

Narratives

Executive Summary

Project Homecoming, Inc. (PHI) will have 12 full-time AmeriCorps members and 3 quarter-time AmeriCorps members who will serve as Worksite Managers, Volunteer Managers, and Homeowner Advocate in a volunteer-based, home rehabilitation program that assists low-income homeowners with rebuilding and repairing their homes in New Orleans, Louisiana. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will have renovated or repaired the homes of at least 40 individuals, transitioning them into safe, healthy, affordable housing. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 35,000 in volunteer hours from volunteers who will be rebuilding or repairing the homes of low-income individuals. This program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of Economic Opportunity and Capacity Building. The CNCS investment of \$153,692.00 will be matched with \$156,562.00 of which \$0 is public funding and \$156,562.00 is private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

a. Problem/Need

More than 8 years have passed since levee walls broke and flood waters damaged more than 180,000 homes in New Orleans. There are an estimated 30,000 blighted properties in New Orleans (The New Orleans Advocate, 12/5/2013). The blight in New Orleans represents properties damaged by the disaster and the large number of households that do not have the means to rebuild and return home.

Over the past year, the cases of homeowners seeking Project Homecoming's assistance reflect an increasingly desperate situation, as funds have dried up and rental assistance programs have closed. Data from Project Homecoming's case files indicate that households are moving back into partially completed homes, many with no electricity, because they do not have the resources for rent or any other options available. They are among the most vulnerable in New Orleans who have fallen through the cracks -- economically disadvantaged individuals, many of whom are elderly and/or disabled.

Statistics related to the Road Home program, which provided financial assistance to uninsured and under-insured homeowners to rebuild their homes, points to the economic hardships faced by those who have fallen through the cracks. Approximately 55,000 people in the state of Louisiana have received letters from the Road Home program asking them to report on their compliance with the program (The Times Picayune, 8/30/2013). A survey conducted by Road Home in November 2011 indicated that of the 109,335 recipients, less than 40% could show they were back in reconstructed

Narratives

homes (The Times Picayune, 12/27/2011). The reasons that homeowners have provided to Project Homecoming as to why they have been unable to rebuild include insufficient Road Home awards; contractor fraud; material theft; forced mortgage payoffs; family illness; job loss; and high rental costs while displaced.

All of these obstacles are hardest to weather for low-income, vulnerable populations. The most recent New Orleans Index (August, 2013) published by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center indicates that the poverty rate in New Orleans is 29%, nearly double the national rate.

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

Theory of Change: Project Homecoming's theory of change addresses the question of what resources and interventions are needed to provide a cost-effective means for changing the circumstances of low-income, disadvantaged individuals in New Orleans who have not been able to repair or rebuild their homes. Our intervention seeks to significantly reduce the cost of home repair and rehabilitation by using AmeriCorps members to leverage volunteers, who provide a significant portion of the construction labor. The output of labor provided by volunteers can stretch limited resources, so that more low-income homeowners can receive Project Homecoming's housing construction services and ultimately transition into safe, stable housing situations.

Project Homecoming will administer an AmeriCorps grant to support 12 full-time and 3 quarter-time AmeriCorps members. The program will be based in Orleans Parish, Louisiana. Project Homecoming will be the only program site where the AmeriCorps members will serve.

The core activities of Project Homecoming's volunteer-based home rehabilitation program will be conducted by AmeriCorps members who fulfill specific roles. Below is a description of the AmeriCorps positions and the activities they fulfill:

1) Homeowner Advocate Activities: Low-income, disabled, and elderly individuals are often the most underserved. Unfamiliar with the rules of assistance programs and overwhelmed by bureaucracies, they fall through the cracks. To address this problem, one full-time AmeriCorps member will serve as a Homeowner Advocate. This AmeriCorps position directly serves clients by conducting intake and addressing inquiries from low-income homeowners seeking assistance. The activities of this AmeriCorps member include screening applicants to determine their income level, needs, and eligibility for services. The Homeowner Advocate assists applicants with all paperwork and documentation required by Project Homecoming, makes referrals as needed, and supports the homeowner as questions and concerns arise.

Narratives

The Homeowner Advocate position serves closely with staff in the construction operations. Each client case is reviewed by the Operations Director, before it is sent to the Construction Coordinator for the development of an estimate and scope of work. Although AmeriCorps members are not involved in the development of the estimate and scope of work, the Homeowner Advocate uses the estimate to identify gaps in resources that must be filled to rebuild the client's home and connects clients to resources that help to fill that gap.

2) Volunteer Recruitment Activities: Volunteer labor is a primary way that Project Homecoming fills the gap that low-income homeowners experience as an obstacle to rebuilding their home. Volunteers are recruited to provide in-kind labor. Two full-time AmeriCorps members serve as Volunteer Managers. They recruit and manage volunteers, using evidence based best practices that are outlined later in this proposal. They also manage Project Homecoming's Volunteer Village, the center of hospitality for volunteer groups.

3) Construction Activities and Volunteer Management on Worksites: Nine full-time AmeriCorps members and 3 quarter-time members will serve as Worksite Managers. They provide direct construction services on home rebuilds. When there are volunteer groups working with Project Homecoming, these AmeriCorps members manage the volunteers on the worksites. They serve alongside the volunteers, training, directing, coordinating, and supervision them on what needs to be done.

The nine full-time Worksite Managers make it possible to do construction on up to 9 houses at a time. The 3 quarter-time members serve a more intensive, shorter period of time when Project Homecoming experiences higher volumes of volunteers during the winter, college spring breaks, and summer youth program.

The duration of the volunteer-based home rehabilitation program is ongoing. With 30,000 blighted properties in New Orleans, there will be a need for home renovation to assist low-income families for quite a few years to come. The rehabilitation of a home usually takes 3-6 months, depending on the scope of work (whether it is a partial rebuild or a full rebuild) and the number of volunteers recruited to work on a home. Once one home is completed, another is started. The dosage of volunteer hours on a home rehabilitation is about 35 hours/week per volunteer.

Project Homecoming's target population is homeowners whose income is at or below 80% of the area medium income (AMI). A priority score is given to each homeowner's application based on a formula that has been developed to determine which cases have the highest need and are most viable. Priority is given to those who are elderly, disabled, veterans, families with small children, or living in

Narratives

substandard conditions.

Project Homecoming's volunteer-based home rehabilitation program is designed to address the problem of limited resources that hinders the ability of low-income homeowners to rebuild or repair their home. It addresses this problem by using AmeriCorps members to not only provide direct services to the homeowners in need, but to also leverage 35,000 hours of direct construction services from volunteers each year. These construction services will benefit at least 45 economically disadvantaged individuals. It is projected that the AmeriCorps members will complete 16 home rebuilds a year for households comprised of 2-3 individuals, leading to at least 40 individuals being returned to safe, healthy, affordable homes.

The program design also addresses the needs of economically disadvantaged, underserved individuals who have fallen through the cracks of disaster recovery services. This problem is addressed by a very intentional process of assisting these individuals through the activities of the Homeowner Advocate. The faith-based nature of Project Homecoming also builds trust and a reputation of integrity and compassion. Construction professionals on the staff of Project Homecoming bring expertise that helps overwhelmed homeowners navigate the renovation of their home, with construction labor provided predominantly by AmeriCorps Worksite Managers and the volunteers they manage.

Evidence Base: Project Homecoming's volunteer-based home rehabilitation Program has been developed and refined based on studies of: 1) nonprofit housing best practices, 2) the cost effectiveness of using volunteer labor on home rehabilitation and repairs; and 3) research on effective volunteer recruitment and management practices.

A major premises of Project Homecoming's theory of change is that we can maximize impact by leveraging resources such as volunteer labor on home repair and rehabilitation projects. This reduces costs, making it more economically feasible to assist low-income populations. A study by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University analyzed the impact of nonprofit housing programs, including Rebuilding Together and Habitat for Humanity, which use a volunteer-base for construction activities ("The Role of Nonprofit Organizations and Public Programs in Promoting Home Rehabilitation and Repair Activity," Abbe Will and Kermit Baker, March, 2013). This study documented how these nonprofit housing organizations leverage resources to serve low-income households and the resulting impact on stabilizing distressed neighborhoods. In the same vein, Project Homecoming's model seeks to maximize impact by leveraging available resources, particularly volunteer labor. A study published in The Innovation Journal by Louis Hill ("World Changers:

Narratives

Successful Partnership for Housing Rehabilitation", 2004) examines the cost effectiveness of a faith-based housing organization similar to Project Homecoming and concludes that the use of volunteer labor stretches average rehabilitation dollars and can make a large impact on tight budgets.

Finally, Project Homecoming has adapted practices for volunteer recruitment and management that have been shown to be effective, based on a 2004 study by the Urban Institute, "Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report" and a 2007 publication of the Corporation for National and Community Service entitled "Volunteering Reinvented: Human Capital Solutions for the Nonprofit Sector." Since its inception in 2007, Project Homecoming has implemented the following practices which these and similar studies have shown to correlate to volunteer retention and volunteer satisfaction. These practices include: 1) creating volunteer recruitment partnerships with organizations and groups that are a natural resource for volunteers; 2) providing strong and frequent communication with volunteers; 3) providing sufficient training and supervision for volunteers; 4) ensuring volunteers have the instruction, materials and resources they need to be effective; 5) collecting volunteer data and tracking volunteer impact; 6) thanking volunteers and showing appreciation; 7) training our staff in effective volunteer management practices; and 8) sharing data with volunteers that demonstrate their impact.

c. Member Training

Although Project Homecoming is competing as a new applicant for funding, its parent organization (the Presbytery of South Louisiana) has been the site of AmeriCorps placements and has been the recipient of an AmeriCorps grant that supports AmeriCorps members serving with Project Homecoming. As a result, Project Homecoming has a well-developed training process for its AmeriCorps members.

The AmeriCorps term of service at Project Homecoming begins with an intensive week of orientation, which includes an overnight retreat attended by AmeriCorps members and staff. Orientation to the AmeriCorps program includes an overview of CNCS history, purpose and programs, AmeriCorps policies and procedures, expectations, prohibited activities, timesheets, evaluation, education grant, monthly training schedule, and other topics that are covered by reviewing the contents of Project Homecoming's AmeriCorps Service Member Handbook.

During the retreat, a number of topics are covered that orient AmeriCorps members to Project Homecoming's history, mission, programs, policies, and procedures. Topics also include Hurricane Katrina's impact on New Orleans, the status of the recovery efforts, and stories shared by

Narratives

homeowners assisted by Project Homecoming. Other topics included are community development, characteristics of resilient neighborhoods, and organizational goals. Retreat activities include team building exercises. At Project Homecoming, the entire month of September is focused on training in specific skills related to each service member's position. Training in CPR/First Aid through the Red Cross is also provided.

Project Homecoming's growing experience in training AmeriCorps members has led to the creation of a workforce development program for low-skilled, economically disadvantaged individuals who are referred to Project Homecoming by the Job 1 program of the City of New Orleans Office of Workforce Development. Project Homecoming hopes to build on our experience in workforce development by recruiting more unemployed and economically disadvantaged individuals to serve as AmeriCorps Worksite Managers.

Every quarter, Project Homecoming conducts a day-long staff meeting, in which all staff and AmeriCorps members participate. In addition, AmeriCorps members receive additional training and educational programming for a full day each month of their service term. These program days are focused on topics such as diversity appreciation, conflict resolution, job interviews and resume preparation, life after AmeriCorps, and presentations by local experts on topics such as disaster mitigation, coastal land loss, wetlands preservation, resiliency, and New Orleans culture. These sessions also allow time for AmeriCorps members to reflect on their term of service, to review prohibited activities, and to be reminded to follow policies and procedures.

One AmeriCorps member recently commented that, among AmeriCorps members in New Orleans, Project Homecoming is seen as "the Harvard of AmeriCorps programs." This is because of the level of training and opportunities that are provided for personal and professional development.

d. Member Supervision

Project Homecoming's staff configuration will include an AmeriCorps Program Director who manages the administration of the AmeriCorps program, under the supervision of the Executive Director. The AmeriCorps Program Director guides and supports the AmeriCorps members during their time of service. The individual in this position is responsible for: 1) recruiting AmeriCorps members and promoting the program; 2) completing AmeriCorps member enrollment and end of service documentation; 3) completing and monitoring adherence to all AmeriCorps program compliance requirements; 4) coordinating AmeriCorps member orientation and trainings; 5) overseeing AmeriCorps member and program evaluation; 6) completing required grant reports;

Narratives

7) maintaining communications with Volunteer Louisiana; 8) attending Volunteer Louisiana and CNCS trainings and remaining up to date on program requirements; and 9) supporting AmeriCorps members in addressing issues and concerns.

The Operations Director oversees the volunteer-based housing rehabilitation program and 15% of this position's time (at least 315 hours/year) is dedicated to direct work with the AmeriCorps Program Director, AmeriCorps members and their supervisors in planning and implementing the program's construction operations. The Operations Director tracks and documents his/her time spent on AmeriCorps activities.

Each AmeriCorps member is assigned a supervisor from the Project Homecoming management or executive staff level. These staff members provide ongoing, daily supervision and certify the member time of those they supervise. The Homeowner Advocate is supervised by the Operations Director. Each Worksite Manager is supervised by a Construction Manager. The Volunteer Managers are supervised by the Volunteer Coordinator. AmeriCorps members and their supervisors meet together regularly. Mid-term evaluations are completed by supervisors and AmeriCorps members.

Project Homecoming holds a staff meeting every week on Friday morning which is attended by AmeriCorps members and staff. The meeting includes a round robin, where everyone reports on his/her weekly activities. Organizational updates and announcements are shared, with a look particularly toward the upcoming week. This provides additional support, guidance, and communication and enhances relationships among AmeriCorps members and staff.

e. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

Project Homecoming is committed to co-branding as the site of an AmeriCorps program. As the operating agent for the Presbytery of South Louisiana's AmeriCorps program, we already include the AmeriCorps logo on our organizational brochures. We also provide each AmeriCorps member with T-shirts and sweat shirts with the AmeriCorps logo. AmeriCorps members are outfitted with enough AmeriCorps branded shirts to wear one each day so that they can identify themselves as AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps members are provided professional magnetized name tags to wear in public and they also receive business cards - both of which also identify them as AmeriCorps members.

Project Homecoming encourages AmeriCorps members to interpret their experiences to members of the community and the public at large. Each AmeriCorps member is assigned days to write the Project Homecoming blog, which is linked to our website and Facebook page. AmeriCorps members also participate in National Days of Service, which raises further awareness about the contributions

Narratives

and service experiences of AmeriCorps members.

Project Homecoming trains its AmeriCorps members to speak with volunteers and community members about their AmeriCorps service, why they decided to serve, and what they find fulfilling about their service. They practice and share this "elevator pitch" as a part of staff trainings.

Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing

Project Homecoming is a faith-based, nonprofit community development organization building resilient neighborhoods in the greater New Orleans area. The organization facilitates a culture of care in targeted communities through: safe, durable, affordable and environmentally sensitive construction; community driven partnerships; service and fellowship. Project Homecoming was established following Hurricane Katrina by the Presbytery of South Louisiana, the regional governing body of the Presbyterian Church (USA). It was created to assist low-income homeowners with rebuilding their hurricane damaged homes.

In 2010, the Presbytery of South Louisiana incorporated Project Homecoming, which received its IRS determination as a 501(c)3 organization in 2011. Project Homecoming spun off from the Presbytery at the end of 2011 and began fully operating as a new nonprofit at the beginning of 2012.

Project Homecoming is a Licensed General Contractor. Construction Operations are overseen by an Operations Director and two Construction Managers who have extensive experience in the construction industry. On the executive level, our Operations Director has 11 years of construction experience and our Executive Director is an MSW with 25 years experience in planning, administration and community practice.

In 2012, Project Homecoming was certified by the United Way of Southeast Louisiana as a funded United Way partner agency. This certification involves a stringent review process that evaluates management experience, financial accountability, financial sustainability, data collection systems, risk management, board leadership, and program impact.

AmeriCorps members have been part of the implementation of Project Homecoming's volunteer-based home rehabilitation program since its inception in 2007. In the Fall of 2007, 5 full-time AmeriCorps members were placed at Project Homecoming by the Louisiana Delta Service Corps (LDSC). In the subsequent three years, a total of 24 LDSC AmeriCorps members served with Project Homecoming, along with 4 AmeriCorps members who were placed at Project Homecoming by Trinity Christian Community.

In the fall of 2010, Project Homecoming's parent organization, the Presbytery of South Louisiana,

Narratives

applied for an AmeriCorps grant to support 11 MSYs to serve with Project Homecoming. The grant was awarded, which has made it possible for AmeriCorps members to continue to implement Project Homecoming's volunteer-based home rehabilitation program over the past three years. Since 2012, with the spin off from the Presbytery, Project Homecoming has served as the Operating Agent for the Presbytery of South Louisiana's AmeriCorps program. The Presbytery does not plan to recompile for another grant cycle.

Although Project Homecoming, as a relatively new nonprofit, has not been the recipient of its own AmeriCorps grant, it has a successful history of AmeriCorps experience. Our capacity to implement the volunteer-based home rehabilitation program is based on experienced staff, effective management structure, and demonstrated success rebuilding homes in New Orleans. We have a management structure that has supported 61 MSYs since 2007 who have contributed to the rebuilding of 200 houses with the help of over 10,000 volunteers who have generated in-kind labor valued at 3.5 million dollars. Of the 61 MSYs that have served with Project Homecoming, only 4 did not complete their full term of service. The reasons for the early departures were that one was dismissed for violating the drug free workplace policy, one got married before her fiancé was deployed overseas by the military, and the other two received employment offers. As the Operating Agent for the Presbytery of South Louisiana's AmeriCorps program, Project Homecoming has successfully enrolled 100% of the slots.

Project Homecoming has experience managing other federal funds. We have a \$1.5 million contract with the City of New Orleans, Office of Community Development that is being used for owner occupied rehabilitation of housing. This HOME funding is from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Project Homecoming is also completing a \$1.6 million contract with the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority to develop 22 affordable homes for low-income homebuyers with HUD funding provided through the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP2).

b. Compliance and Accountability

Having completed a year as the Operating Agent for the Presbytery of South Louisiana's AmeriCorps grant, Project Homecoming has a growing base of knowledge, training, experience, and lessons learned that have contributed to our ongoing development, review, and refinement of organizational practices to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. As a new grantee, Project Homecoming will enact the following practices to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations:

Narratives

1) An AmeriCorps program manual will provide detailed, written instructions on the internal controls - policies, procedures, documentation and accountability requirements which staff must follow to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities for ensuring compliance will be outlined by position and supervisory role in the AmeriCorps program, with training requirements outlined for each position. This manual will be updated when changes to AmeriCorps regulations occur and improved internal controls are identified.

2) Clear, written delineation of roles and responsibilities among staff will provide for separation of authority, responsibilities, and duties to provide adequate checks and balances to protect resources from fraud, provide financial accountability, and ensure compliance. Internal audit checks conducted by staff who are not responsible for the duties being audited will be conducted to prevent and detect compliance issues.

3) Checklists in the Project Homecoming AmeriCorps Program Manual of required documentation and tasks to be completed will outline what is to be done, when, and by whom. Staff will check tasks completed and initial and date it. The checklists and accompanying documentation will be reviewed at scheduled intervals by the Executive Director, to prevent and detect compliance issues.

4) Project Homecoming has refined and improved the instructions, checklists, and training requirements for the AmeriCorps Program Director and Executive staff to ensure that the correct eligibility documentation is collected, the required criminal background checks and searches of the National Sex Offender Registry are conducted and documented correctly, accompaniment procedures are followed, and all enrollment requirements are completed. An internal audit of this enrollment documentation will be conducted by an assigned executive staff member on the scheduled completion date to ensure compliance.

5) Prohibited activities in 45CFR § 2520.65 will be included in the Project Homecoming AmeriCorps Program Manual and Member Handbook and reviewed during staff and AmeriCorps training. AmeriCorps members and staff are instructed to ask for clarification if there is any question about whether an activity they are performing is a prohibited activity. The AmeriCorps Program Director will consult the AmeriCorps Senior Program Officer of Volunteer Louisiana when clarification is needed.

6) The AmeriCorps Program Director and executive staff (Operations Director, Finance Director, and Executive Director) will work together on budget, program design, and the development and implementation of tracking systems. The team will hold each other accountable to AmeriCorps rules and regulations for fiscal and program requirements.

Narratives

7) If instances of risk or noncompliance are identified, staff will be trained to recognize that this is a serious matter that cannot be overlooked and must be immediately brought to the attention of the Executive Director in writing. The Executive Director will call a meeting with the executive team and the AmeriCorps Program Director to address issues raised and the implementation of any corrective actions that are needed.

8) Project Homecoming will utilize the expertise, resources, and training provided by Volunteer Louisiana and the CNCS as we develop and implement our compliance procedures.

Because Project Homecoming is competing as a new applicant for an AmeriCorps grant, instructions indicated that we do not complete the section of this application related to past performance. However, we want to be fully transparent in this grant application. As the Operating Agent for the Presbytery of South Louisiana, Project Homecoming did have compliance issues identified in the 2013 year of program operation. The compliance issues focused predominately on missing documentation related to participant eligibility and accompaniment of service members while waiting for background check results.

We have addressed the issues that were raised by providing Volunteer Louisiana with the requested documentation as well as a response outlining the corrective actions taken by Project Homecoming to prevent and detect these compliance issues as we move forward. This process was very helpful to Project Homecoming. It pointed out areas of deficiency which we needed to correct about which we were unaware. As a result, Project Homecoming has strengthened our internal controls and implemented additional procedures to ensure compliance.

c. Past Performance for current and former grantees:

N/A

d. Continuous Improvement

Project Homecoming is committed to improving effectiveness, efficiency, performance and community impact. We have several mechanisms to seek input from internal and external stakeholders. Project Homecoming's Board of Directors and committees are populated with community stakeholders, including those representing the under-resourced communities that we serve. Internally, Project Homecoming's quarterly staff meetings always include a forum to discuss areas for organizational improvement. Data collected from clients served, volunteer evaluations, and for program and performance evaluation are analyzed by staff and the Board of Directors to inform

Narratives

decisions to improve organizational effectiveness and program outcomes.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. Cost Effectiveness

The cost per MSY for Project Homecoming's volunteer-based home rehabilitation program is \$12,017.00. This is a \$109.00 reduction in cost per MSY from what our parent organization, the Presbytery of South Louisiana, requested for 2013.

Previous mention has been made in this application about the cost effective manner in which AmeriCorps members are used to leverage volunteer labor. Without the AmeriCorps members to assist in the recruitment and management of volunteers, Project Homecoming would not be able to utilize anywhere near the amount of volunteers it does. Historically, approximately 90% of all volunteers that work with Project Homecoming have been managed by AmeriCorps members.

Project Homecoming compares the cost of construction with volunteers, to the same scope of work if completed on the private market on its projects to monitor cost effectiveness and savings. Volunteer labor allows project cost to be reduced by, on average, 33%. With the ability to use and manage volunteers that AmeriCorps members leverage, Project Homecoming is able to finish four houses for every three that typical funding would cover.

Project Homecoming will raise additional resources needed to operate an AmeriCorps program beyond the CNCS share through methods that it has historically been successful in accomplishing. The main sources of those funds come from volunteer donations, which are requested of volunteers who stay and work with Project Homecoming. Historically this source has generated approximately \$200,000 annually.

Other sources are individual, corporate, civic, and church donations and grants, which have historically averaged over \$750,000 annually. This includes funding from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA). Project Homecoming has been awarded \$340,000 from PDA in 2014.

Federal funding, allocated to Project Homecoming through city entities for housing development, will continue to be a primary source of support for construction materials and operations.

b. Budget Adequacy

As the operating site for a current grantee (Presbytery of South Louisiana), Project Homecoming has extensive experience in managing AmeriCorps budgets that are adequate for the successful operation of an AmeriCorps program. The personnel and fringe costs associated with the staff members (AmeriCorps Program Director and Operations Director) who will be overseeing the

Narratives

program are consistent with previous years and provide the necessary management oversight to ensure compliance with federal requirements, training and supervision necessary for members to be successful in each of their roles, and appropriate financial oversight of the program. In addition to the two positions listed, Project Homecoming will also provide supervision to members through two full-time Construction Managers. The costs for these staff have been excluded from the AmeriCorps budget due to the fact that the costs of these staff are paid for through another Federal grant for which match may not be claimed for any other Federal program.

The required living stipend and member support costs including workman's compensation, health insurance and FICA have been included in the budget.

To support the three requested quarter-time members, Project Homecoming will provide a private room in our housing facility to each quarter-time member rent free (there is no cost to Project Homecoming for this benefit so it has not been reflected in the budget). Because these unpaid members will not be included in Project Homecoming's workman's compensation policy, the cost of Volunteer Accident Insurance appropriate for these members terms of service has been included as match in the budget.

Furthermore, the necessary training, consumable supplies, uniforms, background check costs, program evaluation costs, and costs for both member travel to their assigned worksites as well as staff travel to CNCS and Volunteer Louisiana meetings and events have been budgeted based on costs experienced for these items in the past as an operating site of the Presbytery of South Louisiana's AmeriCorps Program.

Project Homecoming has a long history of securing private match as an AmeriCorps operating site. Due to consistent revenue from volunteers providing donations as they stay at Project Homecoming's housing facility, \$106,562.00 of match will be allocated from this source. Additionally, Project Homecoming regularly raises over \$50,000 in individual donations that will be available to provide match for the items budgeted.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

Narratives

Clarification April 9, 2014:

A. Programmatic Clarification:

1. The applicant confirms that the desired grant award start and member enrollment period start date is 9/4/2014.
2. Below is the preliminary plan for evaluation. Once funding is granted, an outside evaluator will be enlisted to refine the evaluation design and methodology.

Preliminary Evaluation Plan

Program Description: AmeriCorps members will be implementing a volunteer-based, home rehabilitation program which assists low-income homeowners with rebuilding and repairing their homes in New Orleans, Louisiana. The theory of change is that this program significantly reduces the costs of home repair and rehabilitation by using AmeriCorps members to leverage volunteers who provide a significant portion of the construction labor. The output of labor provided by volunteers stretches limited resources, so that more disadvantaged homeowners can receive Project Homecoming's rehabilitation and housing services and ultimately transition into safe, stable housing situations. The annual anticipated outcomes are as follows:

- 1) At least \$350,000 of in-kind volunteer labor will be leveraged by AmeriCorps members
- 2) Home rehabilitation costs will be decreased for low-income individuals
- 3) At least 40 low-income individuals who were displaced from their homes or living in substandard conditions will live in safe, durable homes as a result of this program.

Program Evaluation Design: The program evaluation will focus both on evaluating the outcomes of the volunteer-based rehabilitation program and on the quality of experience that Project Homecoming provides to AmeriCorps members. What is presented here is a preliminary outline of the evaluation plan. If funded, Project Homecoming will contract with an outside evaluator, most likely selected from among research faculty at a local university. This outside evaluator will review and refine the evaluation design and methodology. Data will be collected by Project Homecoming, based on the evaluation design and methodology that is finalized through the consultation with the selected research academician. The data will be reviewed and analyzed by the outside evaluator, who will compile the results into a written evaluation report.

Narratives

Several key evaluation questions will be addressed during the program evaluation. These preliminary questions will be further expanded and refined in consultation with the outside evaluator before the evaluation plan is implemented:

Process Evaluation Questions:

- 1) What additional training, resources, and supervision do AmeriCorps members need to more effectively recruit and manage volunteers?
- 2) How do AmeriCorps members perceive the quality of their experience serving at Project Homecoming, especially in terms of skills learned and the opportunities offered for personal and professional growth?
- 3) How do the beneficiaries of the housing repair/renovation program perceive the assistance they have received from AmeriCorps members? How can that assistance be improved?

Outcome Evaluation Questions:

- 1) How many low-income individuals who were displaced or living in substandard housing were transitioned into safe, durable homes through the volunteer-based home rehabilitation program?
- 2) What cost savings, if any, were realized as a result of the volunteer hours leveraged by AmeriCorps members? How did the costs of the volunteer-based home renovations compare to market value estimates for the same scope of work?
- 3) Did the AmeriCorps members successfully leverage 35,000 hours of volunteer labor, valued at \$350,000?

To address the process evaluation questions, a descriptive evaluation design will focus on methods that solicit the opinions of beneficiaries of services, AmeriCorps members and the volunteers the AmeriCorps members recruit and manage. Surveys, which include evaluative scales and open ended questions, will be administered to beneficiaries, volunteers, AmeriCorps members, and their supervisors to assess training needs, AmeriCorps member effectiveness with volunteers and beneficiaries of services, and the overall quality of the AmeriCorps experience at Project Homecoming.

To address the outcome evaluation questions, a quantitative evaluation design will be used to collect empirical data that counts the number of low-income individuals who are transitioned into safe, stable housing and to also count the number of volunteer hours leveraged by AmeriCorps members.

Narratives

A comparative evaluation design will be implemented to determine if cost savings were achieved. Before work begins on a home renovation, Project Homecoming will record the market value estimate for the scope of work and will complete a budget projection for the project with volunteer labor factored in. After the home renovation is completed, the actual cost of the renovation will be compared to both the market value estimate and the projected budget to determine the level of variation. This data will be aggregated for all the home renovations during the year, to determine whether there were cost savings, and the extent of those savings.

Data Collection Procedures:

Volunteer database: Project Homecoming enters all volunteer information into its Salesforce database. When an AmeriCorps member recruits a volunteer, they record that volunteer's name, address, date of birth, contact information and other demographic information into the database. The dates the volunteer is scheduled to volunteer are also entered. The AmeriCorps member records his/her name as having recruited that volunteer when the entry is made into the database.

Aggregate reports on volunteer numbers and demographics can be easily generated by Salesforce.

To gather the quantitative data related to number of volunteer hours, Project Homecoming uses BuildStar to track for each project the number of hours a volunteer works and the type of construction they complete on the house. AmeriCorps members also record in BuildStar the hours they serve each day on a construction site and the activities completed. If an AmeriCorps member was training and managing volunteers on a worksite, those volunteer hours are counted as volunteer management by an AmeriCorps member. Aggregate reports on hours of labor and construction activities completed per project are easily generated in BuildStar.

Volunteer Surveys: Each volunteer will complete a survey related to their volunteer experience, where they rate on a scale of 1 to 10 their level of satisfaction with Project Homecoming's communications, scheduling, worksite management, and their sense of effectiveness in accomplishing the work assigned to them. Open ended questions allow for descriptive comments that provide input into how AmeriCorps members can improve the way they train and manage volunteers. These surveys are completed by volunteers weekly, and the information is aggregated to provide immediate feedback to the AmeriCorps members and their supervisors, so that additional training can be provided in areas identified as needed. SurveyMonkey is an online tool that Project Homecoming

Narratives

uses to survey volunteers and aggregate the data.

AmeriCorps member surveys: Each AmeriCorps member will complete a mid-term and end of term survey where they provide a self-assessment of the skills gained and areas where they have experience growth personally and professionally. The surveys will also include open ended questions that assess member satisfaction with the Project Homecoming AmeriCorps program, their assessment of their effectiveness in implementing the volunteer-based homeowner renovation program, and suggestions for improvements.

Client Database: The quantitative data that assesses the outcomes for individuals seeking the home renovation/repair services is collected by the Homeowner Advocate and recorded in the Salesforce database. Demographic information for each client is collected and entered into Salesforce. Documents are collected to verify income, which are maintained in hard copies in client files that are locked to maintain client confidentiality. Each client has both a hard copy client file where all paperwork and documentation is filed, as well as a client file in Salesforce where aggregate reports about client demographics and outcomes are easily generated. A unique ID# is assigned to each individual client.

Client surveys: The beneficiaries of services will complete a survey prior to their case being closed. The questions will include ratings of satisfaction and self-assessments about how their lives have been improved by the assistance received from AmeriCorps members.

Project Files and Financial Records: Each home renovation is assigned a project number, which is cross referenced to the individual clients. Project Homecoming scans and maintains computerized records of all projects documents. Project Homecoming uses Quickbooks as its financial accounting system. Each project has its own record of projected budget, market value estimate, and all receipts and expenditures are accounted for by project. Reports on variances are easily generated, to analyze cost savings attributed to volunteer labor.

The evaluation results will be used:

- 1) To determine whether program outputs are being achieved and are resulting in the desired outcomes.

Narratives

- 2) To report outcomes to the Louisiana Serve Commission, CNCS, other funders, the Board of Directors, and other stakeholders.
- 3) To determine what changes need to be made to improve the program's cost effectiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- 4) To inform management and programmatic decisions
- 5) To improve training of AmeriCorps members to best manage volunteers and assist clients.
- 6) To identify and implement new strategies to take Project Homecoming's AmeriCorps program to the next level of excellence.

B. Performance Measure Clarification:

The applicant confirms that for performance measure 05, the Salesforce database that will be used to track clients will maintain unique IDs for each beneficiary per the CNCS performance measure instructions.

C. Budget Clarification:

1. Supplies: Project Homecoming provides shirts for each AmeriCorps member, which members are expected to wear daily on work sites as their AmeriCorps uniform. The shirts are branded to identify the members as AmeriCorps. Members are working on construction sites, where the shirts are readily soiled by sweat, dirt, paint, adhesives, and other materials. The number of shirts are necessary and justifiable. Each AmeriCorps member receives 5 shirts at the beginning of the year, allowing for a clean shirt to be worn each day of service. Two additional shirts are given to AmeriCorps members during the year to replace those that have become disreputable due to wear and tear on the construction sites.
2. Member Support Costs: Based on the explanation of what is allowable, the line item for groceries for the no-cost, quarter time MSYs has been removed from the budget. This results in an adjustment to the grantee's match, which is now \$156,562.00 or 50% of budget total. The source of match, listed as volunteer housing donations, has been adjusted to 106,562.00 to reflect this change.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification:

Project Homecoming adheres to an Equal Opportunity Employment Policy and does not tolerate any form of unlawful discrimination. Project Homecoming does not plan to target a specific percentage of MSY slots to recruitment of members with disabilities and will not be applying for additional MSYs for

Narratives

strategic engagement slots.

E. No-Cost MSY Clarification:

Project Homecoming is not requesting any additional no-cost MSYs beyond what is already indicated in our grant proposal.

F. Healthcare Clarification:

1. The health insurance provider that Project Homecoming is proposing to use is the Corps Network Insurance Plan.
2. Project Homecoming selected this provider because it is one of the primary vendors that provides low-cost health insurance options to AmeriCorps members in alignment with AmeriCorps benefit requirements. The Corps Network has indicated it is working to change its coverage to provide for Minimum Essential Coverage as defined by the Affordable Care Act, to go into effect by September 1, 2014.
3. On 4-8-14 the Executive Director of Project Homecoming spoke with Chris Rooney, the Vice President of Willis of Seattle (administrator of The Corps Network Plan) regarding projected costs increases associated with changes to the Corps Network Plan to meet Minimum Essential Coverage. He indicated the cost could be as much as \$220.00/mo per member. Project Homecoming would need to adjust the budget to reflect this projected cost in order to provide Minimum Essential Coverage.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics