Applicant Feedback Summary: External Evidence Review
2017 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

Legal Applicant: AARP Foundation

Application ID: 17ND191752

Program Name: AARP Foundation

The purpose of this summary feedback is to enhance our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). These comments originate from the External Review and are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment. Rather, the analysis pertains to the evidence base portion of the application and the elements that had the greatest impact on Reviewer determinations for the Evidence Tier and Quality Rating. This feedback consists of summary comments from more than one Reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem inconsistent or reflect multiple views. External Review comments do not represent of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

External Review Summary Comments

EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS
Evaluation Required: Yes
Evaluation Submitted: Yes
Type of Grantee: Large

LARGE GRANTEE EVALUATION REQUIREMENTS
External Evaluator: Yes
Impact Evaluation: N/A
At Least One Year of AmeriCorps Program Activity: Yes
Alternative Evaluation Approach: No
Type of AEA:
AEA Condition Met:
Previously Met Impact Evaluation Requirement: Yes
Comments:

EVIDENCE REVIEW
Evidence Tier Claimed: Strong
Number of Studies Submitted: 3
Number of Studies Assessed: 1
Evidence Tier Assessed: Moderate
Quality Rating: Medium
Evidence Tier Justification:
The level of evidence is "Moderate" based on results of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) study of the program. The AARP Foundation Experience Corps (EC) program proposes to engage AmeriCorps members who are 50-plus years of age in providing tutoring and classroom literacy assistance to K-3 students who are below grade level in reading, with the goal of improving student academic performance. The program targets high-need elementary schools in Baltimore, MD; Bay Area, CA; Boston, MA; Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; and Washington, DC. The applicant claims a Strong Evidence Tier on the basis of two attached experimental studies demonstrating positive effects of the EC model. The first external study was published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2010 and met the What Works Clearinghouse standards of evidence. Three EC sites were examined, including Boston, which is one of the seven sites proposed in the

application. Random assignment was based on teacher referrals of students in need of assistance within each school. Data were collected during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years from 883 first through third graders at 23 schools, with 430 students in the EC group and 451 students in the control group. Students were assessed at the beginning and the end of the school year using standardized reading tests and teacher assessments of grade-specific reading skills. The study found that EC students' gains on passage comprehension and grade-specific reading skills were significantly greater than the changes in the control group students' scores ($p < 0.01$). Reported effect sizes were 0.13 and 0.16, respectively. In addition, gains on three of the four reading measures were stronger for EC students receiving a minimum of 35 tutoring sessions (which is considered the full intervention), with effect sizes of 0.13, 0.17, and 0.17. While the study included multiple sites, the generalizability of the findings may be limited, given that EC sites differ in the specific curriculum used and other key program features. These differences across sites are due to the program structure, which allows local sites flexibility in implementing their reading interventions to adapt to local school needs. Since the intervention implemented in Boston, which participated in the study, is not necessarily the same as the interventions used in other AARP sites, the generalizability of the study findings is unclear. The second study examined the impact of the EC intervention on academic achievement and classroom behavior among K-3rd grade students at the EC Baltimore site between 1999 and 2000. Although the study reported positive findings, randomization was conducted at the school—rather than student—level. Because the applicant's program logic model does not purport to impact the entire school (but rather individual students), the study design did not meet the criteria to be assessed for the Moderate or Strong tier and could not be considered as part of the evidence review. Given the applicant's rigorous RCT study of the program, but limited generalizability, the applicant's Evidence Tier is assessed as Moderate.

Quality Rating Justification:
The Quality Rating is Medium. Data collected clearly align with the program logic model, and the design, data collection methods, and analyses are reliable and appropriate for assessing the outcomes of interest. While the results demonstrate positive program effects, the strength of the findings is weak (i.e., small effect sizes). In addition, data were collected over six years ago and included only one of the seven proposed sites.

STUDY 1
Report Title: AARP Foundation Experience Corps Implementation Evaluation of AmeriCorps-Funded Sites
Program Type: Applicant's Program
Evaluation Type: External
Study Design: Process
Study Design (if multiple):
Specify study design if "other":
Assessed for AmeriCorps Evaluation Requirements: Yes
Year(s) Data Collected: 2015-16
Summary of Findings and Methodological Quality:
The attached 2016 evaluation report is an external implementation evaluation of the Experience Corps (EC) program. The objective of the study is to understand the extent to which AmeriCorps-funded EC programs are implemented with fidelity and the internal and external factors that influence the degree of implementation across sites. In addition to examining the program's six key inputs (funding, staffing, recruitment, training, management/coordination, site/school support), the study focuses on two EC outputs/strategies: one-on-one or small group tutoring and classroom literacy assistance. All eight AmeriCorps-funded sites using the EC model in 2015-2016 participated in the evaluation and provided data from multiple sources, including program data and documentation, interviews with key staff and tutors, site visits (to five sites), and online teacher and tutor surveys. The study found that EC sites implemented the six key program inputs with varying degrees of fidelity. Factors such as program size, type of strategy used, and school leadership affected program implementation. The greatest variability was observed in training and staffing arrangements while greater similarity was observed in leadership structures across sites. Classroom teachers were generally found to be consistent sources of support and coordination. Also, the five visited sites implemented each of the two strategies (sustained tutoring and literacy assistance) with varying levels of fidelity. The most common EC delivery approach was

one-on-one tutoring, which was used in four of the five sites. In general, this EC strategy aligned with the prescribed model. Different approaches were used with respect to the sustained small group delivery wherein tutors worked with anywhere between two to five students at a time. The evaluators observed that the amount of time spent on behavior management increased with group size. Literacy assistance tutoring was used in all five sites but was implemented with varying levels of frequency. Whereas one site used literacy assistance as the primary strategy, others provided the service on an as-needed basis or paired it with sustained on-on-one or small group tutoring. Three factors primarily affected the degree to which programs implemented the EC model: approaches to in-service tutor support, targeted use of curriculum and instructional materials, and tutors' prior teaching experience. Additionally, results suggest that tutors would benefit from additional training, increased access to curriculum, and frequent interactions with teachers. Lastly, findings from the evaluation indicated that the extent to which a site supported tutors and implemented the EC model with fidelity were important factors in determining a site's readiness to participate in an impact evaluation. Data collected clearly align with the program logic model and the design, data collection methods, and analyses are reliable and appropriate for assessing the implementation of the intervention.

STUDY 2

Report Title: The Effect of the Experience Corps® Program on Student Reading Outcomes
Program Type: Applicant's Program
Evaluation Type: External
Study Design: RCT
Study Design (if multiple):
Specify study design if "other":
Assessed for AmeriCorps Evaluation Requirements: No
Year(s) Data Collected: 2006-2008
Summary of Findings and Methodological Quality:
This external experimental study assessed the effectiveness of the Experience Corps (EC) program on improving elementary school students' reading achievement. It was published in a peer-reviewed journal in 2010 and met the What Works Clearinghouse standards of evidence. The design, data collection methods, and analyses are reliable and appropriate for assessing the outcomes of interest. Three EC sites participated in the randomized controlled trial (RCT), including Boston, which is one of the seven sites proposed in the application. Random assignment was based on teacher referrals of students in need of assistance within each school. Data were collected during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years from 883 first through third graders at 23 schools, with 430 students in the EC group and 451 students in the control group. Students were assessed at the beginning and the end of the school year using standardized reading tests and teacher assessments of grade-specific reading skills. The study found that EC students' gains on passage comprehension and grade-specific reading skills were significantly greater than the changes in the control group students' scores ($p < 0.01$). Reported effect sizes were 0.13 and 0.16, respectively. In addition, gains on three of the four reading measures were stronger for EC students receiving a minimum of 35 tutoring sessions (which is considered the full intervention), with effect sizes of 0.13, 0.17, and 0.17. While the results demonstrate positive program effects, the strength of the findings is weak (i.e., small effect sizes). The authors acknowledge that the effects sizes are smaller than other evaluations of volunteer tutoring programs but note that the study sample encompassed many schools and districts and used standardized measures, which tend to produce smaller effect sizes than locally developed measures that are tailored directly to a specific curriculum. While the study included multiple sites, the generalizability of the findings may be limited, given that EC programs are afforded flexibility in implementing the intervention in order to adapt to local school needs. Programs differ in the specific curriculum used along with other program features, and these differences in implementing the EC model make it difficult to assess program impact across sites.