

Narratives

Executive Summary

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee will have 73 AmeriCorps members who will support three program areas. As SPARK tutors, members will serve struggling readers in kindergarten through 3rd grade in reaching proficiency through support at school, at home and in the community. These services will take place in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) during the day and during after-school hours. Additional members will provide environmental education service-learning for youth campers at Boys & Girls Clubs' Camp Whitcomb/Mason in Hartland, Wisconsin. Members will also teach fundamental art skills to underserved MPS students during after-school program hours. At the end of the first program year the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for providing literacy intervention to 450 struggling readers, hands on art instruction to 2,000 Boys & Girls Clubs youth and environmental education activities to 8,000 underserved youth. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 200 volunteers who will be engaged in community-wide special events and community development activities in each program area.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of Education and Environmental Stewardship. The CNCS investment of \$285,658 will be matched with \$244,234, \$62,520 in public funding and \$181,714 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

A. PROBLEM/NEED

According to estimates released by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2012 Milwaukee remained one of America's ten most impoverished big cities, with a poverty rate of 29.4%. In all, 171,500 city residents, including 67,229 children, lived in poverty last year. Among minorities, 41% of Milwaukee's black residents and 35% of the city's Hispanics were poor. In Milwaukee Public Schools around 83% of the system's students are eligible for free or reduced price meals.

SPARK Early Literacy Program (SPARK)

The SPARK program targets struggling readers in kindergarten through third grade at ten Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) school/Club partnerships. Literacy is a cornerstone of a thriving community. Literacy helps children learn and succeed in school, and leads to better jobs and wages that improve security for families, which, in turn, reduces stress and strain on public services. The need for increased literacy opportunities in the Milwaukee area is severe. Statistics show that upon

Narratives

completion of high school, minority students possess academic skills equivalent to eighth grade. For individuals who lack basic literacy skills the risk of incarceration, unemployment, and drug and alcohol abuse is greater than 50%. A student that is not reading on grade level by third grade has a greatly reduced chance of graduating from high school. Law enforcement realizes that 78% of juvenile crime is committed by high school dropouts. These dropouts can be predicted with 70% accuracy by third grade, based on reading ability and prior retention (The Children's Reading Foundation). Fourth grade tests results show a need for improvement in K-3rd grade reading achievement. According to the 2013 results of the National Assessment of Education Progress 15% of 4th grade MPS students are proficient in reading and only 14% of MPS 11th graders scored 21 or above on the ACT Reading Test, the benchmark identified for college readiness.

Environmental and Art Education

No Child Left Behind, with its pressure to raise test scores, has reduced classroom time devoted to most academic subjects besides reading and math. MPS, like other large, urban school districts, has struggled with budget cuts and mandates to focus more of the school day on core academic subjects that have resulted in cuts to environmental and art education classes. The vast majority of youth to be served by BGCGM's Environmental and Art Education programs live in high crime neighborhoods and face a challenged path towards healthy, happy and productive lives. Environmental and art education programs address these risk factors by providing the transformative power of environmental and art knowledge to those in greatest need. These programs serve youth between the ages of 6-18 that attend schools in Milwaukee's central city with little access to environmental and art education activities during the school day. A 2008 study by the non-profit organization The Education Commission of the States concluded that the arts can play a critical role in improving academic performance. In a national sample of 25,000 students, those students "with high levels of arts-learning experiences" earned higher grades and scored better on standardized tests than those with little or no involvement in the arts-regardless of socioeconomic status. In a 2003 report, "The Complete Curriculum: Ensuring a Place for the Arts and Foreign Languages in American's Schools," a study group from the National Association of State Boards of Education noted that a substantial body of research highlights the benefits of arts in curriculum and called for stronger emphasis on art education. The National Environmental Education Foundation's "Environmental Literacy in America" report, based on ten years of survey research and related studies, indicates that: Only twelve percent of Americans can pass a basic quiz on energy topics; less than half of the U.S. population

Narratives

knows that the cars and appliances it uses contributes to global climate change; nearly 80% of Americans are heavily influenced by incorrect or outdated environmental myths; and 56% of Americans want to take action to protect the environment, but they don't know what to do. When used as an integrating theme across the curriculum, environmental education has a positive impact not only on student achievement in science but also in reading, math, and social studies. Outdoor activities increase student engagement and interest in science and all core subjects.

B. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS EVIDENCE-BASED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

Theory of Change and Logic Model-Logic Model Worksheet Attached

SPARK Early Literacy Program

In SPARK, AmeriCorps members provide a wrap-around approach to early literacy instruction with school, community and family partnerships that create an environment conducive to collaboration. In the School Sphere struggling readers receive 30 minute, one-on-one tutoring sessions three times/week. Each tutoring session is arranged around a lesson plan that includes: 1. A warm-up activity that reviews a concept familiar to the student. 2. An assessment of reading proficiency. 3. Explicit and direct instruction. 4. Exercises that develop language skills. 5. Guided instruction from books aligned to the students' reading levels. In the Community Sphere students participate in after-school literacy sessions provided by members. After-school literacy sessions include group projects that involve comprehension, exploration of ideas presented in literature, integration of the arts, literacy games and small group activities. The Family Sphere emphasizes keeping families engaged and involved in their children's reading progress. Tutors provide information on student progress so that parents know how to best assist them at home. Specific strategies include books for home libraries, monthly family events and an informational newsletter.

Environmental Education Initiative

AmeriCorps members who serve the environmental education initiative will be placed at Boys & Girls Clubs' Camp Whitcomb/Mason (CWM). Members will create, implement and lead youth through environmental education lessons and activities in the areas of archaeology, agriculture, outdoor living skills and Wisconsin forest history. AmeriCorps members are instrumental in BGCGM's dedication to increasing the number of youth who are able to experience Camp. Members will be responsible for

Narratives

designing and implementing environmental education service learning projects to use with youth campers. Examples include: 1) youth will learn about the effects of invasive species on the local ecosystem and then help remove invasive species from Camp's wetlands preserve and 2) AmeriCorps members will build on CWM's existing partnership with Growing Power to teach youth about sustainable farming methods and food security.

Art Education Initiative

Members who serve as Art Advocates will offer a multi-disciplinary approach to art education by offering participating youth a number of activities that fully express the diverse and explorative nature of the arts. BGCGM administers 28 Club locations in partnership with the Milwaukee Public Schools. These schools all share a common deficiency -- the lack of school day arts programming due to budget constraints and cuts by the school district. Members will serve as arts instructors teaching fundamental art skills and techniques in any number of media including illustration, ceramics, painting, photography, textiles, etc. A key responsibility of members will be coordinating these varied disciplines into displays and shows. Projects will encourage participants to explore the concepts of cooperation, teamwork, and shared experiences. These events will showcase the collective creative ability.

Evidence Base

SPARK Early Literacy Program

There is a vast collection of evidence that supports the strategies used in the SPARK initiative. The framework of the school sphere of SPARK is based on research proven models which focus on in-school tutoring with individualized lesson plans written, and assessments analyzed, by the tutors themselves. Several well-known programs such as Reading Recovery, Success for All and lesser known models use a one-on-one tutoring model like SPARK. Wasik and Slavin reviewed the effectiveness of Reading Recovery and concluded that one-on-one tutoring is a potentially effective means of preventing student failure. A distinction between Reading Recovery and SPARK being that in Reading Recovery sessions are taught by certified Reading Specialists and in SPARK tutors are supervised by certified teachers. The Community Sphere provides opportunities for students to explore reading books that are of interest to them. Research on motivation shows that when students read books of their own choosing they are likely to be more motivated, independent readers. Research on the effects of parental involvement such as the Family Sphere has shown a consistent, positive

Narratives

relationship between parents' engagement in their children's education and student outcomes.

Senechal's meta-analysis of family reading activities showed that brief skills instruction after reading was six times more powerful than simply reading to a child.

A 2013 evaluation of the SPARK program by Dr. Curtis Jones of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee School of Education concluded, "Tested with the most rigorous evaluation methods, a randomized-control framework, SPARK was found to have a statistically significant and sizeable impact on the reading development of the 2/3 of students who already had some basic understanding of reading concepts (early readers)."

Environmental Education Initiative

Camp helps to instill a positive sense of self-worth in young people by providing them with service opportunities and positive peer-to-peer and inter-generational communications. In addition, summer camp helps to build young people's leadership skills, confidence, and self-esteem. Between 2001 and 2004 the American Camp Association conducted research with more than 5,000 people to determine the outcomes of the summer camp experience. Parents, camp staff, and children reported significant growth in self-esteem and peer relationships, leadership skills, friendship skills, social comfort and spirituality.

Camp also helps youth avoid learning loss during the summer months. All young people experience learning losses when they do not engage in learning activities during the summer (Alexander, et al., 2007). A 2005 study by the American Institutes for Research entitled, "Effects of Outdoor Education Programs for Children in California" shows that outdoor environmental education programs raise science scores by as much as 27% and that environmental education programs have a positive effect on student achievement in general. In a 2010 survey of more than 1,000 parents by Edventure More, an agency devoted to curtailing summer learning loss, 96% of parents reported that their children's "enthusiasm for science, art, animation, or recreation" increased after attending camp; and 87% stated that they believed the hands-on learning their children did at camp would have school year benefits.

Art Education Initiative

Evidence clearly shows that high-quality arts programming results in positive academic and behavioral outcomes. In 2012 the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published a research study titled "Arts and Achievement in At-Risk Youth: Findings from Four Longitudinal Studies-Research Report #55." The report demonstrates that at-risk students who have access to the arts in or out of

Narratives

school also tend to have better academic results, better workforce opportunities, and more civic engagement. Specifically: Low-Socioeconomic Status (SES) students who had arts-rich experiences (high-arts) in high school were 10% more likely to complete a high school calculus course than low SES students with low-arts exposure (low-arts); High-arts, low-SES college students had the highest rates of choosing a major that aligned with a professional career, such as accounting, education, nursing, or social sciences. High-arts, low-SES students were 15% more likely to enroll in a highly or moderately selective four-year college than low-arts, low-SES students.

C. MEMBER TRAINING

Member Orientation Plan

The first day as a BGCGM AmeriCorps member is spent with the Program Director who gives a presentation on the history of the AmeriCorps movement, the rewards of community service, other service programs within CNCS, the mission of Serve Wisconsin, and the difference between employment and a term of service. She then goes through the Member Contract line by line. Pre-Service Training is offered as each group of members begins their term of service.

Boys & Girls Clubs Orientation (1 hour)-An overview of the BGCGM's mission, locations, and Core Service Areas. The Human Resources Department orients members to BGCGM policies and rules. AmeriCorps members are provided with the full awareness necessary to avoid all prohibited activities. The list of prohibited activities is included in the AmeriCorps contract and is also provided as a supplemental resource. In addition, community volunteers are similarly instructed with the aforementioned institutional knowledge of all prohibited activities and are supervised by knowledgeable staff to ensure compliance with all rules and regulations. New Employee Training (2 hours)-This training is required for all BGCGM employees and AmeriCorps members. Topics include the mission of the Clubs, the Decade of Hope campaign, brand and image, Club safety, child abuse, mandated reporting, boundaries and sexual harassment.

AmeriCorps Overview (2 hours)-This training covers the topics of AmeriCorps brand and image, building community, professionalism, careers, values and appropriate behavior.

SPARK EARLY LITERACY PROGRAM: Members serving as SPARK tutors receive professional development from the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee and coaching by a certified teacher-Site Coordinator. This is important because research by Brown et al and Ehri et al compared certified

Narratives

tutors and paraprofessional tutors and found the certified teacher/tutors to be more effective. SPARK training includes:

PALS (5 hours) - The Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) is the comprehensive assessment used to evaluate SPARK participants' knowledge of the important literacy fundamentals that are predictive of future reading success. This training includes the assessment procedure as well as the importance of data and data collection.

Lesson plan training (6 hours)-SPARK uses a very structured lesson plan for each lesson. As provided in the training, members receive expertise in the development of appropriate lesson plans. Moreover, the training provides members with the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate the SPARK lesson plan, manage student behaviors, time management and educational games. Members are also taught to reflect on each lesson and write comments on the information they need to remember to write the next lesson.

Vocabulary training (3 hours)-This training stresses the importance of vocabulary development and how it impacts student learning. Members are taught creative ways to teach vocabulary to students.

Reading comprehension training (3 hours)-Members are taught how to improve SPARK students' reading comprehension. The levels of comprehension are taught along with ideas to help students to better understand what they are reading. Members are taught what types of questions to ask and how to engage the students in conversations about what they have read.

Active Learning (3 hours)-This training shows the members how to have fun with the students while they learn. Cooperative and experiential learning is addressed. The members are required to play games, and to come up with their own creative ideas.

After school training (2 hours)-All members who work with the students after school attend this training. Topics covered include: Safety, active learning, conflict resolution, organized play, student management, planning and reflecting.

Writing (2 hours)-Members are taught how to improve their students' writing skills. They learn a

Narratives

variety of strategies to use to get students excited and interested in writing. Members will also receive on-going training from the SPARK Program Director and their Site Coordinator. Each Site Coordinator is a certified teacher, well qualified to offer on-site, on-going tutoring assistance to the AmeriCorps members placed at his/her site.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE: All members serving through the environmental education initiative are required to become CPR & First Aid certified. Additionally, the Program Director at Camp Whitcomb/Mason, provides an extensive training program that includes an overview of educational programming provided at Camp, as well as training specific to each member's responsibilities.

ART EDUCATION INITIATIVE: All Members serving in art education programming will participate in extensive program specific training. The training is offered by the Director of Program Development-Arts, a trained, professional artist and art educator.

EXTENDED TRAINING (Environmental Education Initiative only) Steve Gross, Program Director, will conduct an 8-hour environmental education training that will take place at Camp and will include: an overview of programs offered at Camp, the positive effects of Camp on inner-city youth, and effective strategies to leading central city youth in environmental activities.

D. MEMBER SUPERVISION

SPARK- Pat Marcus, SPARK Director, will oversee the AmeriCorps SPARK initiative. With an Area Manager and AmeriCorps Coordinator under her supervision, she will manage the recruitment/selection process, organize all member service orientations/trainings, coordinate volunteer management, foster and maintain community partnerships, and ensure that members have adequate support and guidance. Additionally, a certified teacher Site Coordinator at each program site will provide support and supervision to members.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE-Steve Gross, Program Director at Camp Whitcomb/Mason, will oversee members serving at Camp. This will allow daily communication, guidance, and support between members and Camp staff. Members will also be in communication with the AmeriCorps Coordinator who will provide additional support.

Narratives

ART EDUCATION INITIATIVE-All members serving this initiative will be supervised by Roberta Humphrey-Stephens, Director of Program Development-Arts. She will manage the recruitment, selection and placement of members. Staff at the placement site of each member will also support the member by coordinating instruction space and facilitating communication between the site and the program director. The AmeriCorps Coordinator will also serve as a resource to the members.

E. COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION

As an organization with eight years of experience as an AmeriCorps grantee, BGCGM is committed to ensuring the identification of AmeriCorps members and funded programs as part of the greater AmeriCorps movement. All SPARK sites proudly display the AmeriCorps logo at the entry to the SPARK room and the logo is displayed at Camp. All members are required to provide service in AmeriCorps service gear, AmeriCorps supported programs are identified as such on the BGCGM web site and all program and recruitment brochures, and training materials identify the programs with AmeriCorps. Furthermore, BGCGM prepares all AmeriCorps members with the information necessary to effectively communicate the significance of their service experience to members of the community.

Organizational Capability

A. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING

Boys & Girls Clubs is overseen by a Board of Trustees which is responsible for overall management and oversight of Clubs priorities. The Clubs President & CEO manages a team of Vice Presidents which is responsible for oversight of major departments. The SPARK, Arts and Environmental Education programs proposed here are fully supported by BGCGM's management team beginning with the Trustees.

The AmeriCorps management team is composed of key agency personnel (including the Program Director, Grant Accountant, Vice President of Government Affairs, Chief Operating Officer and Senior Director of Programs). This team meets regularly to ensure proper management of program operations. Additionally AmeriCorps staff seek the support of key school personnel (including Principals and administrators from the school district Superintendent's office) to ensure proper alignment of the SPARK program to school curricula and activities. The Environmental Education Initiative is managed by the Camp Whitcomb/Mason Executive Director and Camp Program

Narratives

Director. The team meets regularly to foster communication, address problems, brainstorm ideas for program improvements, and celebrate successes. The Arts Education Initiative is managed by the Director of Program Development-Arts under the supervision of the Senior Director of Programs and Operations.

Pat Marcus, Director of Program Development-Early Childhood Education-In the role of AmeriCorps Program Director, Ms. Marcus is responsible for overall management of the AmeriCorps program including project planning, staff management and fiscal and administrative management. Ms. Marcus has been responsible for the programmatic management of BGCGM AmeriCorps awards since 2006.

Tami Kaiser, Grants Accountant - Ms. Kaiser has 14 years' experience with fiscal management of federal awards and has managed the finances of every AmeriCorps award the Clubs have received. She will be responsible for financial accounting and reporting for the AmeriCorps grant. She has been with BGCGM for 13 years and holds a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting from Lakeland College.

Steve Gross, Camp Program Director-Mr. Gross will be the on-site supervisor for all AmeriCorps members placed at Camp Whitcomb/Mason as part of the Environmental Education Initiative. His responsibilities include managing all environmental education programs, teaching and establishing collaborative partnerships with schools and other community-based organizations.

Roberta Humphrey-Stephens, Director of Program Development-Arts-Ms. Humphrey-Stephens will supervise all Arts Education Initiative members. Her primary responsibility is the planning and implementation of all Clubs arts programming.

The AmeriCorps Program Coordinator is responsible for providing oversight for AmeriCorps programming. This includes coordinating program reporting, managing award requirements, coordinating training activities and coordinating member placement.

The Clubs have received three years of AmeriCorps competitive funding (2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09); five years of formula funding (2009-10, 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-2013, 2013-2014); and ARRA funding in 2009-2010. Additionally the Clubs administered \$7,499, 354 in federal funds in 2012,

Narratives

\$7,676,945 in 2011 and \$8,451,292 in 2010. This funding comes from a diverse group of agencies that includes the U.S. Department of Education, U.S Bureau of Justice Administration and Department of Housing and Urban Development to name but a few.

B. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Because of the important role AmeriCorps funding has played in BGCGM programming AmeriCorps rules and regulations have been integrated into the organizations own rules. BGCGM is one agency that operates many sites in the Milwaukee area. As part of our organizational structure, all sites have an established understanding of BGCGM policies, regulations, and standards. Because the sites are part of the larger agency, compliance with fiscal and programmatic requirements is built into the site management plan.

The process the Clubs has put in place to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations relies on the experience of the AmeriCorps management staff. All AmeriCorps members and staff who work for AmeriCorps funded programs receive specialized training from Ms. Marcus who has expert knowledge of AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Additionally, key members of the Clubs' staff are responsible for managing certain aspects of AmeriCorps funded programs. Each member of the team serves as a resource to the entire program, providing expertise in fiscal, administrative and programmatic management to prevent compliance issues from occurring. If any of these individuals were to detect an accountability or compliance problem they would relay it the rest of the team so that a plan for remediation could be determined collectively. If the team were to determine that prohibited activities have occurred, the issue would be immediately reported to BGCGM's senior management team and the Serve Wisconsin Program Officer to determine what steps would be necessary to address the issue.

C. PAST PERFORMANCE

In the past three years, BGCGM has been very successful in meeting performance measures. Review of the program reveals that all targets were achieved for the past three years. Also, for the last full year of program operation BGCGM maintained an enrollment rate above 100% (due to slot refills) and had a retention rate of 95.7%. Three of 70 members in 2012-2013 exited without an education award because as college students, they were unable to reconcile their AmeriCorps commitments with their class schedules. To mitigate this potential problem, BGCGM offers flexibility through a number

Narratives

of different member types (quarter time, minimum time, etc) and offers a supportive staff environment. BGCGM is committed to providing valuable experiences for all its' AmeriCorps members.

According to a June 14, 2013 Serve Wisconsin monitoring report, several items were identified as, "For continuous improvement" and additional issues, "Requiring corrective action." Most of these issues were related to the quality of the initial submission to the CNCS competitive process, updating performance locations in the AmeriCorps portal and member background checks. Through our continued commitment with Serve Wisconsin, BGCGM's program director was able to provide a diligent response to the issues. This included ensuring all current and future proposals be reviewed by the program director prior to submission, and improving internal procedures to ensure that the onset of member service is in accordance with CNCS and Serve Wisconsin criminal history and background check policies.

D. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

In addition to the data collected to assess progress toward AmeriCorps performance measures, BGCGM has access to a wealth of information that will be used to inform the improvement process. For example, arts programs are run in conjunction with 21st Century Community Learning Centers at Milwaukee Public Schools. Through partnerships with the schools, BGCGM staff have access to parent and student program survey data that can be used to inform the improvement process. A newly created partnership and multi-year grant between BGCGM, Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the Wallace Foundation will also greatly enhance BGCGM's ability to evaluate arts programs. Also, the SPARK program has very close relationships with school staff and the program evaluator at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. These relationships give access to program evaluation data as well as anecdotal information that is used for program planning and development.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

A. COST EFFECTIVENESS

Please note that the budget for this proposal reflects a cost per MSY of \$13,152 which is lower than both the maximum allowed and BGCGM's currently funded level.

In and of itself, the SPARK initiative has a budget of nearly \$1.6 million dollars each year. Approximately \$160,000 in AmeriCorps funding will be used in support of SPARK. Camp Whitcomb/Mason has an annual budget of approximately \$975,000 and approximately \$93,000 in AmeriCorps funds will support camp programs. BGCGM art programs have an annual budget of

Narratives

about \$110,000 with only about \$33,000 in support coming from AmeriCorps funds. For all programs, the remaining funds are secured every year by BGCGM and consist of a mixture of government and private grants, United Way funds and private donations.

The cost per student for SPARK is approximately \$2,800. While the budget includes some material costs, it is mostly the expense of staff and tutors. We continually look for ways to maximize cost effectiveness to make the program more affordable. Investigation of other intervention programs in an attempt to do a cost comparison reveals that there is not another program that provides the same level of service. MPS' Tutoring 4 You program provides small group tutoring at a cost of \$1,400/student but only provides 40 hours of service and has no school day or family component. Even Reading Recovery (which contains elements similar to SPARK) has an average cost per student of about \$2,500 while not including all the components of SPARK.

B. BUDGET ADEQUACY

Background Checks: An FBI background check is completed for every member who serves with BGCGM. The cost of each check is approximately \$50. The Human Resources department at BGCGM pays the cost for the checks, but no internal mechanism exists for transferring that cost to another department. Thus those costs are not reflected in either to budget request or match. The experience of BGCGM is the most effective indicator of budget adequacy. For each initiative a history of successful implementation guides this request. Boys & Girls Clubs programs are carefully designed as cost-effective means to deliver programs with substantial impact. As the budget narrative describes, required match for AmeriCorps programs comes from one grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Innovative Approaches to Literacy) and BGCGM campaign funds. In addition to this match SPARK is sustained by a mixture of grants from private foundations (approximately \$257,000), government grants (approximately \$950,000), United Way funding (\$115,000) and Boys & Girls Clubs campaign funds. Camp Whitcomb/Mason's budget includes revenue from grants (\$25,000), usage fees (\$625,000) and Boys & Girls Clubs funds. Finally, art programs are supported largely by BGCGM campaign funds except for a small \$10,000 grant from Milwaukee Public Schools. The previously mentioned partnership/grant with Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the Wallace Foundation will provide a substantial but as of yet undetermined increase to BGCGM's art programs budget.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

On-going, internal evaluations gauge both the efficacy of the programs supported by AmeriCorps

Narratives

members as well as the processes by which they are implemented. Process evaluation findings allow BGCGM to make more informed decisions toward continued improvement of environmental education, arts and early literacy programs.

As it is stated, Theory of Change defines all building blocks required to bring about a given long-term goal. The SPARK program is currently engaged in an external, randomized control trial evaluation through the University of Wisconsin -- Milwaukee. AmeriCorps members who serve as SPARK tutors serve to improve the reading skills of K5-3rd grade struggling readers at 10 SPARK sites, using a regimen and tools created & fine-tuned since the program's inception in 2006-07. The evaluation findings of the first two-year cohort (2011-12 and 2012-13) indicates that SPARK participants progress faster than students in the comparison group and that the increased skills are a direct result of program services. Said data trends indicate assumptions that upcoming evaluation results will demonstrate positive change for the current cohort.

The evaluation model will analyze both PALS (Phonemic Awareness and Literacy Screening) and MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) assessment scores. Both are used universally across Milwaukee Public Schools and scores are, therefore, available for participants as well as students in the comparison group. Data is provided directly to the external evaluator by Milwaukee Public Schools. PALS is used to assess kindergarten students, and MAP is used to assess students Grades 1-3rd. At the onset of a cohort, parent-signed consent forms are acquired from as many students as possible. Participants are then selected randomly by the external evaluator. Because the evaluation covers a 2-year cohort, the first year of the evaluation covers Grades K-2. The second year of the evaluation covers those same students in Grades 1-3. It is anticipated that the current cohort will follow a pattern similar to the first cohort, with 496 students initially (245 participants and 251 comparison students) and 274 students in the final sample due to attrition (139 participants and 135 comparison students).

It should be noted that SPARK serves far more students than are reflected in the evaluation. It is of primary significance to BGCGM that SPARK serves as many students as possible and not just those whose progress is being evaluated.

In addition to the Corporation, BGCGM will report all findings to supporters/stakeholders, including funders and community partners. The evaluation findings will also be applied to improving promotion and outreach activities for recruiting new AmeriCorps members, new community volunteers and nonprofit partners.

Narratives

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

CLARIFICATION RESPONSES MADE - 4/8/2014

A. Grant Capacity and Compliance

1. The CCR Registration has been updated as of 4/7/2014 and is now set to expire 4/7/2015.

B. Budget Clarification

1. Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee has received written confirmation to use the federal Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant as match to this award.

2. Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee Human Resources Department covers all background checks for staff and AmeriCorps members and the costs for said items are not reflected in the proposed AmeriCorps budget.

C. Programmatic Clarification

1. BGCGM certifies that all tutors provide proof of high school diploma - or its equivalent or higher degree - and meet all the requirements in 45 CFR section 2522.910 prior to tutoring SPARK participants. Selection between qualified applicants includes prior experience teaching children, the content of a written motivation statement, and a personal interview.

2. BGCGM certifies that all tutors provide proof of high school diploma - or its equivalent or higher degree - and meet all the requirements in 45 CFR section 2522.910 prior to tutoring SPARK participants. BGCGM also certifies that all tutors successfully complete pre- and in-service training as required in 45 CFR section 2522.940.

3. BGCGM also certifies that all tutors successfully complete pre- and in-service training as required in 45 CFR section 2522.940. All tutors receive trainings on implementation of the PALs assessment, which is used by Milwaukee Public Schools to assess progress. In addition, tutors receive pre-service and in-service training in the following areas: lesson plan development focusing on appropriate skills, vocabulary instruction, and critical elements of early childhood literacy development.

4. BGCGM certifies that all tutors meet the requirements in 45 CFR sections 2522.910 and 2522.940. Furthermore, BGCGM certifies that all tutors are supervised by licensed teachers, thereby satisfying the requirements of 45 CFR 9522.910-940.

Narratives

5. The desired start date is September 1, 2014.

D. Performance Measure Clarification

Please provide the following information directly in the performance measure clarification section of the application. If necessary, add additional narrative to the Clarification Summary field.

1. ED2 - As per the definitions found in the National Performance Measures Instructions for ED2, the students captured under this measure come from predominately economically disadvantaged and minority schools.

2. For ED2 - The students reported are considered having completed the program when a PALs year-end assessment is done. Students leaving early are not included in evaluation outcomes.

3. For ED5 - The minimum levels of improvement in academic achievement required in order for students to be counted are identified per the following three qualifiers below:

- For the youngest participants and/or those having almost no alphabetic knowledge at the beginning of the year, that improvement is specifically tracked month-by-month. For participants in this category, those still learning the letters of the alphabet, the minimum level of improvement to be counted in the performance measure would be an 80% knowledge of the alphabet by year end; 20-21 letters.

- For participants knowing most, but not all, of the alphabet, the minimum level of improvement to be counted in the performance measure would be moving beyond alphabet tracking to leveled readers.

- For participants who know their letters, and begin the year reading appropriate leveled readers, an increase of 2 Fountas & Pinnell reading levels is considered the minimum level of improvement.

4. OUTPT 6307: Annual Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee data trends indicate that on average at least 8000 individuals participate in the program's environmental summer camp program.

5. OUTCM6722: "The Youth Outcomes Battery" from the American Camp Association is the measurement tool utilized to determine participants increase in environmental knowledge per the following areas: Affinity for nature, Responsibility, Independence, Teamwork, Problem-Solving Confidence, Interest in Exploration, Camp Contentedness, and Friendship Skills.

6. OUTPT 4745: Since 2009-10, the staffing structure of the program has been designed with four AmeriCorps members whom have been historically effective in providing member led art activities to 2000 youth participants each year.

Narratives

E. Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification

1. BGCGM recruits AmeriCorps members, including those with disabilities, through the member recruitment process which uses Boys & Girls Clubs of America's recruiting best practices as an equal opportunity employer with an approved affirmative action plan.
2. The proposed program is not requesting strategic engagement slots.

F. No-Cost MSY Clarification

The proposed program is not requesting additional no-cost MSYs.

G. Healthcare Clarification

1. The proposed program confirms and makes sure that eligible members have the information they need to make an informed decision - and based on their decision Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee reimburses them for costs incurred, if/as necessary.
2. To do so, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee will provide information to members about all options available, including: #1-Staying on parents's health insurance plan #2-Applying for coverage through BadgerCare #3-Purchasing coverage through the health insurance marketplace, for which they would be reimbursed.
3. Historically, BGCGM reallocates funds mid-year because of members who leave, cannot be replaced, and have not earned an entire stipend. If/as needed, those funds could be allocated to cover any increased costs above the \$4,248 specified in the proposed budget to ensure coverage of MEC costs.
4. Other than that noted in #3, above, no budget adjustment will be necessary at this time.
5. Not applicable.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics