

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Playworks Louisiana AmeriCorps program will have 7 full-time AmeriCorps members who will provide a school-wide evidence-based program designed to utilize play to create supportive environments with reduced bullying, where all students feel safe, supported, and fully engaged in school in low-income schools in the Greater New Orleans area. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for positively impacting the entire school environment to reduce bullying, thereby creating a safe space for students to increase their overall academic engagement. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 35 volunteers that will be engaged in assisting with components of the Playworks AmeriCorps program as well as projects and events with partner organizations throughout the region. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$93,100 will be matched with \$218,905 in private funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

Playworks is an evidence-based program proven to transform elementary school climates by increasing students' sense of safety and engagement and decreasing bullying. By creating a positive and supportive school environment, the Playworks program allows students to become more academically engaged.

### A. PROGRAM NEED:

Bullying presents one of the greatest health risks to children and youth in our country. According to the American Medical Association, 3.7 million youth engage in bullying and more than 3.2 million are victims of "moderate" or "serious" bullying each year. The US Department of Justice estimates that every seven minutes a child is bullied with approximately 70%-80% of school-age students have been involved in bullying at some point (Graham, 2011).

Bullying has become a national concern with efforts to create safe and supportive schools taking a top priority with the Department of Education. At the 2011 Bullying Prevention Summit, Secretary Arne Duncan explained that a great school needs to be a safe school and that "every child is entitled to a quality education and no child can get a quality education if they don't first feel safe at school." The Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services, has prioritized reducing bullying as a means to increase student outcomes.

Bullying has negative impacts on everyone in the school-the victim, the one who bullies and those who are bystanders. Research compiled by [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov), cited that involvement in bullying,

## **Narratives**

as victim or the one who bullies, creates barriers to learning for all students, and is associated with a host of negative outcomes including increased risk of poor academic performance, truancy, delinquency, physical injury and suicide. In elementary school students, the link between being a victim of bullying, being a bully and lower academic achievement is substantial (Glew et al, 2005; Schwartz, 2003). UCLA psychologists found that victims of bullying are less likely to participate in school, raise their hand in class, complete their homework and show interest in school (Wolpert, 2011). Those who bully others are also at risk of getting into fights, being suspended and receiving poor grades (violencepreventionworks.org). For victims, the fear of continued victimization causes students to distance themselves from social connections, feel unsafe at school, and feel as if they do not belong at school which leads to disengagement from class and skipping school altogether out of fear and social isolation (National Education Association). A single bullying situation can have a wide-range of impacts on the student who bullies, the bullied student, and the overall climate of the school, leaving both victim and offender at risk for poor school success.

In 2011, the Louisiana Department of Education found that approximately 2,600 students were victims of bullying during the school year. The Caring Communities Youth Survey reported that approximately 32% of sixth grade students in the Metropolitan Human Services District Region 1, where members will serve, were victims of bullying, a 74% increase from 2008. In New Orleans specifically, almost 47% of students indicated they had been bullied at school and 82% reported they had witnessed bullying (www.prssa.org). In 2012, in response to the growing problem with bullying, the Louisiana legislature passed Act 861 which requires schools to train staff about bullying, develop a procedure for reporting and investigating incidents of bullying, and to ensure proper support for victims. This level of investment by the Department of Education and local schools indicates a growing commitment to reduce the incidents of bullying at school.

Playworks Louisiana AmeriCorps program will target high poverty elementary schools within Orleans Parish and Jefferson Parish that face enormous barriers to student success, are vulnerable to unsafe school environments, and are at risk for bullying-leading to decreased academic engagement. In selecting our AmeriCorps service sites, we will pursue partnerships with priority schools as well as low-income schools where at least 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. We target low income schools because the need for a positive school climate program is high, but resources in both staffing and funding are non-existent. Currently, Playworks Louisiana partners with six schools in Orleans Parish where 90% is the average of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch. We anticipate that our AmeriCorps program will serve a similar population in the coming school year.

## **Narratives**

### **B. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS-HOW THE INTERVENTION IS DESIGNED TO ADDRESS PROBLEM/NEED: THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL:**

Two important findings from bullying research are that (1) bullying occurs two to three times more often at school than any other location and tends to thrive where there is the largest amount of students and the least amount of supervision (Smith, 2010) with over 70% of incidents happening on the playground (Glew, et al, 2005), and (2) interventions that focus on improving the overall school climate are the most effective strategies (Masiello & Schroeder, 2014). The Playworks AmeriCorps program model provides school-wide intervention centered on creating a safe and inclusive recess environment.

Recess is the central focus of the Playworks AmeriCorps model because it is the time when bullying and conflict are most likely to occur. Through utilizing play, a universal activity, at their assigned low-income elementary school, members will create an inclusive environment where all students feel safe and engaged. Each full-time AmeriCorps member will maintain a constant presence on the playground during recess, teaching and modeling pro-social skills such positive language, and problem solving. In addition, to reinforce the behaviors and positive culture being developed during recess, members will implement key additional program components throughout the day emphasizing respectful social behavior. Members will spend time with individual classes during Class Game Time to teach the games offered at recess and introduce the tenets of respect and inclusion, so students become comfortable actively participating in games with their peers. During these individual class sessions, members serve alongside teachers to help them build rapport with students and strengthen the student-teacher bond. Members will also facilitate a leadership development program with a group of upper elementary students, providing them group trainings and support as they become Junior Coach leaders who model positive behavior, lead games, and assist with conflict resolution at recess.

Outside of school time, Playworks AmeriCorps members will run either a before-school recess or after-school program that reinforces our positive play model. They will also facilitate non-competitive developmental sports leagues each school semester, encouraging participation from students who have not previously felt comfortable playing sports. Members are going to work with their school administration to identify one to two schools community service events to develop, aimed at engaging families within the school community. Finally, throughout the year, our members will also serve at general community service projects or events such as FitNOLA events. Members will use play as a catalyst for creating unique opportunities for students, parents, and teachers to serve together while

## Narratives

building relationships and a sense of belonging within the school community.

Through this proposal one AmeriCorps member will serve as a "peer support" member. Our peer support AmeriCorps member will serve alongside other Playworks AmeriCorps members at their service sites on a rotating basis. Having a trained member ready to step into a school setting allows us to have our members visit neighboring programs for peer-learning without creating a gap in services assigned and is critical to program continuity. Our peer support member will be prepared to assume full-time duties at a school site if another member has an extended illness or exits early.

Playworks AmeriCorps members are ideally suited to provide this intervention. Appropriate adult supervision is crucial to the reduction of bullying and the creation of a positive school climate, but increased pressure on schools to deliver annual improvement in standardized test scores has created a concentration of financial resources on classroom staffing and instructional strategies. As a result, schools lack the capacity or staff to devote to developing a productive school climate strategy. As dedicated, community-minded individuals, members are able to focus the necessary full-time efforts to reduce bullying and create a safe, inclusive, and engaging school environment. Playworks AmeriCorps members also serve beyond the school day, engaging families and the larger school community through service events. Ultimately, through developing positive, and connected relationships for students within their schools, members will create school climates where it is socially unacceptable to exclude or bully others; where respect and inclusion become the social norm, thus increasing students' sense of safety and belonging which helps them to become more academically engaged.

Playworks intends to measure the long-term outcome of increased academic engagement through a modified version of the Social and Character Development Survey (SACD). This survey is validated to measure key indicators of engagement as described by CNCS as increased class participation, increased perception of school climate and increased attachment to school. Playworks will utilize the total score on the engagement scale to determine increases from beginning to end of the year. Playworks will implement the teacher-reported survey on a random sample of students each school year of the grant cycle twice; at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year. We will utilize Education Measures ED2 and ED27 to measure outputs and outcomes as detailed in the logic model. Our annual targets are as follows: 2,168 students will complete the program (ED2) and 1,083 will increase their academic engagement (ED27).

### EVIDENCE BASED:

Playworks uses an evidence-based approach backed by an experimental study that resulted in

## Narratives

several statistically significant findings indicating strong evidence that support causal relationships between Playworks and the intended outcomes.

In May 2013, Mathematica Policy Research in conjunction with Stanford University released the results of a randomized controlled study *Impact and Implementation Findings from an Experimental Evaluation of Playworks: Effects on School Climate, Academic Learning, Student Social Skills and Behavior* (<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com>). The study is currently in review in peer journals *JAMA Pediatrics* and *Journal on Educational Effectiveness (JREE)* and publication is expected. Twenty-nine schools from six different cities were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Random assignment of schools helped to ensure that there were no systematic differences between the treatment and control groups' observed and unobserved characteristics and that the differences in outcomes between the two groups could be attributed solely to the effect of Playworks. To improve the statistical precision of impact estimates and reduce the chance of differences between the treatment and control groups in the characteristics of schools, random assignment was conducted within matched groups (pairs, trios or foursomes) of schools that were similar in terms of observable characteristics. The impacts on students, teachers and schools were determined by comparing the average outcomes in treatment and control schools using regression models that were customized to the unit of analysis. All statistically significant impacts are based on the MHT adjusted p-values. The overall design and methodology (strong internal/external validity) of this study allows the results to be generalized to schools with similar characteristics (urban, diverse, high poverty) implementing the full Playworks program.

Key statistically significant findings from the study support the Playworks Theory of Change and include: (1) Teachers in Playworks schools reported significantly LESS BULLYING and exclusionary behavior, a 43% difference in average rating scores, (2) Playworks teachers average rating of students' FEELINGS OF SAFETY at school was 20% higher than the average rating reported by teachers in control schools and (3) Teachers in Playworks' schools reported spending significant less time to transition from recess to learning activities--34% fewer minutes--showing an INCREASED READINESS TO LEARN.

In addition to the strong evidence provided by the random controlled trial, two additional quasi-experimental studies of Playworks also provide evidence that the proposed intervention will lead to outcomes described in the theory of change. First, Stanford University completed a quasi-experimental study of Playworks, *Playing Fair*, in six newly implementing schools all sharing similar characteristics including high-poverty, high percentage of racial diversity and academic challenges.

## Narratives

Qualitative (structured interviews and observations) and quantitative (teacher and student written surveys) data was collected in the fall and again in the spring to create a pre/post analysis. The study concluded that students felt more included, more connected to the school, their coach, and had a higher sense of belonging at school and felt more physically and emotionally safe.

Second, Kris Madsen completed a study, *Physical Activity and Positive Youth Development: Impact of a School-Based Program* (Journal of School Health, 2011), that used a quasi-experimental design that analyzed data from 159 low-income schools from 2001-2007. Outcomes were 5th grade student scores (n=13,109) on the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) which is administered state-wide. Scores from students attending schools with Playworks programming were compared to scores from students attending schools without Playworks programming. All schools in the study had at least 50% of students eligible for free or reduced meals. After one year of exposure to Playworks, students showed statistically significant increases in the following four protective factors as compared to students with no exposure to Playworks: problem-solving skills, meaningful participation in school, goals and aspirations, and physical activity. All four protective factors are associated with positive social and academic outcomes.

All evaluations included schools implementing the full Playworks model with the exception of the newly developed school community service events which are proposed here as a pilot for this AmeriCorps program and were developed after the time of the evaluation.

### C. MEMBER TRAINING:

Based on Playworks current AmeriCorps programs' training calendar, Playworks Louisiana members will receive over 80 hours of professional development training to enhance their term of service. The term of service kicks off in early August with an intensive two week long pre-service training. Pre-service training begins with a day of orientation including an introduction to AmeriCorps, discussions about what it means to serve, a review of the member contract and handbook, information regarding stipends/benefits/grievance procedures, and prohibited activities. This first day of orientation concludes with an AmeriCorps swearing-in ceremony. The remaining days of pre-service training (9 days; 8.5 hrs. per day) focus on skill development in the areas of group management, age-appropriate games, inclusive play, conflict resolution among students, communication with diverse populations, Playworks curriculum, as well as CPR/First Aid.

Member trainings continue throughout the rest of the service year. In the four weeks following pre-service, members participate in trainings three afternoons per week for 2.5 hours each, focusing on the development of professional skills including timekeeping, data collection and entry, loan

## **Narratives**

forbearance, community engagement, and volunteer recruitment. From October to June, trainings once a month (2.5 hours each) include topics such as bullying prevention, cultural competency, peace promotion, and service project planning. Members also attend "Life after AmeriCorps" and "Education Award" trainings, as well as an AmeriCorps graduation ceremony.

Our program staff ensures all members and volunteers are trained on and adhere to the prohibited activities. For members, the prohibited activities are included in pre-service training, are in the member contract that each individual is required to sign, and are a continuous follow up topic during service site visits. For volunteers, the prohibited activities are included in orientation training.

Playworks Louisiana will strive to create a member experience that not only provides professional development, but opportunities for reflection to promote a lifelong ethic of service. Throughout the term of service, group and individual civic reflection times will be provided as a means to connect with other members, and discuss the role members play in society. Members will also participate in two "Service and Motivation" workshops facilitated by Playworks staff that utilizes interactive activities to focus on their service experience, and their inspirations. This thoughtful way of sharing often taps into what inspires each individual and allows them to brainstorm on ways to reach, motivate and inspire others in the community to engage in service.

### **D. MEMBER SUPERVISION:**

AmeriCorps members are directly supervised by a Playworks Program Manager. The role of the supervisor or "Program Manager" is to train, support, and guide the member through their term of service, and serve as the direct liaison between members and their service site. Managers are responsible for planning and facilitating trainings as well as civic reflection and community building opportunities for our members. Managers conduct regular performance evaluations, meetings with school administration, provide ongoing mentorship, as well as bi-weekly site visits. Site visits provide the opportunity to observe the member's skills and give feedback, as well as time to discuss what challenges exist at the site. In addition to site visits, one-on-one meetings with members occur bi-monthly to identify and document goals and objectives for the coming months. In total, members receive five written "goals and objectives" reviews and two formal performance evaluations or "assessments" during the year. The assessment includes scoring and documenting the members' growth and skills in specific areas essential to a successful service year including professionalism, core program components (recess, junior coaches, leagues, before/after school program etc.) as well as school relationships, and community service events. Our comprehensive approach to member support encourages members to learn from their hands on experience while also applying new skills.

## **Narratives**

Program Managers typically have at least two years of Playworks experience at a school site or equivalent experience in youth development, strong communication, organization and computer skills, and the ability to thrive both independently and in team settings. To adequately train supervisors, Playworks requires each Program Manager to participate in required trainings set by the national office including AmeriCorps program management (including approved activities, prohibited activities, and timekeeping), AmeriCorps policies and expectations, communication skills, training facilitation, and supervision skills.

To ensure a strong foundation for our AmeriCorps program, the Program Director and Program Associate will also share a role in program management. Similar to the Program Manager, the Program Director and Program Associate will be required to attend specific webinar trainings provided by our national office on topics such as AmeriCorps program policies and procedures, prohibited service activities, service project planning, member timekeeping, and program evaluation expectations. In total, our national office provides over 18 training modules to Program Managers, Program Directors and associates to ensure all program staff are knowledgeable in AmeriCorps program management.

The Program Director supervises the Program Managers, and the Program Associate. The director will be responsible for the overall program implementation, member recruitment, member training calendar development, and grant compliance/reporting. The Program Associate will be accountable for AmeriCorps administrative duties including member hours tracking, onboarding and exiting paperwork, and data collection. The associate will also help facilitate member trainings, support civic reflection opportunities, and coordinate additional community service projects.

Although the Playworks Program Manager serves as the member supervisor, the school principal will also be a direct contact on site for the member throughout the day. The principal will work with the Playworks Program Manager and member to support program implementation at their school site. The principal will include the member in an introduction to staff, meet with the Program Manager and member to discuss program progress, as well as support the member with any daily issues that may arise. The principal will also allow the Program Manager to do a "teacher training" with school staff to share the philosophy and youth development tactics of our program.

### **E. COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION:**

Playworks Louisiana's goal is to develop a strong AmeriCorps identity and pride amongst members throughout the term of service. Members are introduced to AmeriCorps during the interview process, and again during pre-service training, and throughout the year during reflections. Members practice

## Narratives

explaining what AmeriCorps is to fellow members during trainings. We also hope our members develop connections with other AmeriCorps members from different organizations through community building opportunities, joint trainings, and commission sponsored activities. To make our members identifiable to the community, each member is provided an AmeriCorps gear pack containing Playworks AmeriCorps shirts, sweatshirts and pin and are required to wear the AmeriCorps logo at all times while serving.

### Organizational Capability

#### A. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING:

Playworks is a \$31 million organization with a 17-year track record of successfully implementing programs. Over the last nine years, Playworks has effectively managed an AmeriCorps program through National Direct and state grants. Our experience in completing desk reviews, site visits, financial desk reviews, and progress and financial reporting has taught us to develop efficient reporting procedures as well as strong communication support systems between our National team and Playworks regional offices. This school year, Playworks will serve a total of 170,000 students in 22 cities across the country; 40,000 of those students in 8 cities with our AmeriCorps program.

As a national organization, Playworks has a proven record of managing large, multifaceted grants. We just completed our second three-year AmeriCorps funding cycle with National Direct and our second one-year funding-cycle with the New Mexico state commission. We are beginning the second year of our fourth three-year funding cycle with the California commission, our third year of our second three-year funding cycle with the Washington DC commission, our third year of a three-year funding cycle with the Pennsylvania commission, and our first year of three year funding cycles with the Utah and the North Carolina commissions.

Organizationally, Playworks has a multi-tiered management structure in place to provide strong support to Playworks Louisiana. A National Board of Directors provides fiscal oversight and support to our national leadership. National leadership includes key department directors, including: Jill Vialet, Founder and Chief Executive Officer; Elizabeth Cushing, Chief Operating Officer; David Gallagher, Chief Program Officer; David Carroll, Chief Financial Officer, Tracy Williamson Director of Government Programs, Jennette Claassen, Director of Evaluation, and Kate Capossela, one of three Regional Executive Officers. Ms. Capossela directly supervises the Louisiana Executive Director and she, along with the Director of Government Programs, are responsible for training the Executive Director on all AmeriCorps requirements should we become a grantee.

Playworks National has several departments trained to provide guidance to all Playworks offices

## **Narratives**

with AmeriCorps grants. The departments of Government Programs, Human Resources, Evaluation, Finance, and National Program support the management of our grants through facilitating trainings, meetings, audits and bi-annual reporting with Playworks program staff.

Playworks Louisiana is led by new Executive Director, Laverne Pitts, who is responsible for the fiscal management and development, day to day operations, and leadership and supervision of staff. Ms. Pitts has more than 15 years of non-profit management experience including government grant management. She is supported by a local Board of Directors who provides leadership and counsel, monitors fiscal reports, and represents the needs and interests of the community.

AmeriCorps program management, as reflected in the budget, will be handled by a team of program staff: 1 Program Director, 2 Program Managers, and 1 Program Associate. The Program Director, Dana Greenup, will devote 50% of her time to the AmeriCorps program. The Program Director is responsible for general program management and directly supervises the Program Managers and the Program Associate. Two Program Managers will directly supervise the AmeriCorps members and the relationship with their placement sites devoting 55% of their time to the AmeriCorps program (equivalent to one full time employee devoted to the supervision of members). Managers will be responsible for training, supporting and guiding the member through their term of service. The managers will ensure AmeriCorps compliance through bi-weekly site visits, written objectives, and bi-annual reviews. We currently have one Program Manager, Nathan Moore. If awarded this grant, we will recruit and hire an additional Program Manager with the skills required to successfully support a cadre of AmeriCorps members. The Program Associate, Mallory Josol, will be responsible for the paperwork and administrative requirements associated with the grant, devoting 60% of her time to the AmeriCorps program.

### **B. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:**

Playworks is dedicated to ensuring compliance with all AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Louisiana program staff will be trained by our Playworks national staff and attend all required commission trainings. The Louisiana Executive Director is required to meet with their supervisor, the Regional Executive Officer, and the Director of Government Programs to review the contract and expectations. The Playworks Program Director is responsible for attending all trainings and technical assistance calls offered by the state commission and providing Playworks' staff (Program Manager and Associate) with ongoing training and support to ensure compliance with regulations and prohibited activities. The Program Director will hold weekly program meetings with the program staff to discuss on-going service activities and events, Corps member support and development, as well as

## **Narratives**

challenges that need to be addressed. The Program Manager is responsible for reinforcing and ensuring compliance at member service site locations. The Program Managers will conduct bi-weekly site visits to ensure high program quality and member compliance. To prevent instances of risk, Program Managers are trained on prohibited activities, and in turn, inform service site administrators, and train members. Program Managers address any compliance issues with members directly and document as necessary. The Program Associate is trained in and responsible for accurate administrative paperwork including but not limited to timesheets, member service activities, member enrollment and exit, and sign-in sheets.

To monitor compliance at the grantee level, Playworks' national office employs three national AmeriCorps Program Managers to support grant implementation and compliance across the country. These managers are responsible for attending any state commission webinars necessary to stay up to date on AmeriCorps information and state grant specifics. Each manager supports a cluster of Playworks offices and holds monthly meetings with the local Playworks program staff. Monthly meetings will be dedicated to the specifics of our Louisiana AmeriCorps program including member hours, member activities, volunteer recruitment and any ongoing projects. The national AmeriCorps Program Managers will also complete member file audits as well as a timesheet audit. File audits are completed twice during the term; at the beginning and end of the term to ensure proper and accurate paperwork. Timesheet audits are completed within the first three months of the term to confirm accurate timekeeping and activities.

Additionally, the national Playworks AmeriCorps Program Managers conduct an internal compliance review each a year with any Playworks' office that has an AmeriCorps program. The compliance review is an electronic process that requires the Louisiana Executive Director to meet with the Playworks Louisiana program staff to review, report on, and certify whether specific items are in compliance, including a sampling of member timesheets, volunteer recruitment, and member activities. If instances of risk are found, the Executive Director and program team will design and submit a plan to address the issue to the appropriate national Playworks AmeriCorps Program Manager. Upon approval, the Playworks Louisiana program staff has a designated amount of time to document and resolve the issue. Our internal system of audits and compliance reviews allows our organization to provide a positive member experience.

Finally, our AmeriCorps program is monitored across Playworks national organizational structure. Playworks' National Program department as well as Finance and Human Resource departments is trained in AmeriCorps requirements. Our National Program Department conducts select site visits

## Narratives

throughout the year to observe our AmeriCorps program, give feedback for improvement, and safeguard against instances of risk. Within the Finance department, the Finance Director works closely with the Executive Director to assure proper financial reporting. The Finance Director is responsible for all AmeriCorps grant financial reporting and attends state commission trainings as needed. Our Human Resources department works closely with the national AmeriCorps Program Managers to stay up to date on AmeriCorps rules and regulations as they pertain to member service hours, benefits, stipends, onboarding and exiting. They also guide program staff with member improvement plans and disciplinary actions.

### D. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:

In accordance with our current AmeriCorps programs, Playworks Louisiana will conduct an annual survey of school staff to learn more about our impact on students and school climate to improve programming. Additionally, our National program quality team conducts annual site visits to all of our AmeriCorps programs to assess program quality, member strengths and challenges, and the health of school partnerships. Playworks uses data from both the survey and site visits to learn about program impact and identify regional and national trends.

## Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

### A. COST EFFECTIVENESS:

For the proposed request of \$13,300 per MSY, Playworks Louisiana will provide daily programming for approximately 2,400 children resulting in a significantly cost-effective program of \$0.72/child/day (of which we request \$0.22/child/day from AmeriCorps). This investment, less than a quarter per day per child, provides significant school-wide impact, reduces bullying and exclusionary behavior and improves attention in class. While many programs serving elementary schools focus exclusively on small, designated groups of students through classroom teaching, individual tutoring and/or mentorship, Playworks Louisiana's AmeriCorps program provides a unique model that serves the entire school population in both large and small group settings. This comprehensive approach increases the number of students directly impacted by our members, thus achieving a very cost effective program.

Investment in volunteers is another way we would demonstrate cost efficiency. Based on the 2012 estimated value of volunteer time of \$22.14 per hour (as calculated by the Independent Sector [http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer\\_time](http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time)), the estimated value of our 35 volunteers supporting our AmeriCorps program will be equivalent to over \$2,324. This savings is based on a three-hour per volunteer average, for a near total of 105 volunteer hours. Engaging volunteers in

## Narratives

service would supply members with additional community support to create a safe school climate in a cost effective manner.

A cost-benefit for our service sites is the benefit of reclaimed teaching time. Data from the random controlled study conducted by Stanford University's Mathematica Policy Research, shows classroom teachers at Playworks' schools saved an average of 10.5 hours a year transitioning from recess to learning activities. Teachers at Playworks' schools reported that they spend 9.37 fewer hours a year addressing behavioral and disciplinary issues throughout the day, allowing for teachers to focus their time on teaching-adding to the overall programs' cost efficiency.

The costs associated with our program, as described in the narrative, are included in the proposed budget. Section I of the budget includes the cost of program staff grant management and member supervision, as well as staff attendance to corporation sponsored technical assistance meetings, and manager mileage necessary to supervise members at their service sites. This section also includes line items necessary for members to be successful; school sites supplies, AmeriCorps Playworks gear, team building activity costs, as well as the cost of criminal history checks for members and program staff. Section II of the budget includes member living allowance, FICA, worker's compensation, and health care costs. Finally, Section III includes funds for administrative costs associated with the grant using the fixed percentage method of calculation.

To raise the additional funds necessary to operate our program, Playworks Louisiana will require financial investment from our school service sites. To have a Playworks AmeriCorps program, schools must pay \$17,500. Once a school is identified as a potential partner, the program staff conducts an assessment of the school to ensure they are an appropriate fit for our AmeriCorps program. If our organization decides to partner with a school, a Memorandum of Understanding is signed by the principal and/or administrator of the school and the source of the school fee is documented. This reaffirms the principal understands our AmeriCorps program and commitment to the cost. When school's budgets are approved for the new year, Playworks Louisiana will sign contracts with the school service sites, following district protocol, to ensure fee payment. Schools will be billed monthly for the cost of our program through the appropriate district office. School fees totaling \$105,000 in non-CNCS resources will support the cost our AmeriCorps program.

Our second source of our match will come from foundation and individual support. Committed to building a local funding base to support our mission, we will secure the remaining \$113,905 through personal contributions from each member of the local Board of Directors, grants from foundations, and donations from corporations. In our efforts to continuously grow our individual donor base, will

## Narratives

also run an annual individual giving campaign to contribute towards our match.

### B. BUDGET ADEQUACY:

Nationally, Playworks has successfully raised the funds to support programming each year we have partnered with AmeriCorps. Throughout the last nine years, 100% of Playworks' offices with an AmeriCorps program have raised the matching funds necessary to cover our AmeriCorps program expenses. Playworks Louisiana's strategy is to create a diversified funding portfolio. Of the total program budget, \$312,005 we propose \$218,905 in non-CNCS funding to successfully implement our AmeriCorps program. Our largest committed source of non-CNCS funding is the school fee. Schools will pay a fee of \$17,500 for our AmeriCorps program totaling \$105,000. The remaining match amount \$113,905 will be funded by foundation, and individual contributions. We currently benefit from funding partnerships with but not limited to the Booth-Bricker Fund, The Campbell Foundation, the Mary Freeman Wisdom Foundation, United Healthcare, the Bruce J. Heim Foundation, and the New Orleans Rotary Fund. Additionally, we continue to collaborate with various organizations to leverage our collective impact with children including Tulane University, the New Orleans Saints, Loyola University, the New Orleans Pelicans, FitNOLA, the New Orleans Kid Partnership, NOLA for Life, and Junior Achievement.

Playworks Louisiana is confident that the proposed budget presented is adequate to fund the proposed program, based on our national organization's prior experience managing several state AmeriCorps grants and National Direct funding. The budget is based on our current operating budget, as well as other budgets currently used in other Playworks AmeriCorps state programs. The submitted budget has been carefully reviewed by our National Finance Director and will be sufficient to allow us to meet our desired program elements, outputs, and outcomes for our AmeriCorps program.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

N/A

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

DATE SUBMITTED 4/10/14

### A. PROGRAMMATIC CLARIFICATION:

## Narratives

1. Our desired grant award start date and member enrollment period start date is 8/1/14.

### B. PERFORMANCE MEASURE CLARIFICATION:

1. Playworks will serve grades 1st-5th. All grades will be measured for the national performance measures ED1, ED2 and ED27.

2. Challenges with obtaining identification of high needs students in the past was due to data collection activities related to a previous performance measure and a methodology we no longer use. Those challenges will not impact our data collection for the performance measure proposed in this application.

Students counted in ED2 will meet the requirements of a being enrolled in an elementary school with a majority of economically disadvantaged students. Playworks will only place AmeriCorps members in schools where at least 50% of the student population is eligible for free and or reduced lunch.

Playworks will get the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch from administrative records published by the school district. If the percentages are not available publicly in the appropriate timeframe, Playworks will contact the school directly. We have collected this data in past school years and have never had difficulty obtaining this information.

Students counted in ED2 will have completed the program, which is defined as enrollment in school for at least five months as determined by completion of both the fall and spring survey. Due to the large number of students served, Playworks will utilize the survey completion rate (pre and post) as a proxy for total students enrolled for five months. The total number of students will be determined by extrapolating the percent who complete the program to the total school population.

We have added the performance measure ED1 in the Performance Measure section in eGrants.

3. Playworks intends to increase the academic engagement of students as defined ED27 and we will specifically track improved perspective on school climate, increased attachment to school, increased interest in school and increased teacher-reported participation in class. Research from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students demonstrates that schools with strong school climates allow students to become more engaged in their classes and schools, therefore,

## Narratives

boosting student achievement and closing the achievement gaps. The Playworks intervention follows a theory of change that indicates transforming a recess has impacts on the larger school climate allowing for students to increase their academic engagement. Playworks intervention is an evidence-based approach that shifts the overall school climate. In a random controlled trial evaluation, Playworks was proven to impact the attitude students had about feelings of safety at their schools--a key indicator of a positive school climate. In 2012-13 Playworks tracked the influence our intervention had on academic engagement as described in ED27 (improved perspective on school climate, increased attachment to school, increased interest in school and increased teacher-reported participation in class) in our national direct schools through a pre/post survey. The results were overwhelmingly positive in demonstrating the intervention created a shift in student attitudes. Pre/post surveys showed that 71% of students had an increase in their overall scores.

Playworks plans to add an additional question on the SACD post survey asking teachers about the other attitudes and behaviors listed in ED27 to ensure they did not worsen.

### C. SAMPLING CLARIFICATION:

1. In each school year of the grant, 2,550 students in 6 schools will participate in the Playworks program. Playworks utilizes a school-wide strategy to create safe and inclusive environments where students become academically engaged. Due to the large number of students participating, Playworks plans to utilize a sampling methodology to understand our impact on all students served. Our data is gathered by asking teachers to complete surveys about individual students in their class. It is not feasible to ask every teacher to complete surveys about each student in their class two times during the school year. This will impede on the amount of time teachers have for preparation and class time and reduce response rates. In addition, the personnel costs required to manage 2,550 surveys would be significantly burdensome for our organization as we have to utilize paper surveys which require printing, collating and scanning results. Instead, using a strong sample frame, Playworks will ask a sample of teachers to complete surveys for a random selection of students.

1. Number of teachers: 30
2. Number of classrooms: 30
3. Number of eligible students: 2,550

## Narratives

2. Playworks collects information on the total percent of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, race and grade in school. This information is collected through published administrative data or from the school directly.

3. While Playworks knows specific characteristics about the larger population, we do not collect this information on each individual student surveyed and, therefore, do not know if the mean characteristics of our sample match the larger population characteristics.

However, in order to reduce sampling bias, Playworks utilizes a rigorous sampling plan that randomly selects teachers as well as students within each classroom, creating a stratified random sample across grade levels. The sampling plan reduces sample bias and can ensure extrapolation to the larger population. The full sampling plan can be found in sections C.4 and C.5.

4. Playworks is selecting one teacher from each grade level (1st-5th grade) to complete surveys. Teachers are selected based on their last name. The teacher within each grade-level whose last name is closest to the letter A is selected to participate. The participating teacher will complete a survey on a random selection of students from their primary class. In elementary school, the teacher generally only has one class but, in cases where a teacher might have more than one class, they will be instructed to include students from their primary class only.

5. Teachers are randomly selected to participate (see question 4 above). Teachers are instructed to select a random sample of their students based on the size of their classes. Using the class roster, teachers identify 7 students based on the following process:

- For classes with 20 students or less, teachers select every third student until a total of 7 students are selected.
- For a class with 21-30 students, teachers select every fourth student until a total of 7 students are selected.
- For a class with 31 or more students, teachers select every fifth student until 7 students are selected.

This process allows us to cover the entire class in the sample frame and acquire the needed sample size.

## Narratives

6. The minimum sample size needed for a population of 2,168 with a 95% confidence level is 180. This number was generated using [www.surveysystem.com](http://www.surveysystem.com) which utilizes the standard formula for developing sample size sufficient to justify extrapolation to the larger population. The Sample Size Calculator is a public service of Creative Research Systems survey software. By entering the population size and the desired confidence level, the calculator determines the minimum sample size needed. The minimum sample size was verified by using [www.raosoft.com](http://www.raosoft.com) which also has a public sample size calculator.

7. Playworks implemented this survey using the same process (random sampling with teacher completion) in 2012-13, the last year of our most recent National Direct grant cycle. During this process we experienced a high response rate from teachers and a willingness to complete the survey on individual students. Program Managers discussed data collection needs with the principal prior to starting the school year, and members were instrumental in assisting with messaging to teachers about the importance of survey completion. In school year 2012-13, attrition of students was a little over 10%. We have built a 10% attrition rate into the targets for the current grant application.

### D. BUDGET CLARIFICATION

1. We have revised our cost per MSY to \$12,800. This revision has changed our CNCS request to \$89,600 and our match to \$228,110. These changes are reflected in the eGrants budget.

### E. STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT SLOTS CLARIFICATION:

1. We do not have a designated percentage of slots targeted for recruiting members with disabilities. Our recruitment plan includes reaching out to diverse groups and encouraging applications from people who are from the communities we serve and who have the skills and desire to impact their community through our program. We openly welcome people of all abilities to apply to serve as an AmeriCorps member through Playworks.

2. Playworks Louisiana is not requesting Strategic Engagement slots with this application.

### F. NO-COST MSY CLARIFICATION:

1. Playworks Louisiana is not requesting No Cost MSYs with this application.

## Narratives

### G. HEALTHCARE CLARIFICATION:

1. The insurance provider we are using to insure our AmeriCorps members is Blue Shield.
2. We used a broker to assist us in choosing health care providers.
3. Yes, our proposed budget for member healthcare provides for Minimum Essential Coverage as defined by the Affordable Care Act for our full-time members.
4. Not applicable.
5. Not applicable.

### Continuation Changes

N/A

### Grant Characteristics