisors are highly trained and provided the support and skill set required to successfully follow the AmeriCorps program regulations and expectations.

The applicant provided compelling evidence to show how the community need is prevalent by discussing that many of WSCs consortium partners are small organizations with severely limited budgets and staff capacity.

The applicant provides strong details to show interventions and roles of the AmeriCorps members. These details include a discussion by the applicant showing that WSC Members and 20,000 community volunteers will provide education and training in disaster preparedness, financial literacy, tutoring and other academic support, and environmental education.

The applicant provided distinct evidence to show how interventions will likely lead helping with disasters by member provided disaster preparedness training. This disaster preparedness training will include curriculum, past barriers, first aid training, gathering preparedness kits, and planning emergencies.

There is strong evidence to show that AmeriCorps members will produce significant and unique contributions to existing efforts by using measures to determine that individuals who received CNCS-supported services in disaster preparedness actually increased knowledge of disaster preparedness; and low-income students who start in a CNCS-supported education program and who complete the program will have improved academic achievement, improved engagement attitudes; and improved engagement behaviors.

The Logic Model provided is strong and very comprehensive. For example, the applicant discussed that their Logic Model illustrates the way in which the proposed program activities will achieve the intended CNCS and applicant-defined output and outcome targets in each Focus Area. The applicant also discussed that sites will measure progress toward output and outcome targets with valid, reliable assessments.

Compelling evidence is provided by the applicant to show high quality member training that includes rules involving prohibited activities. For example, the applicant discussed that their training includes quarterly webinars and support by phone, email, and/or during regularly scheduled site visits. These site visits involves site supervisors and Members being fully aware of CNCS rules and regulations, including prohibited activities.

The proposed supervision trainings are likely to be successful and effective in providing support and allow AmeriCorps supervisors to follow program priorities, regulations and expectations. For example, the applicant discussed that WSC Program Coordinators will provide direct oversight of and guidance for site supervisors to ensure supervisors are able to deliver effective support and supervision for Members.

Coordinators conduct intensive site risk assessments, which analyze each site's governance structure and financial strength and review the performance measures the site is addressing, then provide technical assistance and training based on the level of risk identified.

The applicant provided compelling evidence to show how AmeriCorps members will have opportunities for reflection and will recruit form communities in which their program operates. For example, the applicant discussed that local contacts within communities and connections with schools and other community based organizations help ensure that many of the Members come from the communities served.

This application for a multi-focus intermediary program clearly explains the need for the direct services proposed in disaster-preparedness education, financial literacy and job development, student tutoring and enrichment activities, environmental education and activities, health care information, and veterans' services and volunteer opportunities. It

also justifies the need for an intermediary to support grassroots organizations without necessary resources and infrastructure.

The applicant clearly explains the link between the interventions proposed and the anticipated outcomes, and the application provides recent studies to support the interventions (e.g., 2014 RWJohnson study on benefits of in-person assistance in promoting access to health insurance; 2011 veterans study on positive impact on veterans who engage in communities).

The application explains that the individual placement sites are under resourced and that AmeriCorps members will provide clear value-add by providing expanded services beyond the means of these community organizations. In addition, the intermediary will provide valuable services, including ensuring individual site compliance and member training, that would be difficult for many of the individual sites to undertake themselves.

The application has a strong focus on the need for consistent oversight of individual sites, and clearly devotes effort to ensuring that sites provide high quality services as well as support for the Members placed there. For example, the application discusses how intermediary program coordinators will conduct intensive site risk assessments to determine necessary technical assistance and training needs for each site; including program compliance and support for on-site supervisors.

**Weaknesses:**

The application documents the need for the various direct services proposed, many of which are focused on low-income communities (e.g., education, economic and health care areas), but the criteria for selection of individual placement sites does not explicitly include location or service in low-income communities. It would be helpful to ensure that the sites selected would be focused on the areas of greatest need documented by the application.

The description of many of the proposed member activities was quite general and made it difficult to assess their effectiveness. In addition, some of the anticipated numbers of people served seem unrealistically large given the number of Members designated (e.g., 35 Members to do environmental education, with 15,000 citizens receiving the education).

The application says that the program will recruit 20,000 volunteers, but other than stating that 300 of these volunteers will be veterans, it does not explain what the volunteers will be doing or how they will be recruited.

The application explains that training for core competencies and project-specific skills will be done by the individual sites with 5 or more Members assigned. Given that a large focus of the application is the need for intermediary support because many of the community organizations are under resourced, there is some concern about the sites' ability to undertake high quality, comprehensive training.

There is only limited mention of regional service projects and one annual training conference to provide networking opportunities for Members; reflection opportunities also seem somewhat limited, with Members individually supplying stories. Though a large proportion of Members do plan to continue in public service, the application did not explain how development of this ethic was an intentional part of project design.