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## Executive Summary

Western Dairyland's Fresh Start Program engages 20 at-risk members, ages 16-24, in the construction and rehabilitation of homes for income-eligible families in Eau Claire and Marathon Counties. During the program, members obtain high school diplomas/HSEDs, job-training skills, serve the community, and prepare for post-secondary education. For the 2013-2014 year, 15 members will build one new home in Eau Claire County, while 5 members will rehab 4 homes for income-eligible families in Wausau, Wisconsin. Western Dairyland will subcontract with Wausau Area Hmong Mutual Assistance to serve 5 Hmong members. The program runs September 1, 2013, to August 31, 2014. CNCS investment is \$131,250 and the match amount is \$147,360 (53%). Economic Opportunity is the CNCS focus area the program addresses and members will recruit 40 volunteers serving 500 hours.

## Rationale and Approach

A. NEED: Fresh Start offers at-risk youth opportunities to make a difference in the community by building and rehabbing affordable homes for income-eligible families. Fresh Start provides members with education, life skills and career training, which prepares them to become successful adults, while empowering them to address the local housing crisis. In August 2012, the Philadelphia Federal Reserve ranked Wisconsin 46th for predicted economic growth among the states, making it one of the worst in the nation. The rate of poverty has increased in Wisconsin over the past 20 years, and Eau Claire and Wausau Counties show signs of the downturn. According to the US Census, persons below poverty level from 2007-11 in the State of Wisconsin was 12% compared to Eau Claire County's rate of 15.1%. The high poverty rate creates a need for opportunities that allow people to successfully exit poverty. Higher education is often associated with a great capacity for professional success, and, by extension, economic self-reliance. The ability of individuals to connect education, training, and careers has become key to attaining and maintaining middle class status. The Georgetown School of Public Policy researched the positive correlation between education and economic sufficiency in "Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018". They noted that 59% of lower-income class, 33% of middle-income class, and 7% of upper-income class are composed of high-school dropouts. On the other end of that scale, the study found that individuals with a graduate degree account for 9% of the lower class, 30% of the middle class, and 48% of the upper class. High school completion is a major concern in our service area; Eau Claire's drop-out rate is 13% with Wausau at 19.8%. Without opportunities to connect education to a career, adolescents in the area are

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unable to find work and they perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Fresh Start helps members obtain their high school diploma, and segue their work experience into a meaningful career. The opportunity to use education and job skills to exit the poverty cycle is a major benefit of the Fresh Start model. The positive consequences of this model are felt by the entire community. The 2010 Census had Eau Claire County with a population of 99,879. The same report indicates the County has a total of 42,314 total housing units, and only 64.3% live in owner-occupied housing. Compare this to the state statistics in which 69.1% lived in owner-occupied housing. The lack of total units and owner-occupied housing leads to high rent or high housing costs. Rent is a major expense for many households and is often the major expense for low-income households. The Wausau-Marathon County Area faces a number of serious housing and socio-economic problems including: a) decaying segregated inner-city neighborhoods; b) concentration of at-risk youth who have given up on education, have no job skills, and lack a positive connection with the community; c) shortage of decent affordable housing for low and moderate income households at a time when housing foreclosures are high and credit for low-income families is difficult to secure. These housing and related socio-economic problems, as summarized in the Wisconsin Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy, have been created by two recent trends: rising poverty and rising school drop-out rates. Poverty in general is on the rise with the Wausau School District, which serves the poorest Census Tracts in Wausau, reporting a record 43% of students as economically disadvantaged, representing a 21% increase in 3 years. Wausau's unemployment rate spiked at 11.7%, the 3rd highest city unemployment rate in the State, less than a year ago (Wisconsin Dept. of Workforce Development). All members of the Wausau program will be Hmong at-risk youth. New home construction is running at a quarter of the previous peak and one million units per year below long-run demand rates of 1.5 million units per year. This results in fewer available homes, fewer new homes, and fewer options. The entire program model links the needs identified above with the service provided by the members and community volunteers. Daily programming enhances the lives of the members and provides instruction and tutoring to achieve educational goals established, which serves the community through the construction and rehab of affordable homes. AmeriCorps members reap the benefits of the program as they achieve positive outcomes, which enhance their self-sufficiency, education and employment opportunities. The members are particularly well suited for this program design, as they are in desperate need of life skills, education and employment training. 90% of the members served in this program model are at or below 150% poverty level.

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**B. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS:** Without meaningful opportunities for connecting education to a career, members in the area will be unable to find work, and will perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Fresh Start helps its members obtain their high school diploma, and segue their work experience into a meaningful career. The positive impact of the program is felt by the entire community when affordable homes are placed on the market for a family demonstrating high need. Wausau city police reports that Census Tract 1, and 7 have the highest crime rate (Jan-Feb 2011 -- Wausau Police Dept.). This is the area of recruitment for our minority members. This is an especially difficult time for ill-equipped disadvantaged at-risk youth transitioning to adult living. Yet, these same youth possess many assets and talents. With intensive mentoring, realistic employment training, adult living skills training, and high school completion, at-risk youth can overcome barriers, learn how to invest in themselves and in their community, and become productive self-sufficient adults. Both Wausau and Eau Claire Fresh Start programs have been highly successful in providing meaningful programming for our members. The program provides effective methods to solving community problems, both in service to under-served at-risk young people and community housing shortages. Agency staff and volunteers would not be able to complete these housing construction endeavors. Having 20 members, working 32 hours/week, enables our agencies to provide safe, affordable community housing to those in need. Staff and volunteers would never be able to commit that amount of time and skill to this community project. Western Dairyland and WAHMA will be enrolling 20 members for 900 hour terms of service, which is a total of 10 MSY's.

**C. EVIDENCE-BASED/EVIDENCE-INFORMED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT:** Western Dairyland and WAHMA Fresh Start implement positive youth development (PYD) principles that help members focus on their positive qualities rather than categorizing them by their deficits. The program does this by adhering to the three tenets of PYD: 1) members are considered resources to be nurtured; 2) members are considered full partners in their environment; and 3) the approach focuses on relationships. At the end of the three-year grant cycle we expect to have had 60 at-risk youth, ages 16-24, successfully complete the program as AmeriCorps members. Eighty percent of our economically disadvantaged members will have obtained employment prior to ending their term of service; Sixty percent of our members will have completed their first college course prior to ending their term or within one year following their term of service; Seventy-five percent of our youth will have completed their High School Diploma/GED/HSED while serving their term of service. Our

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members will have built 3 new homes and rehabbed 4 homes, at a minimum, for income-eligible families at 80% the county median income. All members will become CPR/First Aid certified, will have received conflict resolution, citizenship training, leadership and employability skills training. The demonstrable impact of the program will include our members completing their high school educations, entering into post secondary school, and obtaining employment. The community impact will consist of new and rehabilitated construction of safe, quality, and affordable housing. Reporting of all program and member successes is delineated in AmeriCorps performance measures, YouthBuild Websta reports, monthly reports to the Wisconsin Department of Administration and quarterly reports to agency boards. Data is gathered for 5 years after each member leaves the program and all statistical information is reported in an agency database. An emphasis on members enrolling in post secondary schooling has been added as a new performance measure target for 2013-14. The program also added the housing performance measure. Performance measure targets were determined by our programs past performance, community need and program capability. The impressive results achieved in 2012 attest to the quality of the Fresh Start program model; metrics were used to evaluate five areas of the program: 1) 100% of the target obtained their high school diploma or GED; 2) 100% of the members obtained First Aid/CPR certification; 3) 111.1% of the target number improved their financial literacy skills; 4) 100% of the target received career counseling and pre-employment instruction and; 5) 100% of the target members received citizenship training. Impressively, all five targets were met with at least 100% success, and two targets achieved results greater than the goal. The great success of our program in 2012 inspired higher targets for 2013.

D. MEMBER RECRUITMENT: Fresh Start will enroll 20 members from Eau Claire and Marathon County for the 2013-2014 program year. Major sources of recruitment will include staff presentations at alternative high schools, after school programs, church groups, civic organizations, community events, partner agencies, and local county jails, as well as peer recruitment and word-of-mouth from current and past participants. Recruitment presentations will be made at area schools, probation offices, and human services agencies. In addition, Fresh Start will provide brochures, referral forms, and applications for the program at county courthouses, technical colleges, and area high schools. Recruits will actively be sought from individuals involved with the Eau Claire Youth Coalition, Eau Claire and Wausau School Districts, McKinley Charter School, past program participants, the Boys and Girls Clubs, Probation and Parole, county human service departments, Hmong Mutual Associations in both counties, and in-house Western Dairyland programs. To reach low-income young

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women with dependent children, program managers solicit referrals from agencies serving this population, such as Head Start, Women Infants Children (WIC), family health clinics, homeless providers, and domestic abuse shelters. Western Dairyland has Spanish and Hmong-speaking staff in the Eau Claire office that can be used as interpreters, if necessary. All age and income-eligible applicants will undergo at least three interviews by Fresh Start staff. During these interviews, staff will explain the nature of the program, the benefits and rules of participation, community service opportunities, and performance and outcome expectations. Members will be asked to explain their current commitment to service, share their comfort level with the Fresh Start service projects, document their willingness to observe program rules, and explain their personal goals for the program. Of the applicant pool, members with the greatest barriers to success are preferred, but selection is also based on a strong sense of commitment to service and achievement. Potential members will serve two full days as construction volunteers before making their final commitment. Western Dairyland and the Department Director have been operating youth programming since 1980 (32 years) back to the Comprehensive Employment and Training Assistance (CETA) funded days; Fresh Start, which began operation in 1998 has been the agency's most comprehensive and thus, most successful youth endeavor. AmeriCorps funding from Serve Wisconsin for the past 8 years has provided a meaningful service component that was previously lacking and the education awards have changed our member's lives. Western Dairyland has a long successful history of youth programming. From the Summer Youth Employment Program, to Try-Out Employment, to at-risk DPI pregnancy prevention and now through Fresh Start, the agency has provided successful youth programming to thousands of at-risk young people, ages 14-24.

E. MEMBER TRAINING: At program onset, staff assess the educational, vocational, and life-skill development needs of each individual. All members take a survey measuring attitude toward community service and citizenship, and an exam measuring their academic deficiencies. Members meet with a career counselor to discuss potential career paths and opportunities. At this time, the program staff conducts initial interviews with the participants' former employers and school counselors to understand how the youth will interact in academic settings. After all members complete a 3 part interviewing process to determine whether they are appropriate for the program, they enter into "Mental Toughness" for 30 days. More youth are invited to participate than there are slots available, as this provides staff the option to select members that show initiative and the desire to change their behavior. Some youth decide the rigorous physical activity, academic work or high

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expectations are not a good fit for them. Mental Toughness includes an orientation (member expectations, staff introduction and paperwork), limited construction training, goal setting, team building exercises, conflict resolution, communication skill building, and a review of the member's contract and handbook. During this time, members are also oriented to the service site and community partnerships that will be utilized throughout their term. While serving, AmeriCorps members acquire leadership skills. Construction skill training is achieved in a classroom setting and as a hands-on opportunity for further learning. Subcontractors are shadowed and assisted by participants as they work in teams to construct a home. On-site construction training goals are two-fold: 1) To obtain skills required by the housing and construction industries; and 2) To relate skills acquired on the building site to skills needed in continuing education and the broader world of work, including teamwork, critical thinking and communication. Western Dairyland Fresh Start uses the Empowered Leadership Program, designed by Boy Scouts of America, to provide participants with an interactive experience in leadership development. There are 6 modules covered in Seminar One: Styles of Leadership, Problem Solving/Team Building, Communication Skills, Ethical Decision Making, and Individual & Organizational Goal setting. Seminar Two has three modules that focus on more advanced leadership concepts: Personality Profiles, Conflict Resolution, Group and Meeting Management. The final piece of the program is called Challenging Outdoor Personal Experience (COPE). COPE uses unique activities to build leadership, self-esteem, decision-making and communication skills, trust and team work. It is highly inter-active and occurs outdoors at Camp Phillips in Haugen, Wisconsin. After the 1st month of enrollment, participants begin to work on pre-employment and career development. On an individualized and group basis, members begin a series of pre-employment and career development curriculums, under the guidance of the program manager. The coursework emphasizes career path concepts within high-growth industries across west central Wisconsin. Participants are assessed by Chippewa Valley Technical College career counselors using the Kuder Journey, which offers reliable career guidance tailored specifically to today's postsecondary students. Youth select their specific user type (first-time job seeker, post-secondary student, career changer, veteran, adult with disability, ex-offender) to receive a custom menu of options specific to their education and career needs. The Kuder Journey system enhances career preparation, ensures accountability, quantifies program success, and eases reporting requirements. The Chippewa Valley Technical College counselors map out short, intermediate, and long term benchmarks for specific job or post-secondary placement readiness. Information is integrated into the student's ongoing Western Dairyland Fresh Start Gateway plan, and its goals become classroom

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assignments, worksite tasks, and ongoing career counseling. Fresh Start case management framework Gateways combines six sets of integrated, concrete, and progressive tasks. The tasks are intended to guide the youth from enrollment to graduation. Gateways has proven effective in assisting youth in accomplishing short, intermediate, and long term goals. Advances are tracked and measured by Fresh Start staff. Additionally, Western Dairyland Fresh Start uses Blue Print for Democracy to integrate a two-hour weekly classroom component focused on leadership development. Blue Print for Democracy covers the philosophy and mechanics of young adult leadership: group process, public speaking, decision making, meeting skills, understanding government, community organizing, the electoral process, voter registration, values clarification, problem-solving and conflict resolution. Through this curriculum, youth develop self-esteem, a sense of self-efficacy, and the confidence needed to become leaders in the community. Each year, participants take a field trip to Madison, the state capital. The field trip allows students to discuss relevant issues with area legislators, and to learn first-hand about the governing process. Members also engage in ongoing trainings throughout their term of service. These trainings include worksite safety, CPR First Aid, citizenship, resume and cover letter writing, financial literacy, OSHA, health care seminar, dangers of drugs and alcohol, conflict resolution, mock interviews, financial aid, and on the job tours. All skills and trainings are presented by qualified Western Dairyland staff members, community professionals and/or volunteers. The following is a timeline of when the trainings will occur for our members:

- \* 1st Quarter (September -- November): Financial Literacy, OSHA Training, Health Care Seminar, Job Center tour, Disaster Relief Training, on-going pre-employment training;
- \* 2nd Quarter (December- February): Dangers of Drug and Alcohol, complete Wiscareers Assessment/ School Registration, Conflict Resolution, HIV/Aids Awareness, Martin Luther King Jr. Day Project, Empowered Leadership Training, on-going pre-employment training;
- \* 3rd Quarter (March-May): CPR/First Aid Training, Citizenship Training, Resume and Cover Letter workshops, Mock interviews, Earth Day Project, COPE Course with Boy Scouts of America, on-going pre-employment training/job search skills;
- \* 4th Quarter (June-August): On-the-job tours, college tours, post-secondary schooling registration training and financial aid training.

The program manager will ensure that all members and volunteers are educated in AmeriCorps rules, policies and prohibited activities on the first day of service or day of volunteering. The academic portion of the program is geared toward helping participants receive their high school diploma (or equivalent). The educational program operates in an individualized learning environment, where

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certified teachers from McKinley Alternative school provide youth with small group (1:5) and one-on-one instruction by tutors. The partnership with the area school districts allows participants to receive academic instruction at an individualized pace from licensed Wisconsin teachers and to receive a high school diploma. The Chippewa Valley Technical College Off-Campus School also provides students between the ages of 17 and 21 an opportunity to receive their high school diploma by attending evening classes from DPI certified teachers. The curriculum has been developed to reflect the specific needs of the population served. Because each participant has different learning needs and identifiable deficiencies, the college uses the Steck-Vaughn curriculum. The Steck-Vaughn curriculum provides effective learning strategies to meet varied needs by aligning standards with content in reading, writing, math, social studies, science, civics, and health. Through this curriculum, youth develop a knowledge-base that enhances their skills in critical thinking, decision making, problem-solving, and communication. As a result, participants are prepared to obtain their diploma/HSED.

F. MEMBER SUPERVISION: The Program Manager and Site Supervisor ensure that members are supervised daily. Allowing for daily face-to-face supervision gives our members the ability to discuss any concerns, questions, prohibited activities and/or program needs. Supervised by skilled staff, members will work in crews of no more than ten (10) individuals and will perform all hands-on tasks not requiring trades licenses (such as plumbing) or highly specialized equipment (such as foundation excavation). Construction skills are taught in a classroom setting followed by hands-on experience. The Program Director trains and directly supervises the Program Manager. The Program Manager trains and directly supervises the Site Supervisor. The Program Manager and Site Supervisor are vetted by a competitive application process, interviewed and selected by the Program Director. Fresh Start heavily emphasizes the importance of mentoring relationships in the design of the program model. Mentoring helps address the problem of "disconnected youth" by providing a framework for reconnection. Participants are placed into highly structured programs, where they develop meaningful relationships with the construction site supervisor and the program manager. These mentoring relationships are impactful because they are tailored to the distinct character of each youth, provide a positive common goal, and are enhanced by the large amount of time the members spend with the staff mentors. In the WAHMA Program, the 5 members are assigned to a crew headed by a Site-Supervisor. Their team consists of a Site-Supervisor and Program Director, who are trained as mentors, role models, and counselors. WAHMA's Program Director is responsible for staff training. Due to the amount of time spent with members, the Site-Supervisor is the primary mentor, who

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teaches construction and site safety. Site-Supervisors utilize the sites to assist young people to gain the skills and attitudes that are needed to become productive, self-sufficient employees and citizens. In regard to the homes built and/or rehabbed, Western Dairyland and WAHMA act as the general contractor throughout construction. Staff engage in continuing education for their positions through workshops, conferences, and staff retreats. Site supervisors also attend the annual Better Buildings: Better Business Conference, OSHA Training, and other training provided by Operation Fresh Start. The program manager attends the Financial Grants Management Institute Conference, Youth Summit, all Operation Fresh Start trainings, and AmeriCorps Program meetings.

G. MEMBER EXPERIENCE: Our AmeriCorps members are building houses and rebuilding lives. Through the building of income eligible housing, our members learn what it takes to create positive impact for their local community, yet, at the same time, bettering themselves and achieving the goals they have set for themselves. Through service-learning, youth are able to make useful contributions to the community, and begin to view themselves as community assets. Examples of service-learning include donating blood, community gardening, city, river and highway clean-ups in conjunction with DNR and County park staff, walking dogs at the humane society, renovations in domestic violence survivor transitional duplexes, painting homeless shelters, building cubicles for Boys and Girls Club, and working at local food pantries and soup kitchens. Members document and reflect upon their experiences through photography, journaling, and oral presentations. The service work within the community is allowing them to create lasting relationships with other community members that will engage them in further community and national service. Throughout the program, our members spend a portion of time reflecting on the service projects they have engaged in with the program staff and other members. This allows for members to acknowledge what it was like for them to give back to their community and how they can further their civic participation in other capacities. While serving as an AmeriCorps member, all members are required to wear their AmeriCorps apparel provided at time of enrollment. When completing service projects, youth introduce themselves to the community as AmeriCorps members serving with the Western Dairyland Fresh Start program. Our members are able to connect with other members in our local communities and across the state through the Eau Claire County Youth Coalition and AmeriCorps opening and closing ceremonies. Our program really embraces the AmeriCorps identity from the start with potential applicants, other local agencies and non profits, as well as community members by introducing ourselves as an AmeriCorps program and immediately spreading the word that we are an AmeriCorps program and

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the service we give back to our community. Our members are given the opportunity to share what national service means to them and incorporate their ideas into the programming. Our members are proud to wear their AmeriCorps gear, as it portrays a sense of belonging for the youth enrolled. Members wear AmeriCorps gear when constructing homes and during community service activities. Western Dairyland's Fresh Start recognizes participants by attending AmeriCorps ceremonies. Fresh Start is included in our website, under a separate page, which describes the program and includes the AmeriCorps name. Additionally, AmeriCorps press releases and publications are published on our website and facebook page, when relatable to Western Dairyland programming. Any press received for the Fresh Start program, including local media coverage, references AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps is included as a partner on our annual report and the AmeriCorps program model for Fresh Start continues to be the foundation for our program. AmeriCorps members address critical needs in communities all across America; the program is comprised of committed, talented individuals seeking to change the community.

H. VOLUNTEER GENERATION: The completion of a service project is accomplished by bringing together diverse human resources, such as United Way, Literacy Council, RSVP, and Trade Unions. Baby boomer volunteers have been, and will continue to be, an important adjunct to Fresh Start programming. A retired plumber, a heating and venting contractor, high school math teacher, an AODA counselor, and construction union official are all critical to the project. The plumber volunteers hundreds of hours with the members at the construction site teaching his trade. The math teacher addresses the carpentry math and measuring skills needed to perform on the job and also to pass the Carpenter Union's apprenticeship test for those members who are interested. The retired Union trainer facilitates the OSHA-10 safety certification seminars. Other baby boomer volunteers include AODA counselors and speakers, city officials, and other counselors and speakers wanting to affect members' lives in a positive and informative manner. However, the members are the essential element in volunteer generation. Members recruit their friends and family members to volunteer at the service sites. During the summer, when many members have completed their service terms and are gone, volunteers recruited by current and former members are critical in keeping projects moving forward. Often, these volunteers apply to become members when there are openings. This has evolved into a critical recruitment method. The Eau Claire program has a Community Partnership and Volunteer Coordinator (one of our 900 hour slots), who focuses on engaging, recruiting and supporting new community volunteers; however all members are involved in recruiting community members. This

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Volunteer Coordinator will be responsible for volunteer recruitment, training and management, developing and maintaining community partnerships and planning service day projects. This Coordinator will actively engage in the Eau Claire Youth Coalition where at-risk youth community needs are identified and action to address those needs is initiated. All volunteers are trained by the coordinator and program manager to understand the AmeriCorps prohibited and unallowable activities, so no rules or procedures are violated. These volunteers provide needed support in the areas of basic skill development, diploma preparation, independent living skills, and house construction. Staff and members work closely with volunteers to explain the project to be completed and teach the skills needed for project completion. Hours are documented on time logs and signed by the staff and volunteer. Time for reflection on the volunteer opportunity and completion of a satisfaction survey is provided to each volunteer. The program will recruit 40 new volunteers with 500 hours of volunteer service generated. Western Dairyland Fresh Start uses evidence-based approaches to achieve the goals outlined in the 2013-2015 Wisconsin State Service plan. The Fresh Start program goals align with the focus area of Economic Opportunities, particularly Finding Economic Opportunity for National Service Participants. Fresh Start youth engage the local community with service projects that positively impact the environment, and their efforts build important community partnerships. As a result of their outreach, youth begin to view themselves as community assets, and the public learns about the value of AmeriCorps and volunteerism. For the 2012 program year, we enrolled a volunteer coordinator to focus on creating meaningful volunteer opportunities for the public. Additionally, our Fresh Start program is now collaborating with the Wausau Area Hmong Association to expand the reach of AmeriCorps in Marathon County.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION: Members begin the Fresh Start program with the AmeriCorps video "Getting Things Started." Their first impression of the program is this video. Participants wear their AmeriCorps shirts when building homes, during classroom activities, and during community service opportunities. In addition, Fresh Start recognizes participants by attending all AmeriCorps' opening and closing ceremonies. Fresh Start is included in our website under a separate page which describes the program and documents AmeriCorps' contribution. AmeriCorps press releases and publications are published on our website and facebook page when relatable to Fresh Start programming. Local TV, newspaper and radio coverage references AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps is listed as a partner in our annual report and brochures, and the AmeriCorps program model for Fresh Start continues to be the foundation for our program. Both

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Western Dairyland and WAHMA are committed to identifying members and funding associated through AmeriCorps; both agencies are proud of their AmeriCorps association and strive to provide meaningful service to our members, while also promoting AmeriCorps programming in our local communities.

### Organizational Capability

A. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING: Western Dairyland is a non-profit community action agency established in 1966, with a mission "to alleviate poverty-related conditions and provide opportunities which enable people to advance economically and socially." Our agency provides solutions to a wide spectrum of poverty problems, rather than focusing on one single issue. The agency has a 24-member Board of Directors, representing a cross section of the community: 8 members are local elected officials, 8 members are representatives of the low-income population, and 8 members are representatives of community groups and organizations. The Board is committed to the Fresh Start program model and provides internal monitoring and insight as needed. They have approved agency corporate funding to supplement needs of the program and management staff meets with staff members to consistently critique program operations. The agency manages an internal control framework which has evolved over 46 years to include 90 funding contracts annually from federal, state and private resources. Each contract has an individual financial report that separates federal, cash match, and program income by expenditure line and in-kind match. The agency uses computerized double entry accounting software for tracking financial information, and a separate grant account is set-up for each project grant. Western Dairyland has been operating successful youth programming since 1980, has operated Fresh Start since 1998 and has successfully implemented AmeriCorps programming since 2004. Jacque Hogan, department director, has been employed with Western Dairyland since 1980, and has managed budgets exceeding \$2 million per year. She has a BA in English/Communications and was a high school teacher before her directorship. Katie Hulbert, program manager, has a Master's of Science in Mental Health Counseling, a Bachelors of Science in Human Development and Family Studies, and 7 years experience working with youth diagnosed with mental illness. She has worked for Western Dairyland for 3 years. Luke Steffen, site supervisor, has built 100 homes over his 15 year career as a carpenter. He has been employed by Western Dairyland for 2 years. Theresa Kulig, Financial Specialist, has been with the agency for 19 years. The program manager is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of grant supported activities. Dave Zuegge, WAHMA Fresh Start director, has a BS degree in Political Science/Psychology and is a Licensed Social Worker. Previous experience includes live-in counselor/social worker for an

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adolescent residential treatment facility. Dave has been director since 2000. WAHMA site-supervisor, Brett Petersen's qualifications and previous experience includes: BS degree in Psychology; lead crisis-intervention person at an adolescent residential treatment facility; director of a group home for developmentally disabled youth; residential/commercial construction with 11 years of experience as Site-Supervisor. WAHMA lead teacher, Jill Leterski, qualifications and experience includes: Current K-12 Wisconsin State Teacher's License; teaching experience at the high school and technical college level; 10 years experience as WFS classroom teacher. Staff monitor member daily activities to assure compliance with applicable Federal requirements and that performance goals are being achieved. Monitoring will cover each program, function or activity. Members generally remain enrolled for a time period of 9 months to 1 year. The agency uses various internal evaluation methods (Survey Monkey, Board reviews, and member pre and post tests); Western Dairyland also hires an external evaluator to critique all aspects of the Fresh Start program; results are used for programmatic changes if necessary. The agency promotes staff training by providing the funds necessary to attend Focus on Energy Conferences, YouthBuild and all state-wide Fresh Start trainings and CNCS national conferences.

B. SUSTAINABILITY: In an effort to support implementation of the AmeriCorps program, Western Dairyland has secured or applied for funding from the following state, local and private foundations: United Way of Greater Chippewa Valley (\$29,767), WI Department of Corrections (\$35,000), Eau Claire Area School District (\$9,900), Royal Credit Union (\$75,000) and Great Lakes Community Investment Program (\$150,000). Additional federal funding will come from the agency's Community Services Block Grant (\$15,000) and WI Department of Administration's HOME funds (\$75,000/year). WAHMA receives funding from United Way (\$20,000), Wausau School District (\$4500), Department of Corrections (\$10,000), and Judd S. Alexander Foundation (\$20,000). Supplementing funding, Fresh Start relies heavily on the excellent partner relationships that have been developed through the past 13 years which contribute to long-term program sustainability. Western Dairyland has an operating budget of 12 million dollars and agency programs are 90% grant funded; this statistic documents the competence of agency planners and staff in grant-writing and operating successful programs. Key program partners of Fresh Start and their provision of services to our members is listed below:

\*McKinley Alternative High School provides diploma/HSED education and credentialing;

\*Chippewa Valley and North Central Technical Colleges provide career exploration/assessment, waive

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fees for admission and COMPASS testing;

\*Literacy Volunteers of America provides individual tutoring;

\*UW-Eau Claire Campus Meals provides free hot lunches;

\*UW-Equal Opportunity Center provides career assessment and financial aid training;

\*Boy Scouts of America waives fees for provision of leadership empowerment training;

\*Probation and Parole of Eau Claire and Marathon Counties provide referrals and case management of ex-offenders;

\*United Way, Eau Claire, Wausau and DC Everest School Districts provide member referrals, educational planning and funding;

\*Western Dairyland Programs provide AIDS/HIV Awareness, AODA counseling, training on Blood Borne Pathogens and STDs, financial counseling, rent assistance, volunteer drivers and a vehicle loans program;

\*Catholic Charities provides rent assistance and counseling;

\*Marathon County Health Care and Marathon County Department of Social Services provide referrals and member counseling services;

\*Children's Services Society of Wisconsin's Family Resource Center provides referrals and member services;

\*Next Step Energy provides solar and green methodologies training and hands-on implementation training of "green" products.

Diversity of funding and the commitment of program partners assist Fresh Start to remain viable and competitive while impacting the community.

C. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Member retention rate for 2011-12 was 81%; enrollment was 100%. The retention rate did not meet AmeriCorps goals nor did it meet staff expectations. Staff and management have focused on relationships between staff and youth, as well as assessment of potential AmeriCorps members. To address retention issues, several changes were made: more training for staff and a new period of review for each member's readiness. The Department Director has enforced a 30-day "mental toughness" period where members must exhibit dedication to improvement. Activities that are prohibited by AmeriCorps rules and regulations are taken very seriously and reviewed in detail. Staff members go over all prohibited activities at orientation and each member is given a wallet card that lists prohibited activities. Prohibited activities are also posted in office and reviewed at service sites. Fresh Start staff attends all Serve Wisconsin

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meetings to remain current on all updates, revisions or changes concerning AmeriCorps policies and regulations. Staff have handbooks for questions or concerns pertaining to compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. In addition to AmeriCorps rules and regulations, Western Dairyland and WAHMA take financial and program reporting compliance very seriously. The department director ensures that every contract or specified relationship includes any clauses or regulations required by Federal statutes and executive orders and their implementing regulations. Western Dairyland analyzes any perceived or potential conflicts of interest and maintains a written code of standards of conduct governing the performance of employees engaged in the award and administration of contracts. Employees familiarize themselves with the State Administrative Standards Review (ASR) process monitoring tool that the Corporation for National and Community Service uses to assess the administrative capacity of state commissions and is used for AmeriCorps State monitoring activities. This will ensure that employees and AmeriCorps auditors and reviewers are measuring and assessing using the same standards. Western Dairyland maintains an internal financial management system that meets the standards prescribed in the OMB Circular A-110. Monthly, the Finance Director generates an Interoffice Report that compares the grant budget/award to the life to-date expenditures of the grant by expense line item and difference. To ensure effective oversight, the Board of Directors maintains a personnel and finance committee, as well as six program committees. The personnel and finance committee review agency audit reports, financial statements, personnel matters, and agency investment strategies. The committee oversees and approves any changes to the wage and compensation system. Wipfli, an independent, certified public accounting firm, conducts yearly audits in accordance with provisions of FAS/OMB Circular A-133. As result of strict and comprehensive financial management procedures, Western Dairyland has remained in good-standing with all funders. Since 1966, the agency has not had any questioned audit findings. Western Dairyland and WAHMA have weekly communication via email and phone to discuss any programmatic issues. Western Dairyland receives copies of all required paperwork (background checks, enrollment forms, eligibility confirmation, member contracts, and exit forms) from WAHMA for all enrollments and will do at least one onsite monitoring during the program year. Western Dairyland and WAHMA conduct several forms of oversight and monitoring on a wide range of performance and compliance measures, including prohibited activities. Some monitoring takes the form of yearly evaluations or audits. Each year there are onsite monitoring visits. Reviews can be comprehensive or targeted on a specific issue and can be more frequent if necessary. Onsite visits are comprehensive reviews of performance and compliance on multiple dimensions. Fresh Start staff

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review service activities and speak directly to AmeriCorps members to specifically check for prohibited activities. When non-compliance is discovered, the Corporation's enforcement protocol comes into play and issues are brought into compliance as quickly as possible. Fortunately, both Western Dairyland and WAHMA have had state AmeriCorps monitoring done over the past 8 years and there have been no compliance issues. Having been compliant for 8 years, we are lucky to have a good understanding of AmeriCorps values and policies. Staff members are subject to termination for not adhering to AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Members that participate in any prohibited activities will be dealt with immediately. In the event that individuals fail to abide by the rules, Western Dairyland and WAHMA can implement several enforcement options depending on the nature, circumstances and severity of the infraction. The enforcement tools range from assistance with compliance in cases of the mildest and most innocent mistakes to termination of service or employment in the case of the most egregious and intentional acts. The full range of enforcement options for cases of prohibited activities includes: requiring corrective action plan, disallowing member hours and disallowing member education awards.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

A. COST EFFECTIVENESS: Western Dairyland's cost per MSY is \$13,125, and these funds do not exceed the maximum cost per member. Cost per member has remained stable over the past 8 years of AmeriCorps funding, and we have never exceeded the maximum. The cost per member between Youth Corps models and programs not providing services to at-risk youth is not a fair comparison. However, when comparing the cost of incarceration of one member in a Wisconsin prison (\$37,994) our Fresh Start/AmeriCorps program (which serves 60% offenders) is extremely cost effective. When you compare the number of houses built and rehabbed, the successes of 20 members (high school graduation, community service, post-secondary school enrollment, and job placement) to incarceration, CNCS Youth Corps funding is money well spent. Fresh Start receives a variety of non-federal funding. One of our local partners, Eau Claire County Housing Authority, provides \$40,000 per year in cash for construction materials and \$5000 in-kind. Royal Credit Union of Eau Claire provides a \$75,000 zero-interest revolving loan for construction materials. United Way of Greater Eau Claire contributes \$29,767 and Eau Claire School District \$9,900 per year for Fresh Start participant classroom wages and fringe benefits. Xcel Energy provides \$2,000 for member's tools and supplies. University of Eau Claire Campus Meals provides free hot lunches. The Boy Scouts provide leadership training and ropes courses free of charge to our members. A large portion of the Fresh Start program's funding and cash match derives from the annual application to Wisconsin Fresh

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Start, through the Wisconsin Department of Administration. We receive \$35,000 from the WI Department of Corrections and \$79,000 of HOME funding. Proceeds from the sale of the houses also returns funding to the program. These funding sources cover member and staff wages/fringe, member support, and all house costs. WAHMA's program also successfully leverages CNCS funding with a variety of matching funds from state, local and federal agencies. They receive Corrections, United Way, and HOME funds, as well as Judd S. Alexander Foundation funds and Wausau School District dollars. Discounted and donated house materials also assist their program. Both agency Boards have made a commitment to the Fresh Start program, as they believe the program accomplishments enhance local communities and relieve taxpayer burdens. The cost of incarceration for one person is over \$37,000/year in Wisconsin. The CNCS cost per member (half-time slots) is around \$6500. New homeowners pay property taxes. Members graduating from high school, entering post-secondary training and getting employment in areas of high growth contribute to the local economy; members decrease dependence on public assistance programs as they become wage-earners and tax-payers. Fresh Start's annual budget is \$400,000; the CNCS portion is 32%. The overall agency budget is 12 million dollars; CNCS is 1 % of the budget. Western Dairyland has received CNCS competitive or formula funding for 8 years; this funding has sustained a percentage of staff wages/fringe, purchased AmeriCorps gear and logos for member clothing, assisted with rural transportation costs and funded required criminal background checks, including FBI fingerprinting. The dollars requested from CNCS are extremely important in keeping the Fresh Start Program functioning at a high level. Without this funding, staff hours would decrease, which would diminish the success of the program and provide less face-to-face supervision and mentoring to members. As in the past, due to community support and a variety of funding sources, Fresh Start's cash match to AmeriCorps is 53%. In an ongoing attempt to decrease reliance on federal funding, Western Dairyland grant writers and program staff work diligently to increase local and foundation funding for Fresh Start. We are currently working to recruit on-going business sponsors in Eau Claire to fund various portions of the house costs. One employer may commit to buying the windows, while another provides roofing shingles. Through our collaboration with United Way, a variety of area businesses are being exposed to the AmeriCorps program, our members and houses. This partnership can only bring more attention and involvement from area employers. Western Dairyland's Board of Director's has a strategic plan to pursue corporate sponsors. This Board commitment will help sustain the Fresh Start program and decrease reliance on federal support. Western Dairyland continually strives to find local community and state resources to sustain the program without reliance on additional federal

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funding.

B. BUDGET ADEQUACY: Fresh Start's budget is adequate to sustain a high level of quality programming, especially if current and pending funding applications are successful. For example, the goal of 5 of 7 members obtaining high school diplomas was met at 100%; the goal for members receiving career development and obtaining employment was 111.1%; 19 members or 121.4% received financial literacy training (goal was 14 of 19); and 10 (111.1%) showed marked improvement in financial literacy after pre and post tests. House costs, member wages/fringe and incentives are funded through sources other than AmeriCorps. The inclusion of AmeriCorps dollars provides additional training and services to members and assists in funding percentages of staff wages/fringe. CNCS funding is a critical piece of the overall program budget and aligns with the provided narrative of the Fresh Start Program. Our budget is based on goals and capacity, to match income and expenses and then reviewed to determine if the budget meets program and organizational goals and objectives. Funding from CNCS is used for office space, where the members meet each morning, end their day with reflection on the day's events, and are provided numerous training activities. The budget specifically includes funding for staff. Fresh Start is extremely staff intensive; this funding provides classroom instruction, hands-on job specific skill training, life skill training and educational instruction. All of the above activities assist the program to meet performance measure outcomes. The program is both staff and one-on-one training intensive. Funding will also allow members to purchase AmeriCorps gear and logos for member clothing and assist with rural transportation costs to make the program accessible for all potential participants. Criminal background checks and FBI fingerprinting costs for members are delineated in the AmeriCorps budget. When necessary, new staff criminal background checks will be covered by the United Way funding. However, most importantly, CNCS funding goes directly toward funding face-to-face supervision and mentoring of members. The relationships built with this program cannot be accurately quantified as they are valuable beyond words and numbers. The program provides role models and a comfortable atmosphere that elicits pride, face-to-face encouragement, advice, and networking capabilities. Lastly, the funding from CNCS is used for program evaluation. We take monitoring and evaluation processes very seriously. We utilize all evaluation information in making positive changes for the future of the program. Our evaluations reveal what is working best to attain outcomes so that we can recreate successes. Because the program is so staff intensive and a percentage of these costs are attributed to the budget, it supports the program design. Members attend class, work at the house or provide community service

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for 32 hours/week for a period of nine months to 1 year. The comprehensive nature of the program, variety of member trainings, and staff-to-member ratio are a successful combination in achieving our desired results and outcomes. This year, for the first time, our Program Performance Measures place us in Tier 1.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

Below are a few concluding evaluation comments from the outside evaluator's critique of the program: "Youth in this program indicate they have met the program goals. Comments indicate they have made multiple steps to move from being overwhelmed by life's challenges and feeling out of control, toward understanding what they need to know to move in a productive path. Many members indicated they hadn't thought about future goals as things in their lives seemed too bad to ever get better; Fresh Start Programming helps them recognize goals and provides a plan to reach them. The program structure, specifically the strong consistent support of managers (both supervisor and site manager), the consistently high standards, and patience with mistakes and trial are things all participants agreed on as the most important thing that has made the difference for them in succeeding in this program vs. other things they have tried. Youth indicated understanding rules and following rules allowed them to succeed, and that the choice was theirs currently and in the future. Youth left feeling more equipped than when they entered." The program will utilize an outside evaluator from UW-Eau Claire for the 2013-14 program year.

### Amendment Justification

N/A

### Clarification Summary

N/A

### Continuation Changes

N/A