

Narratives

Executive Summary

Through the AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides collaborative, College Now Greater Cleveland will have 70 AmeriCorps members who will deliver programs and counseling on college and career exploration and financial education to 6th through 12th graders; provide support to 11th and 12th graders on strategic and tactile postsecondary access and financial planning; and facilitate successful postsecondary transitions, persistence and ongoing financial education with high school graduates in 10 diverse Ohio communities. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for ensuring that 7,000 of the students they serve complete at least one advising session and one milestone on their path to a postsecondary education. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 560 volunteers who will be engaged in the five national service days that members will lead and implement. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$896,000 will be matched with \$549,229; \$140,450 in public funding and \$408,779 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

a. Problem/Need

AmeriCorps College Guides will address low postsecondary enrollment rates in 10 Ohio communities by providing intentional interventions that help low-income, first generation students along their college-going path. Postsecondary enrollment, our program's primary outcome focus, is a necessary step on the path to degree attainment; degree attainment results in a host of socioeconomic benefits. In the 10 communities (Canton, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Marietta, Oberlin, Warren, Yellow Springs and Zanesville) that our program will serve, college enrollment rates among adults 18+ are as low as 6 percent and average 15 percent, below the state and national averages of 20 percent. (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2012 5-Year Estimates; enrollment is defined as people who were enrolled in an institution at the time of the survey). In terms of matriculation, or students who enroll in college immediately after high school graduation, 52 percent of US students from low-income backgrounds enroll compared to 67 percent of students from middle-income backgrounds and compared to 82 percent of students from high-income backgrounds, reflective of our service population. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012. The Condition of Education 2012). What's more, research shows that first-generation students are less likely to enroll in a four-year institution and are more likely to drop out than their non-first generation peers. (First-Generation Students: Undergraduates Whose Parents Never

Narratives

Enrolled in Postsecondary Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Statistical Analysis Report, June 1998). Research also shows that postsecondary attendance rates are generally lower for youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds than their higher income peers. (National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study, August 2012).

In our 10-community service area, the combined average median household income is just \$36,535, significantly lower than Ohio's average of \$48,071 and the US average of \$52,762. In the service area, a combined 20 percent of all families earn below-poverty income, nearly double the US rate of 10.5 percent and the Ohio rate of 10.8 percent. (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2011 5-Year Estimates).

More than 64 percent of Ohio's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2020, up from 57 percent as previously estimated. (Georgetown University, Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Center on Education and the Workforce, Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020, June 2013). Moreover, by 2020, 65 percent of all US jobs will require postsecondary education. (Complete College Ohio Task Force: Report & Recommendations, Ohio Board of Regents, 2013).

These statistics paint a picture of the stark reality faced by Ohioans and are the impetus for the AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides initiative and the much needed intervention that are planned to increase postsecondary enrollment rates of Ohioans.

b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems

The College Guides proposes to increase its full-time AmeriCorps member base from 60 to 70 in the 14-15 program year in addition to expanding the model to include early awareness and persistence interventions to its traditional postsecondary access services. With the increase in AmeriCorps members and the addition of services that provide a continuum of support, more Ohioans are expected to be served with an overall goal of 23,500, compared to a 16,000 goal in previous years. As recent college graduates themselves, the College Guides serve as near-peers and relatable mentors to the Ohioans they help, making them highly effective in addressing the issue of college access and success. Not only are they increasing capacity at their host sites, they are seen as upbeat and positive walking, talking college-going resources for the community in which they serve. The programs' outside evaluation conducted by Ohio University in 2012 provided evidence that this near-peer model is in fact successful at engaging students in the college-going process.

The AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides theory of change suggests that nuanced, evidence-based and evidence-informed interventions will positively impact students' postsecondary awareness, access and ultimately, persistence and completion. The College Guides will increase the number of students who

Narratives

believe a postsecondary education is a reality, complete milestones on their path to education beyond high school, and persist and complete their chosen postsecondary program. Increasing college enrollment and persistence will improve Ohio's chances to grow the number of degree-holding adults, better equipping the state to meet the escalating demand for a higher educated workforce.

Each of the 10 participating host sites will support College Guides providing baseline intervention services for the students they serve in three major areas: Early Awareness, grades 6-10; Access, grades 11-12; and Persistence to Completion, high school graduates. In each of these focus areas, a majority of the students to be served represent low-income, minority populations and will be the first in their families to pursue higher education.

