

APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

2015 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: Great Oaks Charter School

Application ID: 15ES169307

Program Name: Great Oaks Charter School

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 thoughtfully designed their intervention to model successful tutoring programs, Minnesota Reading Corps and Match Corps that have been evaluated by independent evaluators (including CNCS). The evaluation of these programs showed significant gains in academic achievement for participating students and particularly the lowest performing group of students.

The applicant describes a robust plan for orienting and training Members that occurs prior to the start of service and continues throughout the period of service. The training covers a variety of topics and strategies and is based on the successful training program of the Minnesota Reading Corps program. The training plan includes an individual assessment of each member every three months that will allow Members to improve performance on an ongoing basis.

The AmeriCorps members will learn skills and gain experience that will serve them well beyond the service period. In addition, three of the administrative staff Members (Executive Director, Assistant Corps Director, and Director of Internal Operations) are AmeriCorps alumni. In addition to strengthening AmeriCorps identity, this models potential applications of skills learned during the AmeriCorps program and how they can be applied beyond the service period.

The applicant explains why the problem exists and how the intervention will address the causes of the problem. For example, academic performances will be addressed by implementing individualized instruction for all at-risk youth within the target community.

The applicant clearly and specifically lays out numerous examples of current data to support the identified needs as evidenced by the students' academic performance reflecting a significant level of students falling behind grade level in Math and English Language Arts. For example, the cited sources are 2012 United States Census, State Police reports, and New Jersey Standardized Exam.

The proposal clearly and comprehensively addresses member responsibilities servicing the target population. For example, the program will provide individualized literacy tutoring, building skills learned, instruction, and ongoing on-site coaching for the middle school students. These member activities are logically aligned with the program needs and intended outcomes to increase student's academic performances.

Member training is well documented starting with orientation training on AmeriCorps policies and procedures, one-

on-one training led by the Corp Director and Assistant Corps Director with assistance from other school staff at their assigned agency, several weeks of training with school consultant at the member's assigned agency.

Members have the opportunities by networking at several education-focused events for career and personal development.

AmeriCorps members will be supervised by the Director and Assistant Director at both locations (middle and high school). Members will receive a significant and meaningful level of support: observing, feedback, adjustments, and monitoring (effective service delivery) on a weekly basis.

The detailed explanation of the Members' roles and service demonstrate well-designed activities that promote different aspects of development for its Members. For example, Members will receive a positive service experience and civic responsibility during and beyond their AmeriCorps service.

The applicant clearly states the nature of the specific training, skills, and experience that Members will gain from school based services, which are exchangeable to job responsibilities across multiple sectors and careers paths.

The applicant also cites concrete evidence that the skills and experience gained by Members will enhance their post-service employment and education prospects.

The applicant provides a well-defined recruitment of Members plan to recruit and manage a diverse base of Members for the proposed project. The recruitment plan includes targeting Members from the local community as well as nationally to promote geographic diversity.

Great Oaks provided a well-documented plan for providing training, professional development, and on-site coaching continuously throughout the program to include the AmeriCorps policies and prohibited activities. In addition, Members will be supported by the community program staff, educators, and the school staff with guidance and assistance.

Members are supervised by a hierarchy of experienced leaders giving the Members various points of contact for support and guidance. The Program manager, who has previous experience managing

Members, will ensure that the program is in compliance and executing the expectations of the grant. Member selection is very detailed in how recruitment efforts will be made. The recruitment process is handled by the Director of External Operation and recruitment staff and involves various outreach methods of obtaining a diversified and educated pool of candidates who must complete a structured interview process.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not describe current efforts to address the problem of low academic achievement in Newark, making it difficult to assess how the intervention will be unique or complement existing activities.

The applicant did not describe plans to ensure that AmeriCorps members will connect with the broader National Service network.

Although the applicant mentions that administrative leaders will be aware of AmeriCorps rules and regulations, the method of informing Members and holding them accountable for following protocol is not described.