

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

This planning grant will be used to develop an AmeriCorps program which will engage AmeriCorps Members in implementing an afterschool program in the Ahtna region of Alaska. Members will address the needs of the Ahtna students resulting in improved academic outcomes while preparing for success in post-secondary education. Program activities will primarily be in the areas of Education.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

This planning grant will address how AmeriCorps Members can best be utilized to assist in meeting the needs of the Ahtna Athabascan youth in the interior of Alaska and to help them to be prepared for success in post-secondary education. It will serve the students in the native villages of Mentasta, Chistochina, Gakona, Gulkana, Tazlina, Copper Center, Chitina, Cantwell and the communities of Glennallen and Kenny Lake.

In October 2011, the Ahtna Heritage Foundation in conjunction with Ahtna, Incorporated, and the Copper River School District, hosted a region-wide Indian Education Parent Advisory Committee Meeting. This meeting was very well attended with approximately 3 times the normal turn out. During the brainstorming session, many ideas and suggestions were made on how best to help our native students in the Copper River School District, but the one area of need that kept resurfacing during this and many other meetings and forums, was the need for an afterschool program that combined academic tutoring and culturally appropriate guidance counseling. This need is what spurred this application for funding for the Ahtna Education Planning Project.

In the Ahtna region, our native students are performing at considerably lower levels in comparison to their non-native counterparts. The 2010-2011 Standards Based Assessment for the Copper River School District, where the majority of our students reside, shows that our native students are testing 16.02% lower in language arts and 15.39% lower in math compared to the non-native students. These tests further show that 21.36% of our native students are below proficient in reading, 24.27% are below proficient in writing, and 26.21% are below proficient in math.

There are many factors that contribute to these low performance indicators; 1) Our children often come from homes that have low educational achievement and where education has not been made a priority; 2) We have a lack of culturally appropriate activities within our schools and a disconnect between the native homes and the school system; 3) For many students, academic tutoring is not readily available outside of the normal school day; 4) The number of students that also participate in afterschool activities is also disproportionate, and when speaking with most parents, the main reason

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is the lack of transportation.

Students entering kindergarten in our area follow the statewide trend of being ill prepared. The school staff often speaks to the issue that the students in the primary grades have not mastered many of the fundamentals in reading and math, which often times leaves the students at a disadvantage for the rest of their school years. Reports have shown that this is due in part to the lack of parental involvement. Many of today's native parents have an attitude of ambivalence towards western education and have not considered it a priority in their own lives. Only when faced with employment requirements, do many of our younger adult parents consider obtaining a high school diploma or the equivalent. Without a basic education themselves, the importance of their children's education is often overlooked.

According to ¿ALASKA NATIVE EDUCATION STUDY:A STATEWIDE STUDY OF ALASKA NATIVE VALUES AND OPINIONS REGARDING EDUCATION IN ALASK¿ prepared by the McDowell Group and funded by the First Alaskans Foundation: The research identifies barriers to academic success that begin in pre-school or kindergarten, and may continue throughout a Native student¿s academic experience. Among other things, these barriers include:

- ¿ Language and culture differences among students, parents, and school staff.
- ¿ Ignorance of Native culture among teachers and other school staff.
- ¿ Curriculum, learning materials and teaching styles that do not relate to Native cultural experiences.
- ¿ Standardized tests that do not take into account language and culture differences.
- ¿ Differences in learning styles between Native and non-Native students.
- ¿ Lack of educational role models and parents' attitude toward education.
- ¿ Problems at home, including alcoholism, neglect and abuse.
- ¿ Other factors that affect students¿ performance, such as poverty, indifference, or ambivalence toward education, boredom, and low self-esteem.

Research shows that Alaska Natives and American Indians are the least likely to attend and complete college of all U.S. minority groups (Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1993; Pavel, 1999; ANC, 1994). Alaska ranks 48th among the 50 states in the number of 19-year-old high school graduates of all races who enrolled in college (Mortenson, 2000). Poor academic preparation tops the list of barriers to success for Alaska Natives in post-secondary education. McDowell Group tribal college research (1999) identifies several barriers, including the high cost of college, poor academic preparation, homesickness, cultural differences, and learning styles. Among other factors were parental attitudes toward education and individual student goals. A review of the literature

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corroborates these findings (see, for example, Pavel, 1999, and McIntosh, 1987).

Currently, the schools in the Ahtna region have programs that provide remedial assistance during the normal school day, but in order for the student to participate, they must miss out on other valuable classroom time. This offers some assistance to those that struggle the most, but does little to assist those students that are getting by but could be doing so much better or those that could do well in a college or university setting. It also does nothing for our advanced students that could be further challenged to reach higher goals. (2010-2011 SBA scores indicate that 25 native students are advanced in reading, 15 are advanced in writing, and 35 are advanced in math)

There are many reasons for the low number of participants in afterschool activities, including sports, clubs, and tutoring, if and when available. One of the biggest reasons in our area is distance. The Ahtna region consists of approximately 1.7 million acres of land with villages at each corner of the region. Our villages are spread out over one hundred seventy miles north to south, and three hundred forty miles to the west. For example, a family with limited resources, living in the southern-most village of Chitina for example, cannot easily commute the thirty miles, one way, to take their child to afterschool activities at Kenny Lake School on a daily basis. In the northernmost village of Mentasta, families would have to transport their children the forty miles to participate in high school activities in Tok. With today's fuel prices, this would be difficult for even high-income families to do on a daily basis.

The need for transportation vehicles that can operate safely in our cold remote environment is great. Finding ways to meet this need will remove a significant barrier for our youth to participate in after school activities and is essential for this program to be successful.

The Ahtna Heritage Foundation and the Copper River School District have been collaborating on various projects and programs, and are very supportive of each other in trying to find ways to best meet the needs of our native students in the district.

The Ahtna Education Planning Project will develop a program to utilize AmeriCorps Members in serving the native students in the Ahtna region. The implementation of an after school program will have Members addressing three major areas of need: academic tutoring, culturally appropriate academic advising, and assisting with transportation arrangements.

The plan will address how Members can best provide academic tutoring in an afterschool program for native students in the Ahtna region and how they can help our students to improve their grades and test scores through assistance with homework, remedial help, and a quiet, structured

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environment for students to work in. We will also work to find ways to best meet the needs of the advanced students, as the schools in our region do not have the funding for any enrichment programs. We will look to provide an avenue for more challenging activities that will build up their academic records and prepare them for continuing education, such as advanced placement courses, community volunteerism, and any other possible activities that could be made available. These activities will help to ensure more of our native students in the region are set on a course for future success in post-secondary education.

We have outlined below our plan to carry out the Ahtna Education Planning Project:

Month 1: The Executive Director will advertise for and select a Project Director. Together they will review the project schedule and discuss details and activities to be carried out. A Request for Proposals will be developed and distributed locally to find a reputable consultant with the necessary background to help with the plan development. The Executive Director and Project Director will select and meet with the consultant to discuss what will be required throughout the course of the project.

Month 2: The Executive Director and Project Director will begin to identify organizations and entities that should be included in the planning process and begin setting up community meetings. The consultant will begin to research other similar programs and identifying possible resources that could be available to support the program.

Months 3 & 6: Meetings will be held in each of the target communities and will be facilitated by the consultant with the assistance of the Executive Director and the Project Director. It is anticipated that the meetings will involve the tribal councils, parents and students. Meetings will also be held with the local school districts and staff. During these meetings information will be gathered on issues and concerns related to educational success, local school and community data, and suggestions related to what is envisioned for the Members and their role in the program. This will include what participants want to see covered in the training and orientation of the Members and what qualifications or characteristics the Members should possess. The Ahtna Education Planning Project staff will discuss in these various forums how best to facilitate partnership building between native students, families, and schools, while providing academic counseling, and how best to address the issue of transportation.

Months 7-9: The Project Director will work with the Consultant to develop the Ahtna Education Plan. It will incorporate the information gathered through the meeting process and address how the Members will be utilized in the areas of tutoring, academic advising, and assisting with transportation. The plan will also incorporate resources identified through research and the meeting process and in many cases will include commitments from various supporting organizations.

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Months 10 -12: The Executive Director and Project Director will schedule meetings to present the plan to all those involved in the planning process. The plan will also be presented to the Ahtna Heritage Foundation Board of Directors and the local school boards. The final reporting requirements will be met and the project will be completed.

By the end of the project year, the Project Director and the Executive Director will have attended the CNCS sponsored technical assistance meetings. The Project Director will have completed and submitted all reports on time. The Bookkeeper will have ensured that all payroll, accounts payable, purchases, and drawdowns were done in a timely manner. The Executive Director will also have ensured that planning milestones were met for the year. Reports on the program's success and effectiveness will be provided to the Ahtna Heritage Foundation Board of Directors at their quarterly meetings.

### Organizational Capability

The Ahtna Heritage Foundation was formed in 1986 as a non-profit entity for the Ahtna Region. We are representative of the Cantwell, Chistochina, Chitina, Copper Center, Gakona, Gulkana, Mentasta, and Tazlina Villages.

The original by-laws of the Ahtna Heritage Foundation states, "Consistent with the philosophy of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act P.L. 92-203 (ANCSA) the primary goal and objective of the Corporation shall be to provide support for the culture, heritage and community of the Alaska Native people, particularly those Alaska Natives enrolled to the Ahtna Region pursuant to Section 5 of ANCSA. The Corporation shall endeavor to meet this goal by offering educational and charitable opportunities and services and in connection with such efforts;

"To fund and support the foregoing activities by soliciting and receiving public and private contributions, applying for and receiving grants from government and private sources, engaging in revenue-producing projects, borrowing or pursuing any other lawful method which may be approved by the Board of Directors."

In 2009, the Ahtna Heritage Foundation Board of Directors revised our mission statement to, "Strengthening our people by preserving and promoting the Ahtna culture and supporting education." Over the years, Ahtna Heritage Foundation (AHF) has provided successful management and oversight of many projects and programs directly related to our mission. Our competent staff has a vast array of experience in grant and program management. We recently completed a grant from the Department of Education Alaska Native Education Program. This grant was for approximately 1.4 million dollars over a three year period. This was our largest and biggest project to date, but we also

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have been successful in administering grants of other sizes and scopes. We have been awarded grants from the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Alaska State Council on the Arts, the National Park Service, the Rasmussen Foundation, the Walker Arts Fund, and the First Nations Development Institute to name a few.

The AHF staff is highly qualified to manage this project and firmly believes in its goals and potential. The Board of Directors also requires firm accountability from the Executive Director and the AHF staff. They have provided clear direction, priorities, and goals. This Board is comprised of tribal members of each of our founding tribes that are appointed by the Ahtna, Incorporated Board of Directors, and who have ample knowledge of financial procedures, management practices and project oversight.

Ahtna Heritage Foundation will oversee this program through our established methods of operation. We will keep accurate financial records, provide timely reports and implement the program in a professional manner.

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

The Ahtna Heritage Foundation has several years of experience in developing and administering a budget that is both realistic and cost effective. The following is a detailed explanation of our attached budget:

#### Personnel Expenses

Executive Director: The Executive Director will be responsible for overseeing the Project Director and the Consultant for this project. She will assist with coordinating meetings, working with other organizations, review and comment on the draft plan, as well as review of reports and financials related to the project. The Executive Director works on an annual salary basis. We estimate that at the time this project is awarded the salary will be at \$75,000 per year. It is estimated that for the duration of this project, the Executive Director will spend approximately half of her time overseeing the project. We are requesting 25% of her annual salary from this project and the other 25% will be covered by AHF as part of our match requirement.

$\$75,000/\text{year} \times 50\% = 18,750 \text{ CNCS funds and } 18,750 \text{ match funds.}$

Project Director: The Project Director will report to the Executive Director and will work in

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collaboration with the Consultant. This person will be responsible for meeting target deadlines, coordinating schedules, gathering information, and assisting the Consultant in the development of the written plan. This position will be part time and will be paid at a rate consistent with the local rates for similar projects and positions.

$\$18/\text{hr} \times 50\% (1040 \text{ hrs}) = 18,720 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Bookkeeper Service: The bookkeeper will be responsible for keeping accurate financial records for this project according to general accounting practices. She will process payroll and generate financial reports along with making the drawdowns or employing AmeriCorps financial payment process. AHF currently is utilizing an outside accounting service to handle our bookkeeping duties. The negotiated rate is similar to what other local accounting firms are charging in this region. We estimate that she will spend approximately 1 hour per month directly related to this project and her services will be a part of our match requirement.

$\$50/\text{hr} \times 1 \text{ hr}/\text{mo} \times 12 \text{ mo}/\text{yr} = 600 \text{ match funds}$

### Personnel Fringe Benefits

AHF calculates its fringe benefits at approximately 20% of personnel salary. This includes the cost of our Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) tax, our Workers Compensation Insurance, and our Unemployment Insurance costs.

Executive Director: The salary for the Executive Director for time directly related to this project is \$37,500 times the 20% for fringe benefits equals 7,500. In order to stay under the \$75,000 award ceiling, this amount will be divided between CNCS and our match.

$37,500 \times 20\% = 2,000 \text{ CNCS funds and } 5,500 \text{ match funds}$

Project Director: The wages for the Project Director will be 18,720 times the 20% for fringe benefits equals 3,744.

$18,720 \times 20\% = 3,744 \text{ CNCS funds}$

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### Staff Travel

In order for a successful, realistic, and tangible plan to be developed, we will require input from community members, tribal members, parents, students, teachers and administrators. Unfortunately, the native communities that we serve are spread out over a large distance along the highway system in southcentral Alaska. We have estimated for mileage and per diem of the 2 project staff members to make 2 visits to each village and community, once at the beginning of the project and once towards the end of the project. All mileage and per diem estimates are based on the current federal rates.

Chitina/Kenny Lake: It is planned that the staff members will coordinate these two meetings on the same day to be more cost effective. They will hold a meeting in Kenny Lake, and then continue on to Chitina.

Mileage:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 68 \text{ miles} \times 2 \text{rt} \times 2 \text{ mtgs} \times .565/\text{mile} = 307 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Per Diem:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 118/\text{person} \times 2 \text{ trips} = 472 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Mentasta/Tok: It is planned that the staff members will coordinate these two meetings on the same day to be more cost effective. They will hold a meeting in Mentasta then continue on to Tok.

Mileage:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 140 \text{ miles} \times 2 \text{rt} \times 2 \text{ mtgs} \times .565/\text{mile} = 633 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Per Diem:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 84/\text{person} \times 2 \text{ trips} = 336 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Cantwell: The native village of Cantwell is quite some distance from Glennallen, but it is one of the villages that AHF serves and we will need to meet with their tribal members and residents to see how best to meet their needs. However, unfortunately, due to the high cost and time involved in travel, we will not plan to meet in person with them towards the end of the grant. We will, instead, follow up with them via email and phone.

Mileage:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 320 \text{ miles} \times 2 \text{ RT} \times 1 \text{ mtg} \times .565/\text{mile} = 723 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Per Diem:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 118/\text{person} \times 2 \text{ trips} = 472 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Technical Assistance: In order to fulfill the requirements of the grant and to gain helpful expertise on how best to administer the project and utilize our potential future Members, 2 project staff will attend three technical assistance sessions. Staff will have to travel into Anchorage, the nearest major airport,

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in order to fly out to meetings that we are assuming will be held somewhere in the contiguous US and we have estimated that each airline ticket will be approximately \$900. All mileage and per diem estimates are based on the current federal rates.

### New Grantee Orientation

Mileage & Airfare:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 187 \text{ miles to airport} \times 2 \text{rt} \times .565/\text{mile} + \$900 \text{ airfare} = 2,223 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Per Diem:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 123/\text{day} \times 5 \text{ days} = 1,230 \text{ CNCS funds}$

### Financial Training

Mileage & Airfare:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 187 \text{ miles to airport} \times 2 \text{rt} \times .565/\text{mile} + \$900 \text{ airfare} = 2,223 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Per Diem:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 123/\text{day} \times 5 \text{ days} = 1,230 \text{ CNCS funds}$

### National Conf on Service & Volunteering

Mileage & Airfare:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 187 \text{ miles to airport} \times 2 \text{rt} \times .565/\text{mile} + \$900 \text{ airfare} = 2,223 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Per Diem:  $2 \text{ staff} \times 123/\text{day} \times 5 \text{ days} = 1,230$

### Supplies

Consumable office supplies: We do not foresee any other supply needs other than the day to day consumable office supplies, such as paper, toner, pens, easel pads, markers, etc. Based on previous projects of this size, we estimate that cost to be approximately \$500 which will be part of the AHF match requirement

Consumable office supplies: 500 match funds

### Contractual & Consulting Services

Consultant: A consultant will be utilized to assist with meeting facilitation and generating the final plan in document form. We recently surveyed several local consultants that have experience projects of this size and scope and feel that the rate of \$60 is a sound estimate, it is neither at the high end or low end of the spectrum and we are confident that we would be able to find a professional and

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competent consultant that would be agreeable to that rate. We estimate that the Consultant would dedicate approximately 15 hours per week towards this project and that approximately 16 weeks throughout the life of the project will be sufficient.

$\$60/\text{hr} \times 15\text{hrs}/\text{wk} \times 16 \text{ wks} = 14,400 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Staff Training: We do not anticipate and staff training will be necessary for this project.

Other Program Operating Costs: Criminal background checks will be conducted according to approved personnel policies for project staff. The local Alaska State Troopers post will be used to conduct the background checks.

$\$25/\text{person} \times 2 \text{ employees} = 50 \text{ match funds}$

Total Program Costs: 70,915 CNCS funds and 25,350 match funds

Fixed Administrative Costs: AHF does not have a federal indirect rate, so we have opted for the 5% fixed administrative costs. Per the application instructions, we have taken the total program costs, \$70,915 times 0.0526.

$70,915 \times .0526 = 3,730 \text{ CNCS funds}$

Total Project Cost: 74,645 CNCS funds

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

### Clarification Summary

Clarification on additional financial commitments:

AHF has a long standing relationship with Ahtna, Incorporated, which includes financial support. If successful in obtaining an AmeriCorps grant, a portion of that funding can be budgeted to support the project. We also have MOAs and collaborative relationships with the local school district, the local Indian Education Parent Advisory Committee, the regional non profit health care and social service

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provider, and the National Park Service. These are some examples of organizations and potential partners that could be approached and have already indicating a willingness to support a project such as this.

Clarification on targeted grade levels and target populations:

Although it would be ideal to provide an after-school program for all Ahtna students in the region, due to financial constraints, this planning project will focus on developing a plan for junior high and high school students from each of the eight Ahtna villages. As this application is for a planning grant, it is unclear at this time as to how the participants will be chosen. Once we have been able to meet with the parents and tribal councils for direction, we anticipate there will be some type of application process that includes a formal commitment to the program from both the students and the parents.

Clarification on fiscal management:

Currently our bookkeeper spends anywhere from 4 to 15 hours per month working directly on our organizational finances. This includes our general administration, culture center, cultural programs, scholarship program, and a minimum of seven active projects and grants. We are able to keep her costs to a minimum by handling many of the day to day functions internally through the Office Manager and Executive Director. We feel that allocating one hour per month for the bookkeeper is reasonable and sound.

Clarification on timeline for tasks and who will be involved:

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Months 3-6: Meetings will be held in each of the target communities and will be facilitated by the

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### Continuation Changes

N/A

### Grant Characteristics

- AmeriCorps Member Population - Communities of Color
- AmeriCorps Member Population - Low -income Individuals
- AmeriCorps Member Population - Native Americans
- AmeriCorps Member Population - New Americans
- AmeriCorps Member Population - Older Americans