Early Awareness interventions include college and career exploration and financial education activities designed to increase students' career and college knowledge in the short-term and increase students' recognition of college-going terminology and belief in their ability to go to college in the medium-term. Helping students become college ready is foundational for students to pursue meaningful pathways to postsecondary enrollment, which is our model's ultimate long-term goal. Our early awareness strategy and interventions are supported by evidence-based and evidence-informed research by David T. Conley, PhD (A Complete Definition of College and Career Readiness, Educational Policy Improvement Center, May 2, 2012, www.epiconline.org) which finds the following "Key Transition Knowledge and Skills" necessary for college readiness: "Postsecondary awareness (Aspirations, Norms/culture); Postsecondary costs (Tuition, Financial aid); Career awareness (Requirements, Readiness); Role and identity (Role models); and Self-advocacy (Resource acquisition, Institutional advocacy)."

In October 2012, the National College Access Network (NCAN) released a common set of metrics for college access and success programs based on both research and best practices of its 350-plus member base. This work--called the Common Measures project--helps programs nationwide identify research-based indicators that tell us students are on the right path. Through this project, NCAN vetted wide-ranging research to identify what works in college access and success that provides a foundation for the Access and Persistence to Completion interventions that College Guides will perform.

Access services provided by College Guides include college planning and financial aid interventions designed to help students take concrete steps required to enroll in college. These interventions include advising and support on college entrance exams, college selection, and financial aid advising and support. Short-term and medium-term outcomes include completion of milestones that feed the long-

Narratives

term college enrollment outcome, like FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completion and submission of postsecondary applications. Interventions and milestones are also supported by the evidence-based and evidence-informed research by Conley, whose "Key Transition Knowledge and Skills" include: "Matriculation (Eligibility, Admissions, Program)." Specific to the program's planned interventions are the achievement of milestones related to:

-College Entrance Exams: Essentially, achieving this milestone indicates that a student is likely to enroll and achieving a score of at least 21 on the ACT suggests that a student is academically ready for college. SAT/ACT and PSAT/PLAN are supported by The College Board, SAT Validity Studies, (2008)-evidence-based; Predicting Difference Levels of Academic Success in College, (Sawyer & Noble, 2002)--evidence-based; Condition of College & Career Readiness, (ACT, 2011)--evidence-informed; Staying on Target-The Importance of Monitoring Student Progress Toward Career & College Readiness, (ACT, 2012) -- evidence-based; PSAT/NMSQT Indicators of College Readiness, (Proctor, Wyatt, Wiley, 2010)--evidence-based.

College applications and college visits: Evidence shows strength and frequency of the completion of college applications and college visits positively impacts enrollment and backs the College Guides' proposed interventions in this area. Evidence includes: On the Path to College: Three Critical Tasks Facing America's Disadvantaged, (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001) -- evidence-based; Crossing the Finish Line, (Bowen et al, 2009)--evidence-informed; The College Board, Can Applying to More Colleges Increase Enrollment Rates (Smith, 2011)-- evidence-based; Reclaiming the American Dream, (Bridgespan, 2006)--evidence-based; Promise Lost: College Qualified Students Who Don't Enroll in College, (Hahn & Price, 2008)--evidence-informed.

-Financial Planning: Effectively, it is proven that students who complete and submit a FAFSA are more likely to enroll in a postsecondary program, which is why working with students on this is a critical intervention strategy for the program. Evidence supports the significance of financial assistance and education: Reclaiming the American Dream, (Bridgespan, 2006)--evidence-based; The Role of Simplification & Information in College Decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment, (Bettinger et al, 2009)--evidence-based; Promise Lost: College Qualified Students Who Don't Enroll in College, (Hahn & Price, 2008)--evidence-informed; the Effects of Tuition Price and Financial Aid on Enrollment in Higher Education, (Heller, 2001)--evidence-based and evidence-informed; and Private Scholarships Count-Access to Higher Education and the Critical Role of the Private Sector (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2005)--evidence-informed. Additionally, "Students who reported completing a FAFSA by May and had been accepted into a four-year college

Narratives

were more than 50 percent more likely to enroll than students who had not completed a FAFSA." (From High School to the Future: Potholes on the Road to College, Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2008--evidence-based).

Persistence to Completion services include activities designed to help students successfully overcome barriers in transitioning to college and persist to their next year in college. Student participation in interventions like bridge programming and FAFSA renewal, will lead to the strategy's long-term outcome: continued postsecondary persistence and/or completion of postsecondary program.

Evidence to support the delivery of these interventions include:

-Student engagement in orientation and bridge programs: "Active and collaborative learning and support for learners--is an important predictor of college completion." (A Matter of Degrees, Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012--evidence-based; Helping First-Generation Minority Students Achieve Degrees, Richardson et al, 2000--evidence-informed).

-Financial aid, FAFSA and scholarships are supported by research that prove the significance and necessity of financial aid, especially among low-income students, from: The Role of Simplification & Information in College Decisions: Results from the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment, (Bettinger et al, 2009)--evidence-based; Promise Lost: College Qualified Students Who Don't Enroll in College, (Hahn & Price, 2008)--evidence-informed; the Effects of Tuition Price and Financial Aid on Enrollment in Higher Education, (Heller, 2001)--evidence-based and evidence-informed; High School Academic Curriculum & Persistence Path through College,(Horn et al, 2001)--evidence-based; and Employment While in College: Academic Achievement and Post College Outcomes, (Ehrenberg et al, 1987)--evidence-based). The Pell Institute recommends increased financial resources for college success among low income, first generation college students." (Pell Institute, Moving Beyond Access 2008)--based on evidence-based and evidence-informed research.

Other significant research that supports the delivery of the College Guides proposed interventions advocates that:

-Ninth grade students and parents should have a plan for the student to pursue a rigorous, college-prep curriculum for each year of high school. (K. Christie and K. Zinth, Education Commission of the States, 2008).

-Students who connect their future careers with their schoolwork are more motivated to successfully complete high school. (Constantine, J.M., Seftor, N.S., Sama Martin, E., Silva, T., & Myers, D. 2006).

-"Work to increase families' financial awareness through workshops for parents and students to inform them prior to 12th grade about college affordability, scholarship and aid sources and financial

Narratives

aid processes." (Institute of Education Sciences, September 2009).

-The Pell Institute recommends "participation in special programs for at-risk populations that 'scale down' the college experience." (Pell Institute, Moving Beyond Access 2008).

CNCS should continue to invest in the College Guides program because at least 23,500 Ohioans will benefit from the services the program will provide, and we cannot afford to leave these students behind, especially given Ohio's current rate of degree completion and its growing demand for an educated workforce. Ohio's socio-economic health hinges on developing tomorrow's talent today, a task that the College Guides program has successfully achieved over the last five years.

c. Member Training

The AmeriCorps College Guides program has a strong commitment to providing its members with the training they need to effectively deliver the program's interventions in addition to personal development to achieve their own Life after the Corps objectives. Beginning in August, all incoming AmeriCorps members will undergo a comprehensive orientation conducted by the College Guide's Program Director and host sites which includes an introduction to: AmeriCorps programs at large and the types of service programs under the AmeriCorps umbrella; other AmeriCorps programs serving in their placement region; the College Guides program both locally and at-large; the educational landscape which necessitates college access work in general; their host site organization and staff; geographical layout of the service region; and the challenges and goals of their assigned community and school district. College Guides will be introduced to the Member Development Plan and asked to think through their personal goals for the service term and Life After the Corps. The completed plan will be collected and used to establish appropriate professional development opportunities and shape Life After the Corps opportunities throughout the service year. Lastly, during the orientation, the Program Director, host site staff and College Guides will review the member handbook and service agreement which they have signed that outlines their role and responsibilities and explicitly states the AmeriCorps rules on prohibited service activities.

Once members have been oriented with landscape and context in which they will serve, intense content training conducted by both College Now and the host sites will begin and continue throughout the service term. Trainings include advising methods and theory, college and career exploration strategies and techniques, college admissions processes, college entrance test background and procedures, understanding and communicating financial aid types, navigating the school system, drug and alcohol awareness, college campus visits, understanding the transition from high school to college, recognizing and addressing common barriers to postsecondary persistence, and others.

Narratives

Throughout the service year, College Now will conduct monthly webinars covering both AmeriCorps topics like "Using Your Education Award," and service specific topics like "How to Create Great Relationships with School Counselors." In addition, Ohio education associations provide low-cost or free trainings on topics relevant to the College Guides' direct service, such as college admissions and financial aid, which College Guides will attend throughout the year.

Leadership development is an essential aspect to the design of the College Guides training with the goal of developing leaders in education and the civic sphere after their service. With that, each member will be encouraged to take a leadership position in planning and implementing the required service projects throughout the year. Also, all members participate in Justice Talking, a reflective discussion exercise that they plan and facilitate with the team at their host site, at least quarterly. Trainings and professional development opportunities are provided not less than one day every month throughout the service year by host sites. College Now monitors this by requiring each host site to submit an 11-month orientation and training calendar at the beginning of the service term and reviews its progress during host site visits.

d. Member Supervision

At each participating host site, employees have been assigned as supervisors of the incoming AmeriCorps teams. They have been selected based on interest and ability to relate with, lead and foster the passion of recent college graduates. Selected supervisors are initially trained by College Now's AmeriCorps Director on the AmeriCorps mission and its context in order to ensure that hosting the program at their site is a commitment to direct service, community strengthening and member development. With these tenets in mind, supervisors will be able to ensure that members are well-equipped to perform the service expected of them and are also comfortable with the expectation to critically think about what they want to accomplish throughout the year and in Life After the Corps. Once the service year begins, site supervisors will be responsible for planning and implementing much of the initial orientation and training of their members. College Now provides sites with orientation and training templates to assist in this planning. As part of their Memorandum of Understanding(MOU), sites are required to submit their orientation and training plan for review by College Now. After beginning their direct service, supervisors will conduct regular site visits with their members and three performance reviews during the service term as a formal feedback method to assess training and development needs. Site supervisors include other stakeholders in the performance review, such as counselors at the school, as appropriate. Lastly, supervisors will regularly monitor their member's time, data entry related to their service activities, and completion of reports required

Narratives

by AmeriCorps to ensure they are on target to meet their overall service commitment. Supervisors are in turn guided through these processes and monitored by College Now's AmeriCorps Director. Lastly, during their initial training, College Guides are made aware of the program's chain of command so they can communicate any concerns they may have regarding their supervision.

e. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

Understanding and identifying with AmeriCorps begins during the recruitment process, where information is shared with potential candidates related to what AmeriCorps is and what it means to be a part of the national network of members who are committed to "getting things done." The process continues with selected candidates during the program orientation. There, members will gain further understanding of their role and impact within the national and local network of service programs. Members will receive a name tag that will display both the AmeriCorps and ServeOhio logos that they will be instructed to wear daily. Members will receive other AmeriCorps gear, like fleece jackets, that they will be instructed to wear at their service site and while implementing the required national service day projects within their service site communities. In addition, members will receive an AmeriCorps Serving Here sign that they will be required to display at their service site. The program will include in its orientation a session for members to prepare and practice an AmeriCorps elevator speech so that they will be confident when speaking about their affiliation once they begin their field service. Likewise, sites commit to understanding and monitoring these requirements through the MOU they sign when agreeing to become an AmeriCorps site. They commit to ensuring that their staff and community partners fully understand what AmeriCorps means in the macro and micro sense. They also agree to be responsible for ensuring that members wear their gear and display their AmeriCorps Serving Here signage. Compliance with these requirements is confirmed during sites visits conducted by the Program Director. In addition, College Now's Program Director works with each host site to assist in making connections with other AmeriCorps programs in their area for potential partnerships in training and in implementing national service day projects as a way to increase esprit de Corps and showcase national service in the community.

Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing

College Now Greater Cleveland, Inc. was founded as a scholarship program for Cleveland public school students in 1966 and has evolved into Ohio's largest and the nation's first college access organization. College Now is a financially stable organization with a diverse \$7 million funding base and a professional, board-directed administrative staff. The board includes 50 leaders from finance,

Narratives

education, legal, civic and philanthropic sectors; and provides strategic and fiscal oversight. Our executive team includes a seasoned chief executive with more than 20 years of non-profit leadership who is routinely named to Inside Business Magazine's 100 most influential leaders in Northeast Ohio; a chief operating officer who is a CPA with 10 years of experience managing College Now's finances and operations, including successfully completing A133 audits; a published chief program officer who holds a doctorate in Education with a concentration in administrative and policy studies and organization development; and a chief external affairs officer with 15 years of successful and diverse fundraising experience. Our finance director is a CPA and our human resources manager has nearly 15 years of human resources, payroll and benefit administration experience. The statewide College Guides program is managed by the AmeriCorps Director who led the development of the program in 2008-2009 and has grown it from three host sites and 14 AmeriCorps members to today's 10 host sites and 60 members.

Further demonstrating our capacity to manage government grants, College Now currently administers two competitive US Department of Education TRIO grants; Upward Bound (five-year grant of \$1.25 million awarded July 2012) and Educational Talent Search (five-year grant of \$750,000 awarded in September 2011), as well as two competitive 21st Century Community Learning Center grants (total of \$1.6 million awarded in July 2012) as a sub-grantee of the Ohio Department of Education. We also successfully implemented TRIO Gear Up programming, managing \$300,000 as an Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) sub-recipient annually, providing direct service and technical assistance to four of eight program sites from 2006 to 2011, when OBR's funding renewal failed. College Now also successfully administered a competitive \$375,000 Assets for Independence IDA (individual development account) program awarded by the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Community Service from 2009 to 2013.

b. Compliance and Accountability

College Now's AmeriCorps Director has successfully administered the federally funded Ohio College Guides program for six years. She has gained expertise that is beneficial in orientating and training sites on the regulations and expectations of their participation. Sites are thoroughly vetted prior to joining the initiative to ensure their commitment to compliance with AmeriCorps and the program's requirements including a firm understanding of the member's role and prohibited activities. The extensive MOU sites sign prior to participation solidifies this commitment.

To effectively ensure compliance and to keep track of the documents, instructions, forms and procedures needed to run an AmeriCorps program, College Now utilizes an online platform to store

Narratives

electronic files that need to be readily accessed. The Program Director conducts random member file audits within this system and also performs regular timesheet audits to ensure on-time approval of timesheets and to monitor members' progress towards their commitments. Currently, random data audits are being instituted as another level of checks and balances. If issues are found during any of these audits, a written follow-up is made to the site supervisor identifying the issue with a due date for correcting it. For issues that are significant, the program reserves the right to eliminate a host site's participation in AmeriCorps. The MOU explicitly defines circumstances in which College Now can remove a member from a site or completely remove a site from further participation. The AmeriCorps Program Director also conducts at least one host site visit during the service year to ensure grant compliance. A checklist of policies and regulations is used as a guideline for these visits, and sites must show compliance during this time. Throughout the service year, the Program Director routinely checks in on host site supervisors and convenes all the supervisors monthly through a conference call to discuss concerns and updates, always focusing on overall program compliance, member satisfaction and progress towards the initiative's goals.

c. Past Performance

From August 2010 through June 2013, the College Guides program strove to provide a total of 47,800 students with college access advising services, aiming for 23,900 students served to complete two or more milestones on their path to a postsecondary education. The 179 AmeriCorps members that served during this time surpassed the goal by serving a total of 65,726 students, of which 37,036 completed at least two milestones. The program's long-term measure for success is enrollment into a postsecondary institution. Of the students served during the last three years, 13,821 were seniors, or candidates for postsecondary enrollment in the fall immediately following high school graduation. Of that, 7,097 enrolled in a postsecondary institution. This is slightly below our goal of 8,365. We are currently auditing our program data in preparation for the upcoming external evaluation and in the process found that dates of birth, expected year of graduation and school names were missing from several qualified seniors' records. These items are necessary to accurately pull information from our database in order to submit to the National Student Clearinghouse for confirmation of enrollment. Participating host sites are currently being trained to conduct regular data audits with their members to ensure that complete information showcasing their direct service is captured accurately.

Compliance: The AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides program prides itself in its ability to adhere to AmeriCorps rules and regulations and to meet deadlines and respond to requests from ServeOhio and the Corporation in a timely manner. The program did receive one non-compliance notification in the

Narratives

last year for the late submission of a member development report that was due on April 8, 2013. The non-compliance notification was sent on April 9, 2013 and was addressed within five minutes of receipt. The report had in fact been complete, but saved rather than submitted in the required reporting system.

Enrollment: The Ohio College Guides had experienced a 100 percent enrollment rate since its first year of implementation in 2009, until last program year when 59 of the awarded 60 slots were filled. One partner host site missed a member enrollment deadline. Subgrantees may enroll full-time members in Ohio only during the first 45 days of the project year, or in the College Guide's program's case by September 19, 2012. The program had selected a person to fill the role on September 21, but it was beyond this deadline, so the program ultimately left the position unfilled. The issue was addressed directly with the site, and in the current program year, the number of slots granted to the site was cut.

The College Guides program has returned to a 100 percent enrollment rate in its current project year.

Retention: During the 2012-2013 program year, five members were released or exited from the program resulting in a 91.5 percent retention rate. Three members resigned early because they found full-time positions; one member left for what would have been defined as personal compelling circumstances, but failed to produce the medical documentation that would have enabled the program to process his leave accordingly; and the last member was released for disciplinary reasons. The College Guides program has made great strides in ensuring that candidates understand the required commitment for the AmeriCorps role. The program implements strategies to increase retention rates that begin during the recruitment process with a focus on effectively communicating expectations of the service commitment and continues through the service term with a focus on member development and regular interactions with site supervisors to maintain a positive and encouraging environment. Specific strategies that are implemented during the recruitment process include stressing the importance of fulfilling the commitment; reiterating to candidates that their leaving would result in students unable to receive services; directly asking candidates if they plan to look for other employment while serving; determining if a candidate has too many other commitments; explaining the priority of Member Development to the program's goals and acknowledging the help that will be provided for Life After the Corps plans; and explaining the process for resolving issues that arise during the service term.

Once on board, the communication strategies continue by repeating the policies and procedures that are in place to communicate and resolve issues that may arise during the term. This information is conveyed during the recruitment process, the member orientation and in documents that are read out

Narratives

loud and signed by members like the member handbook and service agreement. The program believes that emphasizing early and often the importance of the member's commitment, in addition to the policies and procedures in place to help make the service experience positive, will assist in improving the overall retention rate.

d. Continuous Improvement

The College Guides formed an Advisory Council in May 2013 with the sole purpose of providing a venue for the leadership of internal stakeholders to receive updates on programmatic and financial performance of the statewide program in addition to discussing and contributing to major decisions that impact the initiative. Each host site participates in this Council and its formation has already proven beneficial in implementing a successful transition of the program's legal applicant while improving the program's integrity, enhancing the program's orientation curriculum and increasing ownership of the overall initiative from sites. In December 2011, the College Guides first external program evaluation was completed and included two years of data for analysis. Among its results, the focus groups conducted with AmeriCorps members, students served by members and site supervisors provided useful information that has assisted the program in strengthening its orientation and training curriculum to better prepare members for service. The results also showed that regular feedback from members is required to truly inform continuous improvement of the program's training, especially since there are new members each year who may have different skills and needs. For that reason, the program collects data from members regularly to ensure the program is meeting their needs: a pre- and post-service term skills assessment is conducted that informs training needs during the year; monthly training webinars are evaluated through a common survey tool and results are utilized to improve future trainings. Common tools are used for collecting direct service data with a set monthly deadline that allows for regular analysis. This lets the program identify areas of concern in the delivery of interventions and provides opportunity for modifications if necessary. The program engages external stakeholders, such as school districts and funders, through a number of avenues. One is through separate agreements that outline expectations and identify reporting schedules and criteria. In addition, host sites engage counselors and other staff within the schools members serve in the three performance reviews that are conducted. This allows schools to formally voice concerns and to highlight exceptional performance from the AmeriCorps Member assigned to their school. In the 2014-2015 program year, College Guide partners have agreed to formalize this feedback process even further by developing a common survey tool that will be distributed to the program's external stakeholders statewide. Feedback from all of these avenues will be used to inform

Narratives

changes and improvements to the program on a continuous basis.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. Cost Effectiveness

For the 10 participating College Guide host sites, the dedicated 1,700 hours of service provided by AmeriCorps members result in more interventions to more students at a cost that is 41 percent less than what it would be to hire an advisor through traditional methods. In previous years, increases in the number of contacts with students and families range from 35 percent to 469 percent at each host site, something a majority of the sites would not have achieved without the "extra-hands" of College Guides. In addition, the total CNCS contribution of \$896,000 to serve 23,500 students results in a \$38 per student served outlay. The impact made through College Guide interventions far exceeds this cost per student served, as increased numbers of college graduates begin to contribute to Ohio's economic vitality. Research finds that first-year, full-time salaries earned by postsecondary completers in Ohio in the spring of 2011 combined to total \$766,933,183 (adjusted for inflation). Moreover, 74 percent of bachelor's earners and 78 percent of master's earners remained in Ohio. (In-State Retention and Salary Analysis of Spring Graduates 2007-2011, University System of Ohio Institutions, Ohio Board of Regents, March 2013.) If these students had earned just a high school diploma, their 2011 earnings would have been reduced by \$123,152,903; a significant economic impact for just one year of college graduates with full-time employment. (Based on Bureau of Labor Statistics, Education Pays 2013 annual income averages for high school diploma holders.) For the 2014-15 program year, the AmeriCorps College Guides program will increase its share of member match, lowering overall cost per MSY from \$12,997 to \$12,800.

b. Budget Adequacy

College Now requests \$896,000 from The Corporation to support 70 AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides who will help 23,500 Ohioans discover and reach their postsecondary education dreams. This amount includes per member \$11,697 towards the living allowance and \$463 to cover partial FICA expenses. The total proposed budget is \$1,445,229 and was developed after careful review of the program's need to properly support members while delivering the planned interventions, in addition to ensuring compliance with AmeriCorps regulations. The program's match aligns with the regulatory requirement of 38 percent.

The broad cash and in-kind match support that College Now and each host site bring to the project bode well for the aggregate capacity to support the AmeriCorps members and the overall program. At the time of this submission, host sites and College Now have received commitments of \$167,351

Narratives

through local school districts (Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Oberlin, Greene, Dayton, Youngstown), private donors, the Stark Education Partnership Endowment, the Ninde Fund at the Oberlin Community Foundation, Muskingum County Community Foundation, Washington State Community College, and the Raymond John Wean Foundation. Requests are pending in the amount of \$284,060 to Cincinnati Public Schools, Wright State University, Greene Giving Foundation, the United Way, Muskingum Valley Educational Service Center, Great Lakes Higher Education Corporation and the Safelite Auto Foundation. Proposals to cover the remaining \$97,818 will be submitted to the Cleveland Foundation, John Huntington Fund for Education, The Youngstown Foundation, Kaigin Family Foundation, Mahoning Valley Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Eastern Ohio, Western PA, and the Siemer Family Foundation. The College Guides Advisory Council is meeting in February 2014 to assess fundraising results to date and discuss potential strategies for joint outreach to national foundations that have a history of supporting statewide initiatives specifically in the areas of training and other member support.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

5. Evaluation Summary or Plan

College Now will conduct a formative internal and summative external evaluation to analyze the effectiveness of our program model, using the results of the program's first external evaluation completed in December 2011 as a baseline. The program framework comprises activities focused on early awareness, access and persistence to completion. The delivery model supports a developmental approach to college and career readiness because caring, competent individuals will provide students with appropriate and intentionally designed interventions. Our theory of change suggests that a "one size fits all" approach across all the program sites will not increase college and career readiness or attainment. Instead, the most effective interventions begin with meeting students where they are and by building trusting relationships. These relationships provide the appropriate nuance and understanding necessary to leverage the impact of programmatic activities. We expect that our College Guides will help students navigate the college-going process and be successful during the transition.

Based on this program model, the external evaluation design is centered on three key program elements: 1) Program Goals-determining the extent to which program goals and activities are achieved; 2) Program Processes-determining the extent to which program planning and implementation are effective and lead to goal and outcome achievement; and 3) Program Outcomes/Impacts-determining the extent to which desired and unintended outcomes are achieved.

Narratives

Our research questions include:

- Does the AmeriCorps College Guide program cause a particular change in participants' or others' behavior, social conditions, development outcomes or other indicators of success?
- What component(s) of the program or intervention were responsible for the change?
- What are the unintended effects of an intervention, and how did they influence the outcomes?
- Will the AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides program work in another context? Are there promising practices that can be adopted in other places?

Across host sites, baseline performance and output measures have been designed that measure expected outcomes based on early awareness, access and persistence to completion. Our evaluation plan will focus primarily on direct service outcomes (student); member development outcomes, volunteer generation results and overall program effectiveness that will include data collected through the end of the 2013-2014 program year.

College Now utilizes a scheduled, robust data collection and analysis system. All College Guide sites utilize the WEST system (Web-Enabled Student Tracking) to track output data, program activities and interventions that are entered by members. Students are flagged appropriately to provide ease and flexibility in reporting. Monthly reports run by College Now and site supervisors help monitor participation and activity progress. The National Student Clearinghouse database will also be used to verify postsecondary enrollments, persistence and completion. Given the diversity of the program sites in our model, we will take a case study approach to data analysis. Case study methodology allows us to systemically investigate what happens at the partner host sites within real-life context. Our formative evaluation will be ongoing throughout the grant period. Results will be shared at quarterly Advisory Council meetings which includes leadership from each site. The summative evaluation will be shared with ServeOhio and The Corporation for National and Community Service, slated for completion by January 2015.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

a. Budget

1. We have labeled the program's Site Supervisors appropriately in the budget narrative and eliminated the usage of the Independent Sector's Value of Volunteer Time to value their time towards supervising Members at their sponsor site. Instead, we have entered the true cost of supervisor's time

Narratives

based on their actual salary and included their actual fringe benefits expense in the appropriate line item. We received this information directly from site supervisor's or their human resource staff. With the change in the site supervisor time that resulted in additional match, we lowered the program's match in the Office Space Line Item in the Other Program Operating Costs section to ensure that we remain at our minimum required match of 38%. We had originally included this in-kind estimate for all Members but with the increase in the budget because of the adjustments to the site supervisor time, we only included this for Cleveland and made a note in the narrative to confirm that all Members would in fact have space allocated at their service site.

2. We have reviewed the Applicant Info section of the application to ensure the program's start date follows AmeriCorps parameters. The program's start date was initially entered as Tuesday, August 5, 2014 and we would like to change it to Monday, August 4, 2014. This is because we have recently been notified that some of the school districts in which the AmeriCorps Members would serve are starting their academic calendars much sooner than in previous years. For example, at the Cleveland College Guide sponsor site, school will begin on August 11, 2014 as opposed to the last week in August as occurred in previous years. We would like to ensure that the program has the opportunity to provide an additional day of pre-service training prior to the AmeriCorps Members entering their schools, if this is allowable.

3. Some of the Member training is captured in the Member Travel line item of the submitted budget. In addition, the selected sponsor sites are all privileged to have internal staff with the expertise required to train the AmeriCorps College Guides at no cost on the key intervention strategies that will help them to serve the students in the schools they will be assigned. In the current year, sponsor sites have begun to bring their expert staff together to host regional trainings for the AmeriCorps Members. This is something the program is building upon for the next program year. The program has also developed relationships with other statewide and local organizations that provide professional development opportunities at no cost. For example, the Ohio Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (OASFAA) offers free training throughout the year on completing financial aid forms, advising students on loan options, interpreting financial aid packages and guiding students through their best strategies to pay for higher education. They also provide free webinars to our Members to help them devise strategies to handle their own student loans. The Ohio Association of College Admissions Counselors (OACAC) also offers free trainings that Members attend that help them to understand the admissions process and how to help students select the "best match" school for their career interests and financial situations. OACAC also provides free events across the state where

Narratives

College Guides and other stakeholders can learn about the various institutions in our state and what they can offer to their students. In addition, the program takes advantage of many of the free webinars that are available through the Ohio Association of Community Colleges, the Ohio College Access Network, AmeriCorps Alums and others that we come across throughout the year. The program also conducts its own monthly webinars with Members.

4. The organizational chart has been updated to show where the 70 AmeriCorps Members fall into College Now Greater Cleveland's overall structure. In the original grant submission, only the 20 Members that would be assigned to College Now Greater Cleveland were inserted. This has been corrected and updated to showcase the program's true structure.

b. Strategic Engagement Slots and c. MSY with no program funds attached (NO COST MSYs)

1. The AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides program would like to seriously consider the addition of Strategic Engagement Slots and/or MSY with no program funds attached, but because of the timing and additional planning required to coordinate this, we would like to consider this option in future years. The ability to add these potential slots has been shared with the program's Advisory Council, which is made-up of executive leadership at each service sponsor site, and the topic will be part of the group's next meeting scheduled in May 2014. The topic of funding the program through other sources is something the Advisory Council has begun to explore and this potential future opportunity will certainly add to the discussion.

c. Healthcare

1. The AmeriCorps Ohio College Guides program's strategy is to offer full-time members healthcare that complies with AmeriCorps provisions and is ACA compliant. We are in the process of obtaining quotes from two insurance brokers for Member healthcare in the 2014-2015 program year and are finding to ensure that we are both AmeriCorps compliant and ACA compliant, that plans require to be overlaid, which is actually resulting in a less expensive monthly premium than we had anticipated. The first broker, The Oswald Group, presented the program with a quote from Reliance Standard. They are also procuring a quote from Pan American. The second broker, CBI Z, presented the program with a quote from TransAmerican and in the process of getting a quote from another provider. We plan to compare costs and coverage prior to making a final decision on the program's healthcare provider for the 2014-2015 program year.

2. We are exploring providers through our current insurance brokers, The Oswald Group and CBI Z. We will select a final provider once we have received and compared their quotes.

3. Yes, the College Guide's program budget does provide for Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC) for

Narratives

member healthcare. The program budgeted for a monthly premium of \$115 for 50 members over the 11 month service term. We budgeted for 50 members instead of the 70 requested based on trends from previous program years. The AmeriCorps College Guides are recent college graduates and as such, many of them do stay on their parent's insurance plan instead of opting into the coverage the program offers. With the quotes we have received to date, it looks like we will actually be paying less than was budgeted for member healthcare.

4. There are no necessary budget adjustments that need to be made in order to provide MEC for the AmeriCorps College Guides. Current quotes are between \$10 and \$20 per month less expensive than the program is paying in the current year and what was budgeted for the 2014-2015 program year.

5. Non-applicable.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics