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Executive Summary

The Renewal Unlimited Fresh Start Program will have 36 AmeriCorps members, between the ages of 17 and 24, who will construct two affordable, energy-efficient, single family homes, who will work to obtain an HSED/Diploma, and who will learn leadership, job training, and life development skills. The services will be completed in Columbia County, Wisconsin. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will complete the construction of 2 affordable homes, obtain their HSED/Diploma, develop career goals, participate in job training and placement services, improve self-esteem, alleviate barriers to economic self-sufficiency, participate in financial literacy training, and enter employment or post-secondary education or join the military. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 55 volunteers that will be engaged in tutoring AmeriCorps members, teaching construction skills on the work site, teaching energy efficiency building methods, or mentoring the opportunity youth. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Economic Opportunity with 30% of the MSY's committed to opportunity youth. The CNCS investment of \$185,549 will be matched with \$257,915 in public funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

NEED - EXTENT/SEVERITY: Renewal will be addressing two community needs. These are services for at-risk youth and the development of affordable housing.

SERVICES FOR AT-RISK YOUTH: Renewal Unlimited is one of the key providers in Columbia County to address the comprehensive needs of at-risk, under-attached youth. Of the 8 school districts in the county, only 2 offer charter schools that address the academic needs of 9th through 12th graders. Both of the charter schools rely on other service providers to address job training skills. Lutheran Social Services offers specific programs for at-risk youth to develop self-esteem, and CASA provides court advocacy skills for youth. Through the Fresh Start Program, Renewal is able to offer a comprehensive program for at-risk youth that addresses academics, leadership and self-esteem skills, job training and placement skills, and life development skills including financial literacy. 1,154 of the 6,485 youth between the ages of 17 and 24 are living in poverty, which represents a poverty level of 17.8% compared to the overall poverty rate of 10.3% for all people in Columbia County. (2010 Census) 8% of these youth do not complete their high school education; 6% of youth do not attend school at all and do not work; and 31% of the school-age population qualifies for free or reduced lunch rates. 49 youth from the school districts in Columbia County have dropped out of school, representing a dropout rate of 3.723% compared to the state average of 2.2% and the national average of 3.4%. (DPI,

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2013) The impact of higher drop-out rates in a rural community has a greater impact on the youth due to fewer opportunities for higher paying jobs and fewer opportunities for growth in a career pathway. Truancy rates in Columbia County School Districts range up to 12.2%. 12% more youth in tenth grade in Columbia County scored at a minimal proficiency level in each of the areas of reading and mathematics than did other tenth graders in the State of Wisconsin. Among the school districts within Columbia County, there were 15% more of the youth who are economically disadvantaged or who have disabilities that scored in the minimal proficiency category compared to other high school students, indicating a disparity for those youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. (DPI School Report Cards 2011-2012; DPI State Data 2011-2012; Kids Count Data Book 2011). In 2010, there were a total of 45.6 juvenile arrests in the county, and in a study done by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2010, it was determined that 8% of the youth within Columbia County between the ages of 12 and 17, and 41% of the youth between the ages of 18 and 25, engaged in binge drinking within the past 30 days; 35% of the youth used cigarettes in the past month; 18% used marijuana; 10% engaged in illicit drug use other than marijuana; and 7% of teens identified that they had abused alcohol or drugs in the past year. (2012 Census; School Year Reports, DPI, 2013; American Quick Facts 2011; Kids Count Data Book, 2011; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). Based on historical data, 90% of the youth that join our AmeriCorps Program have had issues regarding abuse of alcohol and/or drugs or issues with law enforcement. These issues have resulted in youth dropping out of school or showing a high degree of truancy because they could not function within a normal school setting and did not receive the support needed to overcome these addictions or other issues. Our AmeriCorps Program provides a fresh start for many of these youth who have not succeeded in mainstream institutions. This program will address the individual needs of each of these youth to truly make a difference in the choices they make for their lives and will have a large impact on addressing the needs of youth in Columbia County. Without some type of intervention, the future prospects of these youth are not promising and, therefore, it is critical that a positive youth development program, such as Fresh Start, be available for youth in our communities.

DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Columbia County is a rural county located in South Central Wisconsin with a population of 56,539 people, of which 29,655 people are employed. The unemployment rate for Columbia County as of August 2013 was 5.1% compared to the rate of 6.7% for the State of Wisconsin and 7.2% for the United States which indicates that families in the county do have employment and could purchase affordable housing if homes were available.

Columbia County is a growing community with an expected 13.9% increase in population by the year

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2020, and it is estimated that there will be a need for 1,250 more housing units during the next 7-year period. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; Census 2012; Dept. of Workforce Development, 2012). In 2013, the median value of owner-occupied housing started increasing after a period of steady decreases; the current median value of housing is at \$103,600 and the median sale price of single family homes is at \$134,250. (Wisconsin Realtors Association, 10/2013) The median household income for the county is \$55,910. 2010 Census data showed that 35% of families with mortgage payments were paying greater than 30% of their income toward housing expenses, and of these, 7.8% were paying greater than 50% of their income toward housing. This is a strong indicator that the cost of the homes was higher than the affordability limits for these families. With median household income averaging \$55,910 per year, the median sale price of single-family homes averaging \$134,250, and the increasing need for housing units, the need for more affordable housing that is valued at \$125,000 or less is critical so that the mortgage payments can be affordable for lower income families.

In 2010, based on this growing need, Columbia County developed a comprehensive plan in which they identified the development of affordable housing for low-income families as a high priority. The plan indicated that as the cost of homes increase, more households will find it difficult to afford adequate housing; this, in turn, will have a negative impact on economic development, the local tax base, and population migration into the county. In 2012, there were a total of 682 homes sold in Columbia County, the highest number of homes sold since 2007. Through mid-October 2013, there were a total of 568 homes sold. These sales indicate that families or individuals are interested in purchasing homes, but the key is the affordability so that families are not paying greater than 30% of their income towards housing. In order to stimulate the development of affordable housing units, Columbia County chose to forego charging any fees for building permits in the past 3 years. Only 4 permits were applied for in 2011, and 4 permits in 2012. In each of those years, Renewal applied for 2 of the permits. The Wisconsin Realtors Association issued a news release in November 2012 that indicated that the median price of houses rose a solid 3.5% over the former 12-month period in Wisconsin and that continued price appreciation of homes and the declining inventory of homes will start to impact affordability for families. (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2011; Wisconsin Housing Profile, 2011; Wisconsin Realtors Association, 2012; Columbia County Comprehensive Plan, 2007 with projections to 2030). If families purchase homes that are not in the affordable range, the long-term impact on the community will be foreclosures and potentially families moving out of the county impacting the tax base and expenditures in the community.

Due to this data and Columbia County identifying the need for more affordable housing as a high

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priority, this is a need which can be met by training AmeriCorps members in the construction trade. By using AmeriCorps members to construct homes, the cost of labor is significantly reduced which thereby lowers the cost that a home can be sold at and the home becomes affordable. Because the demand for affordable housing is critical, the Renewal AmeriCorps Fresh Start Program has targeted its program objectives to meet this need.

THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL: To address the need for a comprehensive program to meet the needs of at-risk youth and to address the need for more affordable housing units for low-income families in Columbia County, the components that we are proposing as part of our intervention design include a set of caring, knowledgeable staff who will provide significant time and attention to each youth to establish a climate of trust and support; developing a sense of community so that members feel supported and they have a feeling of belonging; an asset-based approach to services where youth are respected and viewed from a strength-based perspective; high expectations that the youth will succeed both academically and display a high degree of responsible behavior; a curriculum that is geared to the individualized needs of each youth and integrates learning in both academic fields and vocational education; career development and work-based learning; and 12 months of follow-up services after the youth completes their AmeriCorps term in order to maintain the trusting relationship that has developed and to ensure that the youth stay focused on their career and personal goals. Specific activities as part of the intervention design include being assessed in the areas of basic academic skills, work maturity skills, life development skills including financial literacy, career interests, and leadership skills and then developing an Individualized Service Strategy to reach identified goals in each of these areas. Youth will work to obtain their HSED or High School Diploma; participate in a Civics Literacy Curriculum, a Health Curriculum, and receive certification in First Aid/CPR; participate in the PACT Curriculum that will lead to a construction certificate that is an industry recognized credential; receive job specific skill training and participate in constructing 2 affordable housing units; have the opportunity to participate in leadership activities; and will learn strategies to recruit 55 community volunteers to assist with program activities. Through all of these program components and design elements, the youth will successfully complete the construction of 2 affordable, energy-efficient, accessible housing units by the end of the program year; successfully achieve their HSED/Diploma; increase their math and reading scores by a minimum of one grade level; complete the goals identified on their Individual Service Strategy; obtain competency certificates in the areas of work maturity, pre-employment skills, basic skills competencies, financial literacy, and independent living skills; obtain an industry recognized credential in construction; participate in

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leadership development activities; and successfully recruit 55 community volunteers who will assist with program services both in the classroom and on the construction site. At the completion of their term of service, youth will be enrolled in post-secondary education, join the military, or be placed in an employment setting. Our past historical data supports the fact that this intervention design successfully leads to the identified outcomes. In the past program year, 79% of the youth obtained their HSED/Diploma; 100% of the youth completed competency certificates in basic skills, independent living, work maturity, and pre-employment skills; 100% of the youth earned a certificate in construction skills; 100% of the youth achieved 92% of their identified goals; and 85% were placed in employment or post-secondary education. The intervention strategies are also supported by evidence-based research from across the country that support the fact that these elements can lead to the successful outcomes identified. CNCS should invest in this project because it is an evidence-based program that provides comprehensive services for at-risk youth; produces the much needed, affordable housing units in Columbia County; and results in positive changes in education and obtainment of an HSED/Diploma, employment, certification in construction skills which can lead to employment in a high wage, high growth industry. This results in the development of self-esteem and knowledge of national service learning, with the opportunity to pay it forward by volunteering in other parts of the community after completing their term of service.

EVIDENCE BASE: The Fresh Start Program is based on the Social Bond Theory initially proposed by Travis Hirschi (1969) which stated that elements of social bonding include 4 essential components: attachments to families, commitment to school and employment, involvement in activities, and the belief that these things are important. In the absence of these attachments, youth may experience negative effects such as delinquency or involvement in criminal behavior. In 2000, M. W. McLaughlin studied the research from 1990 to 2000 that looked at 120 youth-based community organizations in 34 different cities. A synthesis of this research showed that community-based youth programs can have a significant impact on the skills, attitudes, and experiences of young people. Surveys of the youth indicated they had developed a greater sense of personal value and hopefulness compared to peers within their community that did not have the intervention of the youth programming. Follow-up studies of 60 youth indicated that they were firmly set on positive pathways as workers, parents, and community members. The synthesis of the research concluded that community-based programs that focus on positive youth development are most effective with support from their communities.

In 2007, J. A. Durlak et al. published an article on the effects of positive youth development programs

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on school, family, and community systems. This review looked at 526 competency-based outcome studies and concluded that attempts to change social systems affecting children and youth can be successful. Multiple research studies have looked at what makes alternative programs effective environments for at-risk youth. Components of effective programs included the presence of caring, knowledgeable adults who understand and deeply care about youth and provide significant time and attention which leads to establishing a climate of trust and support (James and Jurich 1999; Grobe et al. 2001); developing a small learning environment that creates a sense of community so that youth feel that they belong (Castellano et al., 2001; McDonald 2002; Raywid 2001; Secada 1999; Grobe et al. 2001); an assets approach where youth are seen as having resources rather than deficits - youth with more assets are less likely to engage in risky behavior (Croninger and Lee 2001; Grobe et al. 2001; Lewis 2003); respect for youth - YouthBuild has demonstrated that positive youth development is grounded in profound respect for the intelligences and talents of all youth (Lewis, 2003); high expectations for academic achievement and responsible behavior - youth can succeed at high levels when challenged and it pays off in terms of post-secondary education and employment (James and Jurich 1999); provides a holistic, comprehensive, multidimensional developmental curriculum that responds to student needs, interests and learning styles (James and Jurich 1999; Pines 1999); provide authentic, engaging learning that connects school and work - program evaluations indicate that integrated academic and vocational education, career development, and work-based learning contributed to successful results and gave youth a solid foundation to pursue their college and career goals (Conchas and Clark 2002; James and Jurich 1991); and support and long-term follow-up on a minimum basis of 6 months to continue the trust relationship for the youth so that they will not feel abandoned after leaving the program (James and Jurich 1999). Finally, the Fresh Start Program replicates the work of the national YouthBuild Program including the same intensive, comprehensive services that are provided to at-risk youth between the ages of 16 and 24. In 2010, data was collected from 131 YouthBuild Affiliates that demonstrated 78% of youth completed the program; 63% of these youth obtained their GED or high school diploma; 60% were placed in college or jobs with an average wage of \$9.20 per hour; 25% enrolled in post-secondary education; and recidivism rates for court-involved youth were 40 percentage points lower than the national average. The data also showed that the demand for services for at-risk youth ranged from 2 to 10 times as many applicants as could be accepted in most programs. In 2009, over 18,600 young people were turned away nationwide for lack of funds (YouthBuild USA, 2009 & 2010). Overall, the qualitative and quantitative research that has been conducted on YouthBuild Programs indicate a return on investment - a minimum of \$10.80

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and up to \$43.90 for every dollar spent; 75% in college or employed at an average wage of \$10/hour up to 7 years after program completion; 91% of graduates gave the program a highly positive assessment; personal change - a reliable process of personal transformation had been observed and defined; GED rates were higher than other national programs for high school dropouts; and an increase college participation for YouthBuild students who obtain an AmeriCorps Education Award for their service. (Cohen 2008; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development 2003; Ferguson et al. 1996; Wright 2001; Hahn et al. 2004; Abrazaldo et al. 2009; Hahn 2007; Hazel and Philburn 2009). Therefore, there is significant evidence-based research that exists and spans over multiple years to show that our program intervention with at-risk youth will result in positive changes in education and obtaining a GED/Diploma; employment; learning job specific skills related to employment in general, but also specifically the construction industry; training leading to a high wage, high growth industry; and an increase in self-esteem and a sense of belonging to a community.

MEMBER TRAINING: On the first day of service, members have an orientation with the Human Resource Manager. The HR Manager trains the members on agency policies and procedures they are required to follow. Since safety is a top concern, the HR Manager conducts training with the youth which covers construction safety, including the requirement to use protective equipment. The youth are shown a video on blood-borne pathogens and procedures to follow if an injury occurs. The Manager/Teacher continues training over several days by reviewing the member contract, member rights and responsibilities, the agency's code of conduct, AmeriCorps rules and policies including the AmeriCorps Pledge, the rules regarding AmeriCorps prohibited activities, requirements under the Drug Free Workplace Act, causes for suspension and termination from service, grievance procedures, non-discrimination issues including sexual harassment, and an overview of responsibilities. Each morning as the youth arrive to the classroom, a topic of interest is posted in the classroom and the youth are given 10 minutes to write on the topic prior to a discussion taking place between the Teacher and youth. This strategy is used not only as part of the classroom training in writing skills, but also as an opportunity to receive training relating to topics in Civics Literacy. At housing sites, the Technical Supervisor begins each day with a training session on skills needed for the current construction phase. Tool use and material handling are modeled by the Supervisor, and the youth have an opportunity to practice the task. Jobs are assigned, and members who have demonstrated competency in specific skills are teamed up with the less skilled members so that the youth can train other members and serve in a leadership capacity, but all under the supervision of the Technical Supervisor. Classroom training focuses on blueprint reading, construction calculations, cost estimating, terminology, energy-

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efficiency calculations and concepts, and tool use. The goal of on-site construction training is twofold:

1) Mastery of skills that will enable members to succeed at housing construction. This experience may provide entry into building trades. 2) The Supervisor will relate skills acquired on the site to skills needed in continuing education and the world of work. For most members, the value of the site work lies in learning skills that transfer to all occupations. When tradesmen are on site, such as plumbers or electricians, members have an opportunity to shadow them as part of their training. 20% of the members' time is spent in classroom training activities. State-certified teachers in Secondary Education provide up to 7 hours per week of instruction directly in a classroom focusing on basic skills and GED/HSED completion. The teachers will also go out to the worksite to show how the instruction applies directly to activities on the construction site. The teachers will train youth on accessing career interest surveys and aptitude surveys using the comprehensive Job Center. Staff will train members to search for high wage, high growth jobs in the community or to explore continuing education options, including apprenticeships. All members also participate in a civics curriculum and First Aid/CPR training within the first quarter of hire. Other on-going training includes learning healthy food choices and the importance of good nutrition, budgeting skills, financial literacy skills, wellness skills, conflict resolution skills, and leadership development skills. The content of these trainings is based on the individualized needs of youth. A training session on these topics occurs bi-weekly so that training is geared to needs of the youth and so that training is an ongoing process leading to their personal and career related goals. In regards to volunteer training, volunteers are given an orientation training that also reviews the AmeriCorps Program including regulations and prohibited activities as well as specific training on services they will be performing for the program. Therefore, both members and volunteers receive training on prohibited activities from the first day of orientation and this is continuously monitored by staff.

MEMBER SUPERVISION: The staff team is comprised of a Program Manager/Teacher, a 2nd Teacher, a lead Technical Supervisor and a 2nd Technical Supervisor. Staff members are with the youth 100% of the time both in the classroom and on the work site. Since our program is based on the bond theory, all of the staff develop a strong bond with the youth while working towards the overall goal of providing support, training, and opportunities for the youth to achieve self-sufficiency, defined as getting and keeping a job with a family-supporting wage, attaining an HSED or basic skills competency (increase in one grade level in numeracy or literacy skills), and enrolling in post-secondary education or the military, or securing a job. On the first day of service, the Program Manager/Teacher meets with the youth and reviews the staff and supervisory structure so that the

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youth know the responsibility of each of the staff members and also to whom they directly report. Each Technical Supervisor serves as the lead supervisor of the youth on his crew with additional support from the Teachers. The Technical Supervisor provides direct guidance and supervision on the construction site and serves as a mentor, counselor, and trainer for all construction activities. The Technical Supervisor monitors each member's Individual Service Strategy and provides guidance and direction as needed for the youth to achieve their goals. The Program Manager/Teacher and 2nd Teacher serve as a mentor and counselor and supervises the members while studying in the classroom so that a ratio of 1 teacher to 4 members can be maintained; supervises their basic skills development and HSED testing; teaches life skills training and independent living skills; and assists with connections to other agencies as needed to meet the needs of each individual youth such as referrals to Head Start, the WIC Program, or the Family Resource Center. The Program Manager/Teacher takes lead on teaching pre-employment and work maturity skills; career exploration; and job placement. Therefore, the youth are provided a strong, collaborative measure of support and supervision throughout their term of service.

Staff are also provided with training opportunities including rules and regulations for AmeriCorps Programs, supervisory training, GED training, and training in specific construction skills and building energy-efficient, accessible homes.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION: Renewal Unlimited is 100% committed to branding national service. Part of member development is to develop pride in service to the community, and wearing/displaying the AmeriCorps logo is a part of developing this pride. Each AmeriCorps member attends an orientation session prior to service that describes what it means to be an AmeriCorps member. Members are given t-shirts and a sweatshirt with the AmeriCorps logo displayed on the sleeve, and it is required that members wear this service gear on a daily basis. Extra shirts are maintained at the site in case a member comes without the appropriate service gear. To help the community know that AmeriCorps is active, an AmeriCorps banner is displayed at the classroom and construction sites stating that AmeriCorps members are serving at the site. Our website has a page specifically devoted to the AmeriCorps Program, and the logo is displayed on the website. Our agency brochures and any public relation materials all have the AmeriCorps logo. The application, program manual, orientation materials, and recruitment materials have the AmeriCorps logo printed on them. If an AmeriCorps staff vacancy occurs, the advertisement for this vacancy identifies the position as an AmeriCorps staff position. The Annual Report includes a description of the AmeriCorps Program and our specific achievements in the past year, as well as the AmeriCorps logo;

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this report is distributed to many community agencies. As members develop leadership skills and confidence, they are asked to write great stories and reflection pieces, and, to talk about their experiences to community groups.

Organizational Capability

EXPERIENCE: Renewal Unlimited was founded in 1977 by a group of citizens who had a vision to develop a program to help the unemployed to work on needed housing rehabilitation. Houses in need of renovation were purchased, and young adults with barriers to finding and keeping employment were employed and trained to remodel the homes. The young adults received tutoring to complete their GED or Diploma and received assistance with finding jobs in the community when they left our program. Upon completion of the rehabilitation, the homes were sold to low-income families. During the past 36 years, Renewal has expanded its service area to include a five county area in south central Wisconsin including the counties of Adams, Columbia, Dodge, Juneau and Sauk. Renewal expanded its programming to include Head Start, Family Resource Centers, the Young Adult Offender Program, WIA Youth Services, various housing programs, and the Wisconsin Fresh Start Program. Renewal was selected as a sub-grantee to the Wisconsin Bureau of Housing and received AmeriCorps funds as part of the Wisconsin Fresh Start Program, and operated a HUD Youthbuild Program and a DOL YouthBuild grant in 2007 and in 2009, which allowed Renewal to expand services and create a 2nd crew of at-risk youth. Through the Recovery Act funds, the Wausau Fresh Start Program sub-contracted with Renewal to operate an AmeriCorps youth crew in Sauk County. Then, in 2009, Renewal was awarded a formulary grant through the State Commission to operate an AmeriCorps Youth Corps to build affordable housing; this has continued through the present year. Renewal has had extensive experience in working with housing construction; rehabilitation projects; education, employment and training programs for young adults, especially those at-risk or already involved in the justice system; and helping young adults achieve long-term self-sufficiency.

STAFFING AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE: Renewal Unlimited is a not-for-profit organization operated under the direction of a volunteer Board of Directors. The Board is comprised of members with professional expertise in the areas of banking, law enforcement, education, low-income community representatives, volunteer management, elderly services, and legal issues. The responsibility of the Board is legal and fiscal oversight. The Board delegates oversight of the agency to the Executive Director, who reports to the Board and oversees programming and supervises management and staff. The Executive Director is responsible for the administration of the agency, for the development of programs, and grant writing. The Executive Director provides supervision and

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support to the AmeriCorps Program Manager/Teacher and Lead Technical Supervisor. The Program Manager/Teacher provides supervision to the 2nd Teacher, and the Lead Technical Supervisor provides supervision to the 2nd Technical Supervisor. The Fresh Start Team conducts program evaluation, which compares actual work performance to the overall program plan. Results of the monthly evaluations are reported to the Board and to funding sources as required. The staff who will implement the Fresh Start Program are:

Suzanne Hoppe, Executive Director: B.S. Psychology/Education; 34 years experience managing federal, state, and local programs; 15 years managing housing programs; 14 years administering the Wisconsin Fresh Start Program; and 5 years administering the AmeriCorps Program. Claire Palmer and Stuart Vandervort, Teachers: Bachelor's Degree in Secondary Education and teaching experience with at-risk youth. Jim McDonald and Chris Michel - Technical Supervisors: Multiple years of carpentry and construction experience in residential and commercial settings. This team has a high set of qualifications to implement the proposed program successfully.

ADMINISTERING GRANTS: Renewal Unlimited has 36 years of experience in being awarded and operating grants from federal, state, and local sources. 80% of our funding is federal, and 20% is state, local or private. Currently, Renewal receives funding from the following sources: Department of Agriculture Child Care Food Program; HUD - Neighborhood Stabilization Program, Homeless Prevention, HOME Homebuyer, and Homeless Prevention/Rapid Re-Housing; Department of Labor - Workforce Investment Act for Youth Services; Department of Health and Human Services - Family Preservation Program and Head Start Programs; Corporation for National and Community Service - AmeriCorps; Department of Public Instruction - State Head Start; and various local United Ways and foundations. The AmeriCorps dollars that are proposed in this project represent about 2.0% of our total agency funding. Within the proposal itself, AmeriCorps dollars represent 42% of the total project cost with other funding sources contributing 58% of the dollars. In the last five years, Renewal has received formula funding from the State Commission and, each year, the total CNCS funding has been about 2% to 3% of our total agency budget.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Upon hire to the program, staff members are trained by the Executive Director on the AmeriCorps rules and regulations to ensure that the program is operated in full compliance with the AmeriCorps Program. Overall, the Executive Director is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the strength of our program's systems on a monthly, quarterly, and annual basis. During the review of our systems, items that are evaluated include the comparison of goals and performance measures that had been projected to actual accomplishments, along with the

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identification of strengths and challenges, and methods of resolving challenges; an analysis of budgets for each program; a review of audits; the results of monitoring by funding sources; formal and informal feedback from staff, participants, and volunteers; review of surveys and other written reports; and a review of reports required by funding sources. Using this information, a monthly report is prepared for review by the Board of Directors. Monthly staff meetings with program staff give us an opportunity to review upcoming service activities and ensure that all AmeriCorps rules are followed including the compliance with prohibited activities. If an issue comes up that may impact outcomes, we identify steps to resolve the issue and then proceed. With this thorough monitoring in place, we will be able to ensure compliance with CNCS requirements.

PAST PERFORMANCE: For the past three years, our program met 100% of our national performance measures. In the past program year, we did not meet one of our state performance measures which was related to all youth being certified in first aid and CPR. Due to the fact that we did not enroll one youth as explained in the Enrollment Section below this paragraph, we only had 35 youth complete their First Aid/CPR certification versus the 36 youth that we had projected. Other than this measure, all measures have been in compliance for the past 3 years. During the monitoring for 2012 - 2013, our program was found 100% in compliance. There were a few recommendations for improvement to our member files, and 3 files did have copies of birth certificates that were removed immediately; staff were informed not to make copies of birth certificates in the future.

ENROLLMENT: Our enrollment rate was 97.2% for the 2012 - 2013 program year. The lead Teacher had brought a youth into the program just before the deadline for enrolling the quarter time slots. Due to some concerns regarding his performance, the Teacher decided to wait to enroll the youth until closer to the 30-day deadline for enrolling the youth into e-grants. Just before the 30th day, she let the youth go as he was not working well in the program; however, it was too late to bring another youth in and still have enough time for the youth to complete the 450 hours of service. Therefore, we only enrolled 35 of 36 youth. In the prior 4 years, Renewal had maintained a 100% enrollment rate. For our current program year, we have hired a new Teacher who fully understands the importance of enrolling youth within targeted deadlines for completing terms of service and will ensure that we reach 100% of our enrollment.

RETENTION: The retention rate was 100% for 2012 - 2013. Our intentional emphasis on in-depth initial interviews has worked well for selecting youth that will stay committed to the program.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: Monthly staff meetings and reports comparing current performance against targeted measures are 2 of the strategies that we use to determine if there needs

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to be any change in programming in order to meet targeted performance measures and to continuously improve our programming. Surveys that are completed with the youth at exit are also an excellent strategy for obtaining feedback on how effective our services are. The results of the youth surveys are used to make improvements to our ongoing operations and provision of services. For external feedback, the Program Manager completes a monthly report for the School Districts and the Department of Corrections and obtains feedback from them on how each youth is doing. This feedback is then incorporated into our program plans for each youth.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

Corporation Cost per Member Service Year (MSY) is \$13,254. This cost per MSY is equal to the cost in our current grant. We were able to maintain our current member cost due to other funding sources that we have secured to cover other operational costs of operating the program.

Renewal Unlimited has a diverse set of funding representing non-federal resources that will be used for program implementation and sustainability. For the 2014 - 2015 program year, Renewal will exceed the cash match requirement of 26%, and will obtain \$257,915 of cash match from these sources which represents a cash match of 58%. These sources are: School Districts: \$300 per month per student for each youth that has dropped out of High School for a total of \$36,000; Department of Corrections: \$10 per hour for each youth referred by the Department and enrolled up to \$35,000 per year; and United Way Funding: \$10,000 granted for the upcoming program year to support AODA services and classroom instruction. We will continue to apply for these funding sources and other opportunities as they become available.

Overall, the federal investment of \$185,549 will yield high investments into the community. These investments include that 2 new homebuyers will be adding to the tax base of the county and increasing the tax base for Columbia County from the point of purchase of the homes into future years; the new homebuyers will be putting money into the community for their living/recreational expenses; additional children will be attending our local schools and adding to the state aid that schools will receive per child; 36 job/training opportunities will be created for the 36 AmeriCorps youth to earn a living allowance and an educational award which will result in higher wages and more dollars going into the community to cover living expenses; 36 youth will be prepared to enter the labor market, the military, or post-secondary education thereby impacting the community with a stronger set of young adults ready to begin their careers; and youth will be kept out of the court systems, which results in a savings of approximately \$7 that the community would need to pay for court and institutional care for every \$1 invested in the youth engaged in a community based

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program that helps them to turn their life around and move forward to be productive citizens in their community.

BUDGET ADEQUACY: The budget that Renewal has developed, including CNCS and Grantee Match funds, provides adequate funds needed to pay for program costs for member outreach, orientation, training, living allowances, supervision, member education, and member development to meet AmeriCorps requirements. The budget provides support for staff members to provide transition services for placement in employment or post-secondary education, thereby addressing life after AmeriCorps. The budget also includes dollars for conducting the criminal record checks and the FBI checks for members and any new staff that join the program.

In-Kind contributions have been obtained from the following:

Madison Area Technical College contributes about \$4,500 of services through career counseling, financial planning, and presentation of life skills workshops; the Job Center offers services valued at \$2,400 per year to provide job search opportunities, aptitude test batteries, interest inventory assessments, and employment workshops; and local businesses give us discounts of 3% up to 10% on supplies for the construction of the house or classroom supplies amounting to a total of \$1,500. Renewal will be covering 58%, or \$257,915, of the project costs to operate the two youth crews. \$89,400 is obtained from matching sources, \$81,000 cash match from School Districts, the Department of Corrections, and United Way, and, \$8,400 as in-kind match from the local Technical College, the Job Center, and local businesses, and the balance of \$168,515 will be recognized through current agency cash and through the sale of the homes. The \$257,915 exceeds our required match of 26% of total project costs. Through this budget, Renewal will be able to meet all program objectives including all of the identified outcomes.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Sent

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

Date of Response: April 7, 2014

A. Grant Capacity and Compliance:

On April 7, 2014, Renewal updated the registration information for the CCR Registration through

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the sam.gov website. An e-mail was received from the notification system at sam.gov that the registration update was successful and that it will take 7 to 10 days for the new annual expiration date to be posted. Renewal will monitor this process to ensure that a new expiration date for one year out from today's date will be posted.

B. Programmatic Clarification:

The desired grant award start date and the member enrollment period start date is 09/01/2014.

C. Performance Measure Clarification:

1. The target number of 16 for O12 Output was a data entry error. The target number has been updated to 25 to correspond appropriately to the outcome target of 25.

2. The instrument identified for O4, Outcome 5191 has been clarified to read MLS Listing and Realtor Monthly Summary Report. A professional realtor, which is an external agency, is used to produce the MLS Listing and the realtor confirms that the home will be affirmatively marketed. The realtor also confirms that the home has been completed, inspected by the City Building Inspector, and is ready for sale prior to completing the MLS Listing. Through the MLS Listing, the realtor is able to provide Monthly Summary Reports documenting the specific locations and marketing areas that have been used and the number of people viewing the home both on-line and through actual visits to the home.

3. Renewal has an Income Eligibility Form that is required to be filled out by the Program Manager/Teacher prior to a youth's enrollment into the AmeriCorps Program in order to verify income eligibility. The Teacher must see actual documentation verifying that the family is receiving or meets the income eligibility requirements to receive TANF, Food Stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, SCHIP, Section 8 housing assistance or have a poor credit score or is at least 60 days behind on one or more personal/family accounts. The form is signed by the youth or by the parent/guardian if the youth is under the age of 18 verifying that the information is correct. The staff member also signs the form verifying that they have seen the documentation of income and verifying that the documentation is correct. This form is filed in the member's program file which is maintained at the program site.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification

1. 10% of the slots will be targeted to recruiting members with a disability. Renewal has a very strong relationship with both the local school districts and the Department of Corrections and both of

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these agencies have made referrals to our agency for youth with disabilities. All of Renewal's recruitment materials indicate that we are an Affirmative Action Employer.

2. Renewal will not be requesting any additional slots.

E. No-Cost MSY Clarification:

Renewal will not be requesting any no-cost MSYs.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics