

PART I - FACE SHEET

APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

Modified Standard Form 424 (Rev.02/07 to confirm to the Corporation's eGrants System)

1. TYPE OF SUBMISSION:

Application Non-Construction

2a. DATE SUBMITTED TO CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CNCS):

3. DATE RECEIVED BY STATE:

18-JAN-12

STATE APPLICATION IDENTIFIER:

N/A

2b. APPLICATION ID:

12AC133184

4. DATE RECEIVED BY FEDERAL AGENCY:

FEDERAL IDENTIFIER:

12ACHTX0010002

5. APPLICATION INFORMATION

LEGAL NAME: College Forward

DUNS NUMBER: 146148858

ADDRESS (give street address, city, state, zip code and county):

P.O. Box 142308
Austin TX 78714 - 2308
County:

NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION FOR PROJECT DIRECTOR OR OTHER PERSON TO BE CONTACTED ON MATTERS INVOLVING THIS APPLICATION (give area codes):

NAME: Lisa P. Fielder
TELEPHONE NUMBER: (512) 879-0050
FAX NUMBER: (512) 452-4848
INTERNET E-MAIL ADDRESS: lfielder@collegeforward.org

6. EMPLOYER IDENTIFICATION NUMBER (EIN):

432003552

7. TYPE OF APPLICANT:

7a. Non-Profit
7b. Community-Based Organization

8. TYPE OF APPLICATION (Check appropriate box).

NEW NEW/PREVIOUS GRANTE
 CONTINUATION AMENDMENT

If Amendment, enter appropriate letter(s) in box(es):

A. AUGMENTATION B. BUDGET REVISION
C. NO COST EXTENSION D. OTHER (specify below):

9. NAME OF FEDERAL AGENCY:

Corporation for National and Community Service

10a. CATALOG OF FEDERAL DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE NUMBER:94.006

10b. TITLE: AmeriCorps State

11.a. DESCRIPTIVE TITLE OF APPLICANT'S PROJECT:

College Forward Partnership for Higher Education

12. AREAS AFFECTED BY PROJECT (List Cities, Counties, States, etc):

Greater Houston Gulf Coast Region (Harris County, TX) and Central Texas Region (Hays, Travis, and Williamson Counties, TX)

11.b. CNCS PROGRAM INITIATIVE (IF ANY):

13. PROPOSED PROJECT: START DATE: 08/13/12 END DATE: 08/12/13

14. CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT OF: a.Applicant b.Program

15. ESTIMATED FUNDING: Year #:

a. FEDERAL	\$	972,885.00
b. APPLICANT	\$	621,870.00
c. STATE	\$	0.00
d. LOCAL	\$	0.00
e. OTHER	\$	0.00
f. PROGRAM INCOME	\$	0.00
g. TOTAL	\$	1,594,755.00

16. IS APPLICATION SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY STATE EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROCESS?

YES. THIS PREAPPLICATION/APPLICATION WAS MADE AVAILABLE TO THE STATE EXECUTIVE ORDER 12372 PROCESS FOR REVIEW ON:

DATE:

NO. PROGRAM IS NOT COVERED BY E.O. 12372

17. IS THE APPLICANT DELINQUENT ON ANY FEDERAL DEBT?

YES if "Yes," attach an explanation. NO

18. TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF, ALL DATA IN THIS APPLICATION/PREAPPLICATION ARE TRUE AND CORRECT, THE DOCUMENT HAS BEEN DULY AUTHORIZED BY THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE APPLICANT AND THE APPLICANT WILL COMPLY WITH THE ATTACHED ASSURANCES IF THE ASSISTANCE IS AWARDED.

a. TYPED NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:

Kristen Braitkrus

b. TITLE:

Program Manager

c. TELEPHONE NUMBER:

(512) 452-4800 213

d. SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE:

e. DATE SIGNED:

05/07/12

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Executive Summary

85 College Forward AmeriCorps members will leverage 135 new volunteers to provide intensive college access and success services, to ensure that nearly 7,700 economically disadvantaged students from Central Texas, Houston/Gulf Coast, and one additional region of Texas have a chance to attain a college degree regardless of family income or background. By the end of the three year project period (2012-2015), 3,728 students in the program will enroll in college (85%) [Note: this figure includes students who did not participate in our High School Program but who have been enrolled in our College Persistence Program by partner programs], and 309 students will complete a post-secondary degree. This project will primarily address the CNCS focus area of Education: College Access and Success. The CNCS investment of \$972,876 will be matched with \$621,761.

Rationale and Approach

a. Need

College degrees are critical, not only to an individual's social and economic liberty, but also to the prosperity of our broader society. Yet the ability to access college, let alone enroll and persist, is still a challenge for economically disadvantaged students. The Texas Regional Action Plan for Postsecondary Completion, recently commissioned by the Greater Texas Foundation, Houston Endowment, Communities Foundation of Texas and Meadows Foundation, reports that even though low-socioeconomic (low-SES) students comprise the majority (59%) of Texas' student population, only 30-40% of them ever enroll in post-secondary institutions, compared to 61% of their high-SES peers.

A state profile report issued in September 2011 by the national education watchdog group Complete College America highlights eight key reasons for this crisis, and emphasizes Texas' need to focus its resources and services on post-secondary completion:

- (1) For a strong economy, the skills gap must be closed. The crisis in Texas: while 60% of jobs in 2020 will require a college degree or certificate, only 31% of Texans currently have those credentials.
- (2) Too few students make it through college, and for many, the path ends with no degree and excessive debt. The crisis in Texas: for every 100 students currently entering higher education institutions, a mere 20 will graduate successfully within twice the normal time.
- (3) We're making great progress in providing access to more students, but not a path to success. The crisis in Texas: only 31% of white students, 15% of Hispanics, and 12% of African Americans seeking bachelor degrees as full-time students graduate within four years.
- (4) Graduation rates are exceedingly low, especially for students who are poor, part time, African American, Hispanic, or older.
- (5) College retention rates drop from year to year, as students get discouraged. The crisis in Texas: 40%

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of all associate degree candidates drop out within two years, while 25% of bachelor degree candidates drop out within four years.

(6) Remediation practices must be fixed. The crisis in Texas: too many students rely on remedial courses because they aren't prepared (51% of associate degree students and 23% of bachelor degree students). Of those in remediation, few end up graduating.

(7) Precious time and money are lost when students don't graduate on schedule. The crisis in Texas: not only do students take too much time to graduate (4.5 years for what should be a two-year degree; 5.3 years for four-year degrees), but they take far more credits than required (which costs).

(8) More time isn't bringing more success. The crisis in Texas: On-time graduation rates for bachelor degree students are shockingly low (56% within six years), yet more shocking is that adding time beyond six years produces little additional success, rising to only 62%. Almost no one over the age of 25 ever graduates; students fresh out of high school are most likely to succeed.

Clearly, the state of higher education for Texas' economically-disadvantaged students is alarming. Put simply, low-SES students are not adequately: 1) preparing for college; 2) accessing college; and 3) succeeding in college. Nationwide, it is estimated that only 15.9% of economically disadvantaged students ever have the chance to attend college, and the U.S. Department of Education estimates that only 6% of students from the lowest socioeconomic status will ever earn bachelor degrees. Though Texas has spent over a decade experimenting with interventions, expensive marketing campaigns, and rudimentary programs that attempt to address these glaring gaps, none can claim the outstanding student outcomes and scalable impact achieved by College Forward.

College Forward (CoFo), an Austin-based nonprofit, has demonstrated a cost-effective way to fill the persistent gaps in college access and completion, and to help low-income and under-served student populations achieve college degrees in order to improve state and national prosperity and global competitiveness. CoFo has developed three core programs that are revolutionary in philosophy and design, playful in tenor, and demonstrably effective in practice: 1) an intensive, individualized High School Program provides 11th and 12th graders with over 400 hours of out-of-school programming, coaching students through self-reflection, college visits, ACT/SAT test preparation, college admissions, financial aid/scholarship applications, and community service; 2) a bilingual (Spanish/English) Parent Education Program provides information and social capital to empower parents to be "smart consumers" of college education and participate productively in the college decision-making process; and 3) a groundbreaking College Persistence Program is CoFo's key differentiator. It leverages the power of social media, peer mentoring, academic advising and rigorous data tracking to provide critical interceptions and interventions from college enrollment through graduation.

CoFo specifically targets high school juniors who meet the following qualifications: 1) academic

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criteria: ranked in the top 60% of their class; 2) disadvantage criteria: either 'low-income,' according to National School Lunch Program guidelines and verified by family income and school records - or - will be the first generation from their families to graduate from college; and 3) motivation criteria: complete a six-page CoFo application, including essay and teacher recommendations, affirm a commitment to participate for at least two years, and declare their intention to earn a bachelor's degree. Once enrolled in CoFo, students receive up to eight years of services until they graduate from college.

CoFo has expanded rapidly since 2003-04, when it enrolled 30 students at Hays High School in Buda, Texas. The organization now serves more than 2,500 students, including 1,100 college-age students, 1,100 at eleven high schools across three Central Texas counties, and 300 students at three high schools in the Greater Houston area. By 2012-13, we will grow to serve more than 3,500 students, including 200 additional students in a third Texas city, in alignment with our ambitious, five-year strategic growth plan.

b. Value Added: AmeriCorps Member Roles and Responsibilities

At the core of College Forward's innovation and success is our partnership with AmeriCorps. Since receiving our first AmeriCorps*VISTA grant in 2003, CoFo has boldly refined and replicated our high-impact programs for thousands of low-income and first-generation college-bound students in Texas. In 2012-2013, CoFo will recruit, train, and deploy its largest AmeriCorps cohort to date: 85 members, including 70 full-time (FT) and 15 minimum-time (MT) members, with 10 of these MT slots reserved for Education Award Only (EAO) college work-study students. AmeriCorps members are the pinnacle of our program, acting as direct service providers and capacity builders in the following four capacities: 1) College Coaches (FT & EAO); 2) College Transition Coaches (MT - Summer Corps); 3) College Persistence Coaches (FT); and 4) Program Evaluation and Innovation Specialists (FT). All FT members will serve 11 months (August through July), while MT-EAOs will serve streamlined, 9 month terms of service (September through May) to meet the federal work-study calendar. MT Summer Corps members will serve 2 month terms of service (early June through early August).

FT and MT-EAO AmeriCorps College Coaches (CCs) will have three primary responsibilities: 1) teach twice weekly after-school college prep classes to qualified CoFo high school students using our proprietary curriculum, while keeping detailed database records of student milestone achievement; 2) foster a "college-bound culture" by creating and overseeing educational outreach activities at partner school sites; and 3) promote community service and volunteerism by leading CoFo-sponsored service projects and recruiting/coordinating volunteers to build organizational capacity. Coaches are assigned cohorts of qualified high school juniors or seniors at an average ratio of 40:1. CoFo's curriculum, designed to meet the needs of low-income Texans, addresses the following topics: 1) Self and College Exploration; 2) ACT and SAT Test Prep; 3) College and Scholarship Applications; and 4) FAFSA and

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College Success Strategies.

Once students graduate from CoFo's comprehensive High School Program, they face enormous statistical obstacles transitioning to college during the critical summer months (June through August). MT Summer Transition Coaches (STCs) will provide individualized transition support and "summer bridge" programming. In addition, STCs represent CoFo's best, brightest, and most engaged college students, who "pay it forward" by devoting a summer of service to ensure CoFo's graduating high school seniors follow in their footsteps and enroll in college. Each STC will be assigned a caseload of approximately 100 rising college freshmen, whom they will contact through social media, in person meetings, and special events, to ensure that they: 1) sign a CoFo Persistence Program Agreement that will allow us to track their college enrollment status and academic records; 2) have or negotiate sufficient financial aid to attend; 3) secure housing, transportation, and other necessary services; 3) attend a campus orientation; and 4) successfully register for their first semester of courses, keeping in mind their specific degree plan. In turn, STCs earn valuable professional experience, leadership skills, and Education Awards that they can use toward their own college tuition and student loans.

Once students have enrolled in college, FT AmeriCorps College Persistence Coordinators (CPCs) will provide student support services and case management over the 4-6 years our students attend college, administering the following program components: 1) Academic Advising -- course selection, building a degree road map, study and test-taking skills, finding the right college advisor; 2) Financial Aid Counseling -- individualized intervention and advocacy, assistance with annual FAFSA/TASFA renewals, and scholarship referrals; 3) Campus Engagement -- club and campus activity guidance, leadership and service opportunities; 4) Peer Mentoring and Leadership -- campus mentor groups, semi-annual class reunions, social media presence, online networking, public speaking opportunities; and 5) Career Development -- internship referrals, resume review and mock interviews, career counseling and guidance.

Finally, a FT Program Evaluation & Innovation Specialist (PEIS) will assist our Program Directors and Managers with implementing continuous program improvement efforts and detailed analyses of program impact across sites. A new position for CoFo, the PEIS will be critical to fulfilling our Strategic Growth Plan while maintaining the current quality of our services. Specifically, this member will: 1) use existing evaluation systems (Naviance database for High School Program, Microsoft Excel-based Persistence Program database) to compile, archive, and compare detailed analyses of historical program data; 2) recommend, establish, and systematize parallel evaluation programs and procedures at each CoFo site, including training of key staff and other members on data input; 3) assist with the development of/migration to a new, custom program database that will uniformly track CoFo students from start to finish in a single, more automated system, in accordance with external evaluators'

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requirements and best practices; 4) use data and focus groups as a tool to spot trends and recommend efficiencies or program design improvements; and 5) coordinate with evaluation consultants and database developers on a variety of evaluation initiatives.

AmeriCorps members are ideal candidates for these CoFo roles because they are idealistic leaders, recent college graduates and 'near-peer' mentors who understand the college-going process, are personally motivated to make a difference (rather than just a paycheck), and are unaware of what they "shouldn't be able to accomplish" to such an extent that they can serve clients more effectively than an employee. Our outstanding results can be attributed to hundreds of AmeriCorps members' selfless determination to "get things done for America"; the vast majority of our members serve well beyond their 1,700 or other minimum hours commitment each year because of a firm belief in the power and impact of their service.

c. Evidence-Based

College Forward is data-driven and data rich. The more than 2,500 low-income, first-generation, and predominately Hispanic students CoFo and our AmeriCorps members already serve have found far greater success than statewide or national education averages for all students: 99% of CoFo students have graduated from high school on time and with a diploma (compared to 61% of all Texans); 99% have been accepted to college; more than 90% enroll in college within 12 months of high school graduation (compared to 54% of all Texans), with over 70% enrolling at four-year institutions. Most impressively, 82% of all CF students who have entered college have stayed in college or graduated (compared to 20% statewide). We believe that these outcomes speak for themselves as evidence of our effective design; but we also know that high-engagement college access program models have emerged in Boston, MA and Brooklyn, NY (Bottom Line); Milwaukee, WI, St. Paul, MN, and Omaha, NE (Admission Possible); Seattle, WA (College Access Now); St. Louis, MO (College Bound-St. Louis); Syracuse, NY (On Point for College); and Washington, D.C. (For Love of Children). Of these six effective organizations, it is notable that four utilize national service participants and AmeriCorps for college access and success activities.

Committed to rigorous monitoring of student outcomes, CoFo recently sought our first professional program data audit to verify the accuracy and correct documentation of several key program outcome measures. As we provide assistance to larger numbers of students, we know that our efforts will be increasingly scrutinized. Rigorous, systematic evaluation of our program implementation and outcomes will likewise become progressively more important to support long-term organizational credibility and sustainability. As a component of this emerging evaluation agenda, we selected ICF-International, a consulting firm with extensive experience conducting objective third-party education program evaluation for federal grantees (particularly the Department of Education), to lead this audit. This effort was conducted to ensure that data are accurate, complete, and reliable, and to provide assurance to

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stakeholders that findings are credible. The scope of the program audit included confirmation of three key student outcome measures: 1) growth in ACT scores from pre- to post-test periods (2011 cohort), 2) college acceptance rate (2010 cohort), and 3) college enrollment (2010 cohort). The final report, which has been submitted to OneStar Foundation for review, found that "the tracking and documentation procedures employed by College Forward appear robust and thorough, and result in generally accurate estimates of key student outcomes."

d. Member Experience

We believe College Forward is an ideal AmeriCorps project; few other service delivery models inspire students and support our values as well as AmeriCorps. Because of this, CoFo promotes an organizational culture that celebrates and encourages a powerful and fulfilling "getting things done" spirit. To this end, we structure our members' terms of service to promote teamwork and camaraderie, personal ingenuity and creativity, civic reflection and engagement on a deep level, and connection to the AmeriCorps brand and ethos as well as connection to each other and those serving nearby. Members are never placed in sites or assigned projects alone; we use pairs and small groups to encourage a sense of belonging and shared experience, and require all member types to report to a centralized office for a minimum of 50% of their time to foster a culture of collaboration and allow time for group meetings, team trainings, and peer learning.

CoFo promotes a national service identity by encouraging member participation in planning and executing community-wide AmeriCorps recognition events across Texas, such as an annual "Swearing-In" Ceremony and AmeriCorps Week. CoFo's program staff and AmeriCorps members have historically taken important leadership roles on planning committees for these events and play a large part in their success each year; in 2011, our brand new CoFo Houston Corps took pride in spearheading the planning of the inaugural Houston AmeriCorps Week, garnering a mayoral proclamation and media attention. Members and AmeriCorps program staff are also required to go above and beyond in completing at least three of the five National Days of Service that CoFo plans each year: Make a Difference Day (October), National Family Volunteer Day (November), MLK Day (January), Global Youth Service Day (April), and AmeriCorps Week (May).

CoFo members also participate in civic reflection (CR) discussions and activities throughout the year. Developed by the Chicago-based Project on Civic Reflection, CR engages and retains members through a series of hour-long discussion sessions through the service year, led by certified facilitators who address critical topics related to civic life and service based on works of literature. Since 2010, CoFo has prioritized civic reflection across our sites by sending three staff and nine members to attend Facilitator Trainings, with support from the OneStar Foundation. We currently maintain a Civic Reflection Team of certified member/staff facilitators, who meet regularly to plan relevant CR opportunities for all CF

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members. In general, members will participate in a minimum of two civic reflections per year, with optional bi-monthly sessions on topics related to poverty, philanthropy, direct vs. indirect service, education and youth. Research has shown that CR engages members in such a way that participation actually improves their overall satisfaction, retention, and re-enrollment rates -- and feedback from our members corroborates this fact.

e. Overall Picture

CoFo's unique program design leverages highly talented, energetic young men and women in national and community service to provide timely, proven interventions to solve one of our nation's most pressing needs: educational attainment. Serving in four different positions (as outlined above) alongside 135 community volunteers, 85 AmeriCorps members will provide direct and indirect service to nearly 7,700 low-income students over the next three years. These members will dedicate 123,500 hours of service during each year of the project to fight negative educational trends by ensuring that 85% of CoFo students will enroll in college, and 309 will graduate with post-secondary degrees. Research shows that 11th and 12th grade are the most critical years for impacting students' choices and lifelong educational outcomes through simple, concrete steps, such as taking the ACT/SAT, applying to college, and filling out the federal financial aid form (FAFSA); similarly, students' freshman year of college can predict how likely they are to persist and graduate. Our AmeriCorps members are the missing link to providing the kinds of evidence-based, cutting edge, "near-peer" mentoring our millennial students need to help them overcome these odds.

f. AmeriCorps Member Selection, Training, and Supervision

Since 2003, College Forward has successfully recruited high quality AmeriCorps and VISTA members using the MyAmeriCorps recruitment portal, and we will continue this strategy. Our leadership team and primary AmeriCorps recruiter (a certified HR professional) are also exploring new and innovative strategies to shorten our seven-month recruitment cycle while yielding similarly high-quality applicants as we grow our number of available member slots. Possible new strategies include: 1) emphasizing and/or incentivizing re-enrollment of current, eligible, successful members (our rate is already impressively high, ranging from 20-40% each year); 2) utilizing technology (i.e., Skype) to conduct more meaningful interviews for non-local applicants; 3) partnering with low-cost organizations such as Campus2Careers (to recruit college graduates before they leave college) and Affintus (to use "selection science" and a customized, web-based applicant questionnaire to assess potential member "fit" within the position and organization); and 4) word of mouth and social media campaigning through a forthcoming CoFo Alumni Network (CFANs).

Recruitment for CoFo's AmeriCorps programs is highly competitive, attracting a diverse pool of applicants. In our 2011 cycle, 406 unique applicants applied for 52 FT positions, representing a 12% (1 in

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8) selection rate. Applicants came from 42 states, 211 different colleges; 86% were first-time AmeriCorps applicants, while 10% came from other AmeriCorps programs. All members are required to have an accredited bachelor degree (with the exception of MT members, who at minimum must be enrolled in college and working towards a degree), have reliable transportation, and pass the required, three-part AmeriCorps background check (FBI check, state repository check, and National Sex Offender Website check). To recruit more diverse and local applicants, we will continue to post our AmeriCorps positions on all relevant job boards, including local Craigslist pages, Idealist.org, and university career service sites. We recruit the majority of MT Summer Corps and MT Ed Award Only members from a diverse local talent pool, focusing especially on our own CoFo collegians and other students from local partner institutions, such as UT-Austin, St. Edward's and Texas State University.

Once their term of service begins, CoFo AmeriCorps members undergo a year-round training program to equip them for intensive service. Members start the year with a 40 hour Pre-Service Orientation (PSO) held at a local college campus or community center to introduce the community in which they will serve. PSO provides a high-level overview of national service, member rights and responsibilities, the field of college access and success, nonprofit leadership, performance goals and expectations, and extensive team-building with peers and program staff. Members also spend their first day of PSO reviewing and completing all required paperwork, including the CoFo Member Service Agreement (which incorporates detailed descriptions of prohibited activities, federal laws such as the Drug-Free Workplace Act, sexual harassment and non-discrimination laws), National Service Enrollment Form, CoFo Team Member Handbook (including Policies & Procedures), and a fingerprint-based background check.

In the week following PSO, members return to their local headquarters (HQ) office to participate in another 40 hours of On-Site Orientation and Training (OSOT). During OSOT, members learn from specific program staff and their assigned member supervisor to gain a more concrete understanding of their position, schedule, and annual calendar, as well as how to use organizational data-tracking systems, office equipment and technology, and important forms to navigate their year successfully. Our goal is to have members start service feeling enthusiastic, united as a Corps, and ready to serve.

Throughout the members' term of service, CoFo provides ongoing professional development and In-Service Trainings (ISTs) on a monthly basis, including webinars, guest speakers, and documentary film discussions. An additional Mid-Service Training (MST), held in early January, consists of 32 hours of professional development designed to refresh, re-inspire, and re-energize Corps members for the second half of their service year. Session themes generally include: Big Picture, Welcome Back, Communication and Crucial Conversations, Crisis Intervention, Life After AmeriCorps, and position-specific Best Practices Sharing.

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CoFo members are paired at the beginning of their service year with a direct supervisor (Program Manager), who typically has previous supervision and personal AmeriCorps experience and who will meet bi-weekly with the member to provide individualized feedback and coaching. These 45-minute, one-on-one coaching sessions follow a specific format that maintains strict focus on the member's position goals and overall experience serving clients. Additional one-on-ones are scheduled as needed -- for instance, if a member is going through a difficult time personally or professionally, or has been placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). Supervisors also evaluate each member twice per term of service, during a Mid- and End-of-Service Performance Evaluation. Since we plan to increase the number of AmeriCorps members on staff, we also plan to add additional program management staff to maintain our low member to manager ratio.

g. Outcome: Performance Measures

In 2012-15, College Forward will continue its current trajectory of educational impact by setting ambitious performance measurement goals. As in our current grant cycle (2009-12), we are committed to fulfilling five National Performance Measures that align in our primary focus area of Education: ED1 - Number of students who start in our program; ED2 - Number of students who complete participation in our program; ED10 - Number of students entering post-secondary institutions; and ED11 - Number of students earning post-secondary degrees.

At the end of the three year project period (2015), we will have served 7,721 unique students (in high school and college), of whom 90% will be retained each year of the program (7,116 in total). Most importantly, 85% (3,728) will enroll in college (this figure includes students who did not participate in our High School Program but who have been referred to our Persistence Program from future partner programs), and 309 students will complete a post-secondary degree.

Please note that all Performance Measures at the end of this grant reflect only Year 1 (2012-13) data and goals. Please see Section 2.e. below for CoFo's past impact in meeting our measures.

h. Volunteer Generation

Starting 2012-13, AmeriCorps members will have a more in-depth role in the recruitment, coordination, and communication aspects of College Forward's volunteer program. With the creation of a Volunteer Liaison Team (VLT), a self-selecting group of 5-10 AmeriCorps members at each site will spend time each week seeking out meaningful new volunteer opportunities throughout our High School and College Persistence Programs. By soliciting opportunities from fellow members, these coaches will reinforce the importance of volunteerism and engage their peers in creating and carrying out opportunities to involve volunteers in program events and activities. Volunteers enter our program through our staff Volunteer Coordinator (who spends 25% of time on volunteer efforts), by filling out an organizational volunteer application and attending a volunteer orientation held by the Volunteer Liaison

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Team. Once trained, volunteers receive the Volunteer Loop, a semi-monthly e-newsletter, that showcases upcoming volunteer opportunities and outstanding volunteer efforts. Volunteers who will have recurring access to vulnerable populations must also pass a thorough criminal history check, just as all AmeriCorps staff and AmeriCorps members are required to do.

The 2012-2013 Volunteer Liaison Team's main focus will be to research and test effective forms of volunteer recruitment, aimed at our target population: volunteers who are flexible, dedicated, skilled, and have a passion for education. The VLT will also consider improvements to the current CoFo volunteer orientation. Once the guidelines for effective volunteer recruitment have been set, the team will create an updated volunteer handbook that outlines CoFo's most effective volunteer recruitment, orientation, management and recognition practices. The VLT will also strive to engage the entire CoFo team in celebrating the volunteer program (i.e., our National Volunteer Week festivities), giving all AmeriCorps members a stake in the volunteer program.

Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing

College Forward's mission is "to provide college access and college persistence services to motivated, economically disadvantaged students, in order to facilitate their transition to college and make the process exciting and rewarding. We believe that higher education is the right of every young Texan." Although CoFo was initially designed to help students "access" college, it quickly became clear that access was only half of the problem, and we have since evolved into "a college completion program that begins in high school." Because our program has produced such high levels of student success, we feel an obligation to scale our impact. We have two theories of change: in the short term, we seek to ensure that more low-income and first generation students receive high-quality college access and college completion services. In the long term, we intend to change the way students go to college in America by building a movement to institutionalize the critical services CoFo provides. We are confident of achieving these goals because we have a demonstrated capacity for program success despite rapid expansion. Since CoFo enrolled our first class of 30 students at Hays High School south of Austin in 2003-04, student enrollment has increased by 9800% -- an average annual growth rate of 88% -- and this year we will serve more than 2,500 students in Austin and Houston, where our first satellite site launched in January 2011.

CoFo retains talented, committed and credentialed staff to ensure proper oversight of our AmeriCorps grant and program. AmeriCorps fiscal contacts include Carl Searles, CPA, as Controller (primary contact), and Lisa Fielder, CEO and Founder (secondary contact). Both Carl and Lisa work closely with our Board Finance Committee (comprised of two CPAs and an MBA) to ensure the organization follows best practices, undergoes an annual audit, and maintains legal and grant

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compliance at all times. AmeriCorps program contacts include Emily Steinberg, Acting COO/Austin Executive Director and CoFo AmeriCorps Alum (primary contact), Monica Glasgow, HR Generalist and AmeriCorps recruiter (secondary contact) and Kathy Rose, Houston Executive Director (secondary contact). These designated AmeriCorps contacts attend all relevant annual OneStar and CNCS trainings to maintain current knowledge of AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including attendance at the Corporation's Financial and Grants Management Institute (Michigan, 2010), AmeriCorps*Texas All-Grantee Conference (annual), the National Conference on Volunteering and Service (Louisiana, 2011), and the Leadership Institute and Symposium on Service and Inclusion (Virginia, 2011).

CoFo is proud of our eight-year record of successful AmeriCorps and federal grant management. Since 2003, we have received and completed three distinct types of AmeriCorps grants for multiple cycles: AmeriCorps*VISTA (2003-06 pilot; 2006-09 growth; 2009-12 replication), AmeriCorps*State (2006-09 Austin; 2009-12 Austin and Houston) and AmeriCorps*State Recovery Funds (2009-10). In 2010, we were named one of the "52 Most Innovative AmeriCorps Programs in the United States" by America's Service Commissions and Innovation in Civic Participation, one of only two programs from Texas to receive this honor. In addition, we have benefited from two Department of Education pass-through grants: a College Access Challenge Grant from THECB (2008-10) and 21st Century Community Learning Grants from five different school district partners (2009-present).

CNCS funding represents no more than 40% of our total annual organizational funding, with a proposed match rate of 39%, and CoFo has always met or exceeded CNCS funding match requirements. Our fund development team consists of a dedicated Director of External Relations, Development Director, and Grant Manager, as well as a percentage of time from our CEO (50%), Houston Executive Director (30%), and Austin Executive Director (20%). Our Board now boasts an aggressive, seven-member Resource Development Committee (including three high-level community volunteers from our Innovation + social venture capitalist partnership). In September 2011, we were one of five nonprofits selected for a "Fundraising for Growth" grant from the National College Access Network (NCAN), which provides 12 months of individualized coaching and consulting on advanced fundraising topics by Development Resources, Inc. Our current 2011-12 revenue streams (which we hope to diversify through this consulting process) include: Foundation grant revenue -- 43%; Government grant revenue -- 40%; Individuals -- 9%; Contract (school district) revenue -- 3%; In-Kind -- 3%; Grant revenue, and Corporate -- 2%. While we are still largely grant-dependent, CoFo has met our budget and covered our expenses in every fiscal year, never having to borrow, seek emergency funding, or make mid-year budget cuts. Thanks to generous donors, we have also been able to establish a cash reserve of approximately \$600,000 as of 2011.

CoFo has developed a collaborative, success-focused management structure, with "customers"

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(students, volunteers, and donors) at the top of our organizational chart and the Board of Directors at the bottom; each level on the chart is responsible for the success of the levels above. This visual representation of organizational priorities has enabled students, members, staff and leaders to thrive and grow through mutual coaching, constructive feedback, and mission-driven focus. CoFo's AmeriCorps members are trained and supervised by a team of dedicated Program Managers at a 12:1 ratio or less to ensure a high level of member performance focused on specific program outcomes.

Because of the expansion we are requesting for our 2012-13 AmeriCorps roster, we will hire two new Program Managers to keep our member to manager ratio between 10:1 and 12:1. The largest AmeriCorps member expansion will take place within our College Persistence Program where we will nearly double the number of AmeriCorps members serving our college-aged students. We will require that candidates for Program Manager positions hold a baccalaureate degree with a minimum of two years of successful related supervisory experience. Previous non-profit experience, AmeriCorps experience, and Spanish fluency are strongly preferred. Knowledge of college access/persistence programming and/or strategies is a plus.

These Program Managers report directly to their respective site Executive Directors (Secondary AmeriCorps Program contacts), and the site EDs in turn report to our COO (Primary AmeriCorps Program Contact) to ensure that all functions and services maintain fidelity to CoFo's program model, compliance with AmeriCorps grant requirements and performance measures, and that corrections can be made quickly and efficiently as needed. A dedicated HR professional oversees our highly-competitive AmeriCorps recruitment process and provides expertise in organizational administration. The COO and three National Team managers report to our CEO to monitor site quality, sustainability, and process documentation for future replication in accordance with the Board of Directors' long-term vision and organizational growth plan.

As an AmeriCorps grantee for the past six years, CoFo has demonstrated the capacity to integrate AmeriCorps effectively into our organizational structure and framework -- largely because our Corps serves as front-line team members in supporting CoFo's single mission and focus: a college degree for every student. Members are central, not auxiliary, to what we do: they are not just "nice to have" but necessary to executing our vision. Since our second grant cycle began in 2009, we have demonstrated our commitment to being a thoughtful, responsive, collaborative partner with our State Commission support team; we have exceeded, achieved or come within 90% of meeting all performance measures, with only one exception (ED11). We have maintained a 100% member enrollment and 96-100% annual member retention rate, and successfully resolved two compliance issues (one fiscal, one programmatic) that we discovered as a result of recent OneStar desk/file audits (See Section 2.e. below). Our grant management philosophy is one of openness and honesty: we aim to be the first to detect and disclose

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any weaknesses or mistakes in order to discuss the matter rationally and productively with OneStar, in order to agree on the best possible corrective action(s). If the issue cannot be resolved through a specific action or plan, we commit to paying back every cent for any grant-funded activity found to be in error.

b. Sustainability

College Forward is firmly committed to maintaining the long-term sustainability and impact of our programs and services, beyond the presence of AmeriCorps or other federal support. In addition to strengthening our fundraising capacity with the assistance of national consultants, as discussed previously, our national growth team is developing two key sustainability initiatives that will support our organization indefinitely, with input and assistance from our business-minded Innovation + social venture capital partners. These two initiatives include (1) a Work-Study program pilot and (2) earned income revenue streams.

The first initiative, a Work-Study program pilot, was developed in response to high-level concerns about the future of AmeriCorps funding. Launched in September 2011, the pilot currently employs 10 Work-Study students from local partner universities as Part-Time College Coaches. This pilot will test the feasibility and effectiveness of using local college students (including CoFo collegians) in lieu of or in addition to FT AmeriCorps members. Work-Study is also an extremely cost-effective model, as partner universities can generally pay between 65-100% of direct costs; we plan to expand our Work-Study Pilot Program in 2012-13 by offering 10 Minimum Time Education Award Only slots to participants who successfully complete at least 300 hours of service and maintain high performance.

The second sustainability initiative is to diversify CoFo's funding with earned income initiatives, which will leverage our innovative programming while simultaneously ensuring quality and mitigating risks. Utilizing in-depth market research and targeting "early adopter" school districts, community-based organizations, and other partners, CF is exploring earned income partnerships that will enable the organization to directly or indirectly serve as many as 16,000 students by 2016. We are currently exploring three specific earned income streams: College Persistence Partnerships, High School Program Licensing, and Consulting Opportunities. CoFo is actively evaluating these opportunities and will launch promising earned income pilots in 2012 and 2013. Our goal, as it has always been, is to "put ourselves out of business" by garnering enough national attention, public interest, and demonstrated success that our services will one day be systematized across all high schools and universities, giving all students the opportunity to access college and earn a degree.

CoFo assiduously solicits feedback several times each year from our primary stakeholders -- low-SES students and their parents -- by administering qualitative surveys and inviting confidential criticism and suggestions for program improvements. We actively seek to engage community stakeholders by leading, facilitating, participating in, and/or supporting numerous forums: CoFo founded and currently chairs

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the Austin College Access Network; we maintain Austin- and Houston-area Advisory Councils; and we actively support initiatives of the Greater Austin Chamber, Ready by 21 Coalition, Texas Partnership for Out-of-School Time, Impact Austin and other community stakeholder efforts.

c. Compliance and Accountability

College Forward has developed specific systems and controls to ensure ongoing compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations at all current and future sites. Our primary program and fiscal contacts are charged with ensuring that all staff members receive thorough training on AmeriCorps requirements. We also conduct an annual review of organizational policies and procedures to ensure we stay current, compliant, and accountable to new federal regulations and best practices. We hold compliance calls with our Houston site weekly, and conduct monthly site visits to ensure the allowability and maximize the effectiveness of member activities. Our AmeriCorps leadership team reports progress or any compliance concerns or questions to the OneStar Foundation on monthly support calls with our Program Impact Specialists, and to our own Board of Directors at their monthly meetings. We make it a point to attend any and all CNCS and OneStar Foundation trainings, webinars, or meetings offered.

CoFo has also developed strong systems for preventing and addressing prohibited member activities within our program. We now utilize a CNCS-approved electronic timekeeping system (OnCorps) that gives program staff instant, real-time access to member service activity descriptions and the ability to approve or reject timesheets with detailed comments. Program staff meet bi-weekly with each of their assigned AmeriCorps members to provide in-depth supervision, position support, and guidance for each member. We focus on early member awareness of AmeriCorps rules and regulations, beginning in their initial interview process, and continue to orient them to our "zero tolerance" policy for prohibited activities throughout PSO, MST, and other trainings. For the first time in years, we exited two members in 2011 for "cause" due to performance issues at our Houston site, and have no qualms about doing so in the future if members do not adhere to service activities outlined in their Member Service Agreement.

Overall, CoFo believes in holding ourselves accountable for any instances of risk or noncompliance that may arise. To prevent these instances, we conduct internal fiscal and program audits and periodic spot checks, receive an A-133 financial audit from a reputable firm each year, and notify OneStar immediately when deficiencies are observed to collaboratively develop a Plan of Action to correct the issue in full.

d. Current Grantees: Enrollment & Retention

College Forward enrolled 100% of our AmeriCorps slots in our last full program year of operation (2010-11) and has achieved a 100% enrollment rate for all six years as an AmeriCorps grantee except 2007-08, which was a significant growth year for our program. We also maintain a 100% on-time approval cycle for new member enrollment. Our member retention rate has remained similarly high, at

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96% in 2010-11 and 100% for two consecutive years before that (2008-2010). The slight dip in our retention rate this past year is due to a deliberate decision to terminate two Half-Time members at our new Houston site due to performance-related issues and repeated policy violations. While we were disappointed in the variation from our previous retention rate, we also believe this decision was essential to preserving the rest of our Houston Corps during its first year of operation.

To improve member retention in 2012-13 and beyond, we have implemented three changes: (1) we added a FT dedicated Program Manager at our Houston site (an AmeriCorpsAlum) to supervise AmeriCorps members; (2) we increased HR training for program staff on addressing member performance issues through earlier identification of member "red flags" along with a coaching-based approach to discipline; and (3) a revised, simplified Progressive Disciplinary Policy that clearly delineates potential violations between Category I (less severe) and Category II (more severe) infractions that has been designed to be consistent with our organizational values, HR best practices, and Texas employment law.

e. Performance Targets and Demonstrated Compliance

College Forward has a demonstrated track record of achieving results. As a current AmeriCorps grantee, we adhere to CNCS's new Standard Performance Measures for Education. In 2010-11, we exceeded 3 of our 5 aligned National Measures, including ED 1 (Students who start an AmeriCorps education program; reached 114% of our goal), ED 2 (Students who complete an AmeriCorps education program; 120% of our goal), and ED 9 (Students graduating from high school; 101% of our goal). We also came within a close 97% of reaching one of our primary outcome measures, ED 10, for students enrolling in post-secondary institutions after high school (we projected 90% but achieved 87%). As discussed in-depth with our OneStar Program Impact Specialists, we will adjust this measure in the future.

The only measure we did not meet or exceed in 2010-11 was an ambitious ED 11 target: students completing post-secondary degrees. Although we came within 83% of our target (10 of 12 projected students), we faced a data collection challenge that we will adjust for in the future: the "projected graduation rates" listed for our students in the National Student Clearinghouse Database we use to confirm student enrollment are misleadingly predicated on the date the student entered college, rather than on students' actual accumulated academic credits. We are now in the process of refining our internal data systems to create a more accurate "early warning system" when students are not accumulating enough college credits to stay on track to graduate. We're also working to form a better partnership with the National Student Clearinghouse to access these college enrollment reports in a more user-friendly format. We have adjusted for this in our 2012-13 Performance Measures.

CoFo has demonstrated our ability to address compliance issues quickly and effectively. Two areas of

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weakness arose in our program during the 2010-11 year. In January 2011, we were notified by the OneStar Foundation that we would be placed on a Corrective Action Plan to more closely monitor the timely submission of monthly Periodic Expense Reports (PERs), which had been delayed on several occasions; after careful discussion of OneStar and AmeriCorps policies between our CEO, Controller, and OneStar's support team, we agreed to temporarily hire a bookkeeping assistant to help prepare our PERs in a more timely manner. On September 29, 2011, after submitting eight consecutive, on-time PERs, we were notified by OneStar that our Corrective Action Plan was completed and considered resolved.

CoFo also recently demonstrated our ability to identify and correct programmatic compliance issues. In December 2010, following a support call with the OneStar Foundation to clarify AmeriCorps Member Eligibility Requirements, we conducted an internal file analysis and discovered that a number of our member files did not contain adequate documentation of member eligibility (specifically citizenship, as documented by a U.S. Passport or birth certificate). Previously, CoFo had considered the federal I-9 employment eligibility form guidelines to be sufficient proof of citizenship. We quickly disclosed this finding to OneStar, developed an ambitious, six-month Corrective Action Plan, and completed a final report regarding our status on May 31, 2011. Of 51 members whose files were affected by this finding, 46 (90%) were able to provide the missing citizenship documentation, with only five former members' documentation still outstanding despite repeated attempts to contact them. CF promptly repaid all grant funds associated with those five members (although none of them had completed our program or earned an Education Award, which resulted in minimal disallowed costs).

As a continued AmeriCorps grantee, CoFo will remain committed to identifying, disclosing, and correcting our AmeriCorps program in accordance with all CNCS rules and regulations as we continue to grow, learn, and improve our capacity to serve.

f. Operating Sites and Member Service Sites

College Forward serves students across multiple operating sites (including Austin, Houston, and soon a third city in Texas), but we do not operate as a true multi-site program. All AmeriCorps members work from HQ offices in each of the cities we serve, where they complete position-related research and data entry as well as receive training, support, and supervision from qualified CoFo staff. Three afternoons a week, members who serve as College Coaches working with high school students travel to local service sites to teach after-school classes, spending no more than 50% of their time out of the office, while College Persistence Coach members remain in the office full-time, with the exception of frequent visits to partner college campuses.

As outlined in our Member Placement Chart, we will place members at 20 different sites, 14 in Central Texas and 6 in the Houston Gulf Coast Region. Austin area sites include: CoFo Austin HQ and

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Akins, Connally, Crockett, Del Valle, Georgetown, Hays, LBJ, Lanier, Lehman, Manor, Manor New Tech, Stony Point and Travis High Schools. Our Greater Houston sites will include: CoFo Houston HQ and Eisenhower, Hyland Center, Lee, Scarborough and Sterling High Schools.

Our site selection process is holistic, but aligned with our mission and results-driven structure as well as CNCS's emphasis on site quality, innovation, sustainability, quality of leadership, past performance, and community involvement. We also explicitly look for all of the following criteria or conditions in a potential site: a high percentage (above 50%, as reported by the Texas Education Agency) of economically disadvantaged students, a recent record of strong site leadership that is supportive of after-school programming and higher education efforts (Superintendent, Principal, Lead Counselor), the availability of a dedicated on-site contact person, the availability of classrooms and computer labs, and a strong commitment to improve the site's college-going culture and rates.

Positive and mutually-supportive relationships with school campus and district partners are essential for CoFo's success. Ideally, schools provide CoFo with in-kind support of meeting space, buses for external events, and staff liaison personnel as well as financial support from grants (particularly 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants) or district funds. Programmatic and logistical support from college/career counselors and administrators are also important parts of our effective after-school programming. To maintain strong relationships and ensure continuity of services, CoFo schedules regular meetings with campus principals and staff twice each year: prior to the start of school in August, and again mid-year in January. At these meetings, CoFo leaders share campus-specific program data, plans for the coming months, and any concerns from our Program Managers. School leaders are regularly invited to CoFo events as honored guests. Dr. Betty Harrison, a former public school administrator and CoFo director, serves as our part-time School Partner Advisor, conducting these partner meetings and maintaining regular contact with school leaders through monthly updates.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. Cost Effectiveness

For 2012-13, College Forward requests CNCS support in the amount of \$972,876 for 73.17 MSYs, for a total cost of \$13,296 per MSY. This represents a 10% decrease in costs from our 2011-12 figure of \$14,750/MSY. We pride ourselves on having an extremely cost-effective program design that blends high quality services and experienced member management with a laser-like focus on innovation and efficiency.

We are committed to obtaining substantial and diverse resources as match for this project. To meet our 38% match requirement (\$621,761 in 2012-13) as a seventh-year program, we will secure resources from 17 distinct funding sources as outlined in our budget and Form D, representing private foundation, business, and in-kind university support from funders with whom we have positive and preexisting

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relationships, several of whom are long-time supporters of our AmeriCorps program; we have already secured a multi-year, annual commitment from the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation of \$230,000 for our Central Texas schools, and expect confirmation on a second grant for our Houston site. By 2013, we also plan to incorporate match from new earned income strategies, as discussed previously in Section 2; we estimate that this program income could be as much as \$150,000, or 22.4% of our total AmeriCorps match by the conclusion of our grant in 2015.

b. Current Grantees: Cost-Share Rates

College Forward has increased our share of costs every year since becoming an AmeriCorps grantee in 2006. In 2010-11, we exceeded our fifth minimum cost-share rate by contributing a total of 34% match compared to the 30% requirement for Year 5); we do not anticipate any major match funding challenges in the future. In 2012-13, we will meet or exceed our required 38% match share while broadening the impact of our services by serving an additional 1,000 students from our current 2011-12 year -- another 40% increase in clients served. In spite of this growth and increased cost efficiency, we will continue to meet the same aligned primary National Performance Measures as previous years (ED 1, 2, 9, 10, and 11) with only slight adjustments based on recent, specific years' outcomes.

c. Special Circumstances - N/A

d. Budget Adequacy

As outlined in our 2012-13 budget, we have planned for all basic costs necessary to successfully operate our proven program model, including salaries for multiple tiers of highly qualified leadership and program staff (from direct member supervisors to our primary/secondary contacts), as well as funds for essential technology and database subscriptions such as NavianceSucceed, Volgistics, and the National Student Clearinghouse for detailed data collection and analysis, OnCorps for member time tracking, thorough FBI and State Repository criminal history check services that meet and exceed CNCS's new, three-part member screening requirements, AmeriCorps gear to ensure member visibility and national service identity, and all member support costs including required benefits and living allowances. Because CoFo has a single focus and single mission (a bachelor's degree for every economically-disadvantaged student in our program), our AmeriCorps costs are "built in" to our annual operating budget every year; they do not represent superfluous or supplementary costs, but rather critical line items that directly support our core mission.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

College Forward is part of a three-year independent, external evaluation of the AmeriCorps*Texas portfolio that OneStar Foundation (OneStar), the Texas state service commission, is conducting on all of its programs. OneStar has contracted with The RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin (RGK) to implement a rigorous,

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scientifically-based independent evaluation. Components of the evaluation include: measuring the value of AmeriCorps service across Texas; analyzing impact; evaluating organizational structure and program management characteristics to identify any determinants of successful program implementation; and providing a series of case studies examining the strategic use of AmeriCorps members to make significant impact in their communities. RGK is nearing the completion of the data collection phase from program directors, members, and various sources of organizational characteristic data and will begin analysis and case study work in late 2011. Once the evaluation is complete in 2012, the final report will be sent to CNCS.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

* Please clarify by providing evidence that your program achieves better results with the identified student population compared to what similar students (top 60% of their class, high initiative, economically disadvantaged) are able to achieve without your interventions.

Upon inception, College Forward's program design was originally informed by dismal college matriculation, college persistence, and degree attainment rates among economically disadvantaged students in Central Texas as well as the nation. According to data compiled by NCES (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2011). The Condition of Education 2011 (NCES 2011-033) college matriculation rates for low-income, minority students (primarily Black and Hispanic) hovered at approximately 60% between 2003 and 2009. As stated in College Forward's commissioned research study, *The Price of Persistence: Barriers to Post-secondary Success for Low-Income and First-Generation Students*, the degree-attainment rates of low-income students between 1970-2005 rose only six percentage points (from 6% to 12%) while the degree attainment rate for high-income students rose thirty three percent (from 40% to 73%.) (Mortenson, 2007). Furthermore, by 2012, only nine percent of low-income college students persist to earn bachelor degrees by the age of 26 (Pennington, "For Student Success, Stop Debating and Start Improving," 2012).

Informed by the state of college transition, persistence, and success for low-income students, College Forward built a curriculum to help students navigate the process successfully and provided guidance in the form of a 'near-peer' mentor, an AmeriCorps member, who works closely with students to ensure the completion of program milestones designed to result in the attainment of a bachelor degree by the completion of the program.

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Though the statistics cited above refer to low-income students, they do not also take into consideration College Forward's other qualification criteria: 1) that the student be in the top 60% of their high school class; and 2) that the student have a high level of initiative. The Bridgespan Group verified the importance of class rank in relation to potential college success in "Reclaiming the American Dream," 2006. We also knew that students who did not have enough intrinsic motivation to fill out an application for the program would not succeed in completing program milestones and requirements; unofficially, CoFo has confirmed this year after year upon recruiting new classes of juniors and having to deactivate students before our final census count of students served due to lack of participation, engagement, and responsiveness.

To further understand the success achieved by our students in relation to their socio-economic status, academic achievement, and level of intrinsic motivation, College Forward is currently participating in a comparison group matching study that is being administered by the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas-Austin and funded by a TG "Staying Powers" grant. The matching cohorts in the study--students from Austin College Access Network-participating organizations: Breakthrough-Austin, College Forward, and Con Mi MADRE--will serve as comparison groups in later quasi-experimental evaluation projects designed to measure the difference in post-secondary enrollment, persistence, and success rates between program participants and non-participants.

College Forward is confident that based on information gathered about post-secondary success for low-income students, our program is--and has been--having tremendously positive effects on outcomes for low-income students:

To date:

- 99% of our participants have graduated from high school;
- 99% have applied and been accepted to college;
- 90% of our students matriculate into college within the first 12 months after graduating from high school;
- Compared to a 53% average college persistence rate in Central Texas, College Forward students have achieved an 82% college persistence rate overall; and
- 30 of our students have successfully earned their bachelor's degrees as of December 31, 2011 - we anticipate that a total of 727 College Forward collegians will earn their college degrees by 2016.

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* Please clarify what the unmet capacity needs of the organization are. Also, please clarify how proposed member capacity-building activities align with those needs.

College Forward's unmet capacity needs lie within creating a more strategic approach to educating our students on properly choosing a major in college. A recent report published by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce

(<http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/Unemployment.Final.update1.pdf>) explains how the difference in employment rates amongst college graduates correlates with the selection of a college major. While understanding the basic concepts behind choosing a major has always been a part of our college access curriculum, it is becoming apparent that we need to begin building more robust curricular units that focus on choosing a major including long-term effects and career implications. To address these unmet needs, we have begun recruiting volunteers who can offer career/major advice, provide job shadowing opportunities for our students, become career mentors, explain specific industries/fields of focus post-college, and other important aspects of choosing a major that our AmeriCorps members do not have expertise in. Furthermore, we see a true opportunity to connect our students more purposefully with the community in which most of them will come back and contribute to. We hope that by creating specific areas of focus around this topic within our curriculum and training, members will be able to advocate for the needs of their students and build working relationships with essential volunteers in the community.

* Please explain how AmeriCorps member roles add value to the duties of high school guidance counselors and college academic advisors, and do not duplicate or displace their responsibilities.

According to a policy research report released by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) entitled "Counselors in Public Schools," the average student-to-counselor ratio in high schools with a 40-60% economically disadvantaged student body has historically been as high as 450:1. Specifically, for Region XIII, the greater Austin metro area, the student-to-counselor ratio was documented in the same report as 438:1. In the schools and districts College Forward serves, high school counselors are responsible for implementing a variety of services outside of individualized, 'high-touch' college prep counseling such as: guidance curricula, responsive services, individual planning (including class scheduling, high school graduation planning), disciplinary action, dropout prevention, improving standardized test scores, and administrative systems support. A 2010 article in The American Independent states that though high

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school counselors in Texas are "key players" in creating a college-going culture in local high schools, "Many counselors work with several hundred students, a caseload that makes it impossible to provide personalized attention to the neediest students." Additionally, counselors are overburdened by highly detailed and time-consuming administrative tasks (one of the most time-consuming being the arduous task of making schedule changes for students each semester) and have little time or bandwidth to handle counseling and provide follow-up for the most high-need students in regard to the myriad minute details related to applying to college (including writing application essays, creating resumes, etc), applying for financial aid, navigating and appealing financial aid awards from colleges, and much more. In 2008, according to the American Counseling Association (ACA), there were 10,879 certified counselors in Texas and 430 students per each public school counselor. The Texas Education Agency recommends a maximum student-to-counselor ratio of 300:1. "At the current level, it's not possible to address the needs of every student, especially those who might be the first in their families to enroll in college," the article states; and the 'college readiness' role that many high school counselors are supposed to play is significantly diminished by increased administrative tasks--a situation made worse by continuing decreases in city/state education budgets and available school staff. Because high school counselors do not have the capacity to counsel individual students--especially high-need (low-income, first-generation) students--the need for College Forward's programs to help increase low-SES student college matriculation, persistence, and success, remains strong. College Forward's AmeriCorps members who serve as College Coaches for high school juniors and seniors have an average student-to-coach ratio of 35:1 and provide intensive, individualized counseling for a minimum of 400 hours per year, per participant. College Coaches provide participating students with intensive guidance concerning college selection, major/minor selection, resume creation, financial aid literacy, college application essay-writing, college application submission, diagnostic or "practice" ACT tests, registration for standardized tests (ACT/SAT), analysis of standardized test performance and delivery of test-taking strategies based on test performance, scholarship application submission, college visits, assistance communicating with parents and families regarding the college transition and matriculation process, parent/family education regarding the college transition process, financial literacy, FAFSA/TASFA submission, time management, social skills, and much more. Because high school counselors lack the time and capacity to provide this type of intensive guidance to the most high-need students, College Forward AmeriCorps members provide a critical service in this capacity.

Colleges and universities provide varying degrees of student support services, all of which are established to meet the needs of diverse student populations. Yet despite their intentions and significant financial investments, many institutions fail to provide the comprehensive support uniquely required by

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low-income and first-generation students. This shortcoming is compounded by counselor-to-student ratios as high as 1:3,500 (American College Counseling Association-ACCA). Furthermore, whereas college counseling services exist to handle severe student crises, a significant percentage of counseling sessions address financial, academic or family/life issues that do not require the support of licensed counselors whose annual salaries average \$118,000. According to a survey administered by ACCA, 60% of college counseling offices are expanding services and staff. Expansion of services alone is not enough. 88% of departments report serious concerns that the most high-need students are being left out. On average, 46% of college counseling departments have wait lists, and 24% report having "serious wait list problems." An even greater sense of urgency is established when considering that these same departments report that 78% of their students require immediate response. Each College Forward AmeriCorps College Completion Coach is assigned a student cohort of 100 students maximum, and utilizes virtual counseling and monitoring of social media (particularly Facebook) to maintain close contact with students who need intensive support through their college experience. From social transitional issues to financial aid crises and student loan management, CoFo Coaches help participants work through issues and find appropriate solutions to avoid derailment and stop- or drop-outs and financial loss. We review students' grades at the conclusion of each semester, and review financial aid status annually. Office-based College Completion Coaches interact with students via phone, text message, Facebook, Tumblr, Foursquare, and other outlets. Coaches assist with college transfers (two-year to four-year), link students with campus-based tutoring, counseling, health care, etc., remind students to renew financial aid, and provide guidance on academic skills, summer jobs and internships, roommate issues, etc. Coaches are trained to deal with a wide range of academic, financial, and socio-emotional issues, and to immediately escalate difficult issues that exceed their experience. With average college counselor-to-student ratios of 3,500:1, it is impossible for college staff to provide the kind of intensive and personalized support College Forward's AmeriCorps Coaches provide to our 1,170 students attending over 90 colleges and universities across the country.

* Clarify the number of members that will be engaged as Program Evaluation and Innovation Specialists. Additionally, how much of their time will be spent on evaluation.

We currently have one FT position slotted to be the Program Evaluation and Innovation Specialist. This AmeriCorps member will likely split their time 50/50 between evaluation and innovation, although much of these responsibilities will overlap.

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* Please explain how the PEISs do not duplicate or displace the performance measurement responsibilities of program staff.

Because we are in the midst of rapid organizational growth and expansion, the PEIS will be working to refine current structure in order to help support strategic growth. This capacity-building role will help us identify the potential need for future staff members given the ever-growing nature of the organization. We are also in the beginning stages of implementing a new "smart information system" as well as pursuing possible earned-income strategies, each of which will give the PEIS relevant resume-building experience. Since we are only in the infancy stages of these endeavors the PEIS will not be duplicating or displacing the responsibilities of existing program staff.

* Please explain what volunteers recruited by members will do and how they will have an impact on overcoming college access and college success challenges.

As stated previously, College Forward's unmet capacity needs revolve around the importance of supplementing our existing college access curriculum with more robust curricular units that focus on choosing a college major, including long-term effects and career implications. Volunteers recruited by AmeriCorps members serving as College Coaches will support the unmet capacity needs by providing: career/major advice, job shadowing opportunities for our students, career mentoring, explanation of specific industries/fields of focus post-college, and other important aspects of choosing a major that our AmeriCorps members do not have expertise in. Volunteers will also provide students with the opportunity to connect more purposefully with the community in which most of them will return and contribute to. Recruiting volunteers who have the capacity to provide in-depth knowledge regarding the correlation between college major and related career success will directly support College Forward's theory of change: Loosen the grip of generational poverty through education. Studies consistently prove that, for most low-income students, a college degree is "the passport to America's middle class" and the only sure route out of generational poverty (Jencks and Riesman, 1968; Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Adelman, 1999; Terenzini, Cabrera, and Bernal, 2001; Carnvale, Rose, and Cheah, 2011). Volunteers who can provide greater insight into potential careers for our students will help them form a link between their current situation, their future college education, and later success in a chosen career. This theory also helps support students as they and their families struggle to come to terms with giving up short-term benefits of working immediately after high school and accepting the long-term benefits a

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bachelor degree will provide.

* Please clarify why the specific service sites were chosen and the value added by the AmeriCorps members to those sites.

First, College Forward selects service sites based on the following criteria for 'need': 1) Student demographics--greater than 50% low-income, or, feeder schools have greater than 50% low-income student population; 2) No existing college access services, or, existing college access services reach less than 10% of the student population; 3) College-going rate is less than 30% of graduates, including the average for the previous five years; 4) Less than 50% of high school graduates matriculate to four-year institutions of higher education. Aside from basic criteria for need, College Forward also considers alignment with mission and level of commitment from school leadership and staff including: 1) Fit with mission and theory of change; 2) Fit with CoFo's entrepreneurial nature and culture; 3) Supportive administration, faculty, and counselors; 4) Existing policies that actively support student success; 5) A willingness and commitment to establishing a "college-going" culture; 6) Late buses provided for after-school activities; 7) Fee waivers provided for ACT/SAT, college applications, AP exams; 8) Access to AP classes; 9) No preference for dual-credit over AP courses; 10) No prioritization of two-year colleges over four-year; 11) Ownership and prioritization of the partnership with CoFo; 12) Nearby colleges and universities to provide local support of campus events. Also considered are the schools' community relations including: 1) Outcomes-driven leadership, focused on long-term; 2) Supportive, engaged high school/district leadership, actively and visibly promoting the College Forward program; 3) Strong community partners with common interests and goals; 4) Potential for development of a strong local Advisory Council; 5) Pool of potential staff and AmeriCorps recruits; 6) Pool of potential volunteers. Lastly, College Forward looks at potential for strategic growth and partnerships to fulfill organizational goals, including: 1) Scalability opportunities with additional and/or nearby high schools/districts; 2) Strong corporate and foundation presence to encourage program sustainability; 3) Potential for in-kind space with access to telecom services; 4) Potential for financial support for College Forward; 5) Potential to educate policymakers (local, state, and federal). AmeriCorps members serving at selected school partner sites provide critical and much-needed personalized, 'high-touch' guidance to students with the highest need who do not receive adequate or timely doses of guidance and mentoring to successfully navigate high school to college transition, college persistence, and college success.

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* Clarify that member activities will not duplicate or displace the effort of work-study students who are engaged in the same or similar activities.

We currently have work-study students performing a modified version of our AmeriCorps Coach role. Work-study students are assigned their own set of high schools students and are expected to deliver the curriculum just like an AmeriCorps Coach. The work-study and AmeriCorps Coaches do not have to rely on each other in order to perform their duties as assigned.

* Please remove your capacity-building performance measures because they do not capture a significant area of focus.

Completed as requested.

* Please describe your process for ensuring there is no overlap in responsibilities between AmeriCorps members and guidance counselors.

The process ensuring that there is no overlap in responsibilities between College Forward AmeriCorps members and guidance counselors begins with pre-programming meetings with our partner high schools during the summer prior to the start of the academic year and the commencement of College Forward programs. During these meetings, College Forward program staff meet with counseling staff and school leadership to explain College Forward's programming, including selection of participants, program qualifications, program curriculum and expectations, program milestones and benchmarks, academic information releases (in compliance with FERPA laws), parent involvement, and many other program-specific items. College Forward's main point of contact at a partner high school is typically a lead guidance counselor; this communication structure ensures that communication between College Forward and the partner school is consistent. Additionally, "check-in" meetings between College Forward program staff and school staff and leadership occur twice a year, once before programming begins and another during the spring semester. College Forward's College Access Program meets twice a week after school during the students' junior and senior years and AmeriCorps members are trained on delivering a curriculum designed by College Forward to meet specific and timely program milestones. AmeriCorps members serving as "College Coaches" at our partner high schools focus strictly on college access issues during these after-school classes and refer students to guidance counselors for issues such as academic assistance, scheduling, and socio-emotional support. College Forward's program staff work

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hand-in-hand with guidance counseling staff and do not overlap responsibilities with them. Often, guidance counselors will refer to College Forward AmeriCorps members for advice and assistance regarding college access for non- College Forward students. Our relationship with the guidance counselors on our high school partner campuses is one of respect and necessary trust; AmeriCorps members work in concert with guidance counselors, providing regular reports on students' college plans along with relaying any immediate concerns regarding student health and welfare.

* The role of the PEIS appear to be inappropriate for an AmeriCorps member. Members should not be involved in developing earned income strategies, as this is a fundraising activity and thus unallowable. Please reallocate the slot set aside for the PEIS or ensure that their time is spent only on service delivery expansion or evaluation system development. PEIS evaluation efforts should not be to measure the impact of the AmeriCorps program. The capacity building activities PEIS should not duplicate or displace staff.

In response to this clarification, we would like to ensure the Corporation that any AmeriCorps member serving with College Forward in the capacity of a Program Evaluation & Innovation Specialist will spend 100% of their term focused on enhancing the mission, strategy, and skills of the organization and no time on any efforts that will involved earned income or fundraising. Additionally, the PEIS will not work on AmeriCorps program evaluation or AmeriCorps progress reports. As stated in our original proposal, the PEIS will, "...assist our Program Directors and Managers with implementing continuous program improvement efforts and detailed analyses of program impact across sites. The PEIS will be critical to fulfilling our Strategic Growth Plan while helping maintain the current quality of services." The PEIS does not duplicate or displace permanent staff as there are no current staff members dedicated to program evaluation and improvement. Staff who currently work within our strategic growth team are focused specifically on earned income strategies and organizational documentation. The PEIS will provide crucial insight into the effectiveness of our program model and advise on improvements to deepen and broaden program impact. Differentiating between the most effective and impactful aspects of our program model as opposed to those that have been kept in play purely based on history and tradition will be a major focus of the PEIS. At this point in College Forward's growth, this kind of intensely focused evaluation is critical to maintaining the quality of our programs as we face growth.

* CLARIFICATION NOTE ON PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

We deleted the performance measurement for ED9, realizing this measurement was more of a byproduct of the real measurement, ED10, which measures the direct-to-college matriculation rate of

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our program participants. Though high school graduation is an important step towards enrolling in college, it is not a direct result of the administration of our program. The long-term goal is for students to earn a bachelor's degree, and the most crucial step towards reaching that goal is college matriculation.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Required Documents

Document Name

Status

Evaluation

Sent

Labor Union Concurrence

Not Applicable