

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP) proposes to have 25 AmeriCorps members who will organize a variety of community-driven, evidence-informed interventions that engage primarily Alaska Native youth and build resiliency to prevent substance abuse and suicide in 25 remote, rural and severely under-resourced tribal communities across Alaska. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for increasing resiliency factors of cultural identity or supportive relationships in 260 youth. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 1,000 volunteers who will be engaged in youth-driven service initiatives and activities.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Multi-focus Intermediaries. The CNCS investment of \$343,250 will be matched with \$308,434 in public funding, and an additional \$149,025 will be leveraged from additional public or private sources.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

**PROBLEM/NEED:** Rural Alaska communities have some of the highest rates of substance abuse and suicide in the nation. Through needs assessments, community forums, and strategic planning sessions, these communities consistently identify substance abuse and suicide as among the most critical health issues to address (State of Alaska: Healthy Alaskans 2020's 25 Leading Health Initiatives, 2014). Recent RurAL CAP AmeriCorps communities have had the following characteristics: an average population of 550; 81% of residents are Alaska Native; unemployment (63%) and poverty (26%) rates greater than state and national averages, and an economy that mixes a non-cash subsistence lifestyle with a partial cash economy for groceries, electricity, heat and fuel. Most community infrastructure is limited to a tribal and city council, post office, one school (K-12), small clinic (with paraprofessional provider and no certified counselor), a grocery store, one or two private businesses, and possibly a Head Start center. Most communities are accessible only by small aircraft or boat, making the cost of living exceptionally high and the isolation extreme.

Alaska Natives experience the highest rate of alcohol induced death nationally. From 2007-2011, nearly one in every 13 Alaska Native deaths was alcohol induced (Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics); this rate is 2.5 times the national average. From 2009 to 2011, statistics show an increase in alcohol dependency/abuse for Alaskan youth ages 12-17 from 1.6% to 3.2% (National Survey on Drug Use and Health). In 2010-2011, 11% of Alaskan youth age 12-17 reported using illicit drugs in the past month, higher than the national average. According to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 30% of Alaskan 12th graders consumed alcohol, and 12.8% of high school students self-

## Narratives

reported excessive drinking. Further, Alaska was one of the top five states for illicit drug use among persons age 12 or older (National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2010-2011). Nine of the 10 leading causes of death in Alaska can be associated with substance abuse as a potential contributing factor (State of Alaska Epidemiology Profile on Substance Use, Abuse and Dependency: Consumption Consequences, 2013). Additionally, in 2011, one-quarter of Alaska high school students surveyed stated they had participated in drinking activities, and one in five reported currently smoking marijuana (Alaska Mental Health Board & Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse: The Economic Costs of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse in Alaska, 2012).

Alaska has the highest rate of suicide per capita in the country (Statewide Suicide Prevention Council: Alaska Suicide Facts and Statistics, 2010), with an average of 136 deaths by suicide per year between 2000 and 2009. From 1980-2007, Alaska Natives died by suicide at a rate nearly 4 times the US average. Suicide was the leading cause of death among Alaska Native young males between 15 and 34 who died by suicide at a rate of 225 per 100,000 over the same time period. A 2003 survey of Alaska Natives found that 7% of respondents had seriously contemplated suicide in the last year (Suicide Among Young Alaska Native Men, Institute for Economic and Social Research, UAA). More than 60% of all Alaskan teens who committed suicide between 1999- 2009 were Alaska Native (KidsCount, 2011-12, Institute of Social and Economic Research, UAA). Regional statistics show that suicide attempts are particularly high among remote, rural youth. For example, 18.4% of youth in the Bering Straits School district, which encompasses 15 remote communities outside of Nome, have attempted suicide. This rate is 1.7 times than in Nome (2011 Alaska Youth Risk Behavior Survey).

For more nearly 50 years, the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Inc. (RurAL CAP), has worked with rural tribal communities to find local solutions to locally identified needs. The Youth Success AmeriCorps Program will build the capacity of 25 remote, rural, primarily Alaska Native communities to address high rates of substance abuse and suicide by promoting the healthy development and overall well-being of youth. Through a state-wide selection process, a consortium of service locations (tribal councils, community centers, health clinics, or schools) will be identified in 25 remote Alaskan communities. AmeriCorps members will be recruited locally from these communities. Members will mobilize volunteers, service providers and youth in assessing needs, planning and implementing locally-led interventions that increase "resiliency" among community youth. Increasing youth resiliency, or the ability to successfully manage and adapt to challenges and adversity, has been linked to reducing substance abuse and suicide by decades of research (detailed in Evidence Base below). Members will focus their interventions with youth on strengthening the resiliency-building,

## Narratives

protective factors of: 1) cultural identity; and 2) supportive relationships.

RurAL CAP's BIRCH AmeriCorps program has more than 10 years of experience working with youth, rural communities, and regional and statewide partners on promoting wellness and addressing substance abuse/suicide. RurAL CAP's RAVEN AmeriCorps program has 20 years of experience engaging youth in improving environmental conditions in rural Alaska. This proposal builds on these successes and lessons learned to combine BIRCH and RAVEN into one new program - the Youth Success AmeriCorps Program (YSP) - with outcomes focused on the critical need of substance abuse and suicide prevention, as prioritized by the tribes and communities RurAL CAP serves.

THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL: Twenty-five YSP members will serve with youth and wellness coalitions in 25 consortium communities to plan, implement, evaluate and reflect on service projects which build youth resiliency and reduce substance abuse and suicide. The target population is the youth in selected communities between the ages of 10 and 18. Recent AmeriCorps sites have had a population average of 95 youth per community in this age range.

To assist in planning interventions, members will begin their service by working with their site supervisors and other leaders to organize or strengthen existing wellness coalitions or planning groups aimed at supporting healthy youth development. These wellness coalitions may consist of stakeholders such as tribal council members, teachers, faith leaders, Elders, public safety officers, volunteers, and youth. Members will also collaborate closely with Behavioral Health Aide (BHA) crisis intervention workers in planning activities.

Members will assist wellness coalitions and similar groups to plan and implement youth activities based on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMSHA) Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) being utilized nationally, by the State of Alaska, Division of Behavioral Health, and in many rural communities across Alaska as an effective prevention model. This five-step process guides the assessment, capacity building, planning, implementation, and evaluation of evidence-based, culturally appropriate, and sustainable prevention activities (Center for Prevention Research and Development. Background Research: The Strategic Prevention Framework, 2009). Members and their coalitions will use the SPF process to assess needs and identify interventions that are appropriate for each community's unique culture, and which build upon any existing efforts. The AmeriCorps role will include assisting wellness coalitions in assessing needs, developing plans, organizing training activities, building community awareness, assisting in securing service activity resources, and mobilizing community volunteers and youth to implement activities which build youth resiliency. In this way, members will build capacity of community organizations to promote youth

## Narratives

resiliency and sustain prevention activities beyond the service year.

Working with volunteers to organize, coordinate and implement activities identified by wellness coalitions and youth which build youth resiliency will be the primary role of the member. The interventions will be designed and evaluated to specifically increase youth: 1) cultural identity; and 2) positive, supportive relationships with adults or peers, following the logic model outlined below (and further described in Evidence Base).

\* Cultural Identity \* (extent to which someone connects to and practices the values, beliefs and traditions of their identified culture). Member service activities identified by previous AmeriCorps communities to increase youth cultural identity have included: traditional dancing/singing; language revitalization; traditional storytelling; fishing, berry-picking or other subsistence food gathering; environmental activities which demonstrate the traditional value of taking care of the land; classes on traditional recipes and food preparation; traditional tool, trap, and net making; beading, carving, sewing fur/skins, or mask making art; wilderness survival; and boating or ice safety. Additionally, members may assist in organizing a community-wide culture camp - a traditional gathering uniting the community for two or more days to celebrate and impart the cultural knowledge of traditional customs and values and may include many of the activities listed above.

For example, the community of Huslia's wellness coalition prioritized revitalization of dog mushing to connect youth to their heritage, while tapping into the skills of retired Alaska Sports Hall of Fame dog racing champion and Athabascan Indian George Attla, who resides there. AmeriCorps member Kathy Turco (2013-2015) served with Attla to engage 70% of local youth in mushing. She worked with school administrators to integrate veterinary science and mushing into middle/high school math and science classes. Attla, and volunteers mobilized by Turco, taught the youth dog care, wilderness safety and mushing, and engaged youth mentors in teaching younger children the same skills. As a result, a Huslia youth won the 2014 Junior North American Sled Dog Championship, and many other youth are practicing the mushing tradition. This program is now being modeled in neighboring communities. ([www.murkowski.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=ak-education-success](http://www.murkowski.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=ak-education-success))

Cultural Identity Outcome: As a result of the YSP, 325 youth are expected to engage in at least 20 activities each during the member year (output). Of these, 80%, or 260 youth, are expected to show an increase in cultural knowledge (short-term outcome) and 60%, or 195 youth, are expected to demonstrate an increase in the application of cultural skills or practices (long-term outcome).

\* Supportive Relationships \* (between adults or peers). Service activities identified by communities to increase supportive relationships between youth and adults or peers have included:

## Narratives

providing a regular, safe meeting space for youth; promoting community service and youth-led activities to build a peer and adult support network; engaging Elders (seniors exemplifying Native values), parents, and volunteers in activities to provide opportunities for intergenerational connection; and members making themselves available to youth outside of scheduled activities. For example, to support the service of AmeriCorps member Wilma Bell (2013-present), Hooper Bay's wellness coalition refurbished an abandoned building to serve as a youth center. Bell mobilized a team of Elders to run a daily, afterschool youth program at the center. The Elders teach traditional dancing/singing and subsistence food gathering skills to the 45 youth that participate regularly. The youth have established the community's first-ever Yupik dance troupe, touring regionally. Wellness coalition members have mentored youth to create a youth council, which now oversees the activities of the center. To increase connection to their parents, youth council members are educating the tribal council as to the effect that the nightly adult bingo hall has on reducing time with their parents in the evenings and on holidays, for consideration as the tribal council regulates bingo hall operations and openings. As a result of AmeriCorps in Hooper Bay, youth-adult relationships have been strengthened, and parents are reporting increases in their children's grades, self-confidence and drug-free living.

Supportive Relationships Outcome: Overall, 325 youth are expected to engage in at least 20 activities each during the member year (output). Of these 80%, or 260 youth, are expected to show an increase in the number of supportive relationships (short-term outcome) and 60%, or 195 youth, are expected to demonstrate an increase in the usage of their supportive relationships (long-term outcome).

Interventions, such as those above, identified and designed by each program consortium community to build cultural identity and supportive relationships, will contribute to the short and long term outcomes described above and the end outcome of increased resiliency to prevent youth substance abuse and suicide. This is based both on empirical evidence (see below) and 10,000 years of evidence-informed practices of the Alaska Native people. Short-term and long-term outcomes will be measured through the use of a pre/post Likert scale survey to be designed by professional evaluators with expertise in youth resiliency.

Members will host at least two youth engagement activities per week. At minimum, members will provide 86 significant youth engagement opportunities (2 per week x 10 months, given two months for training, activity planning, and leave) throughout their service year which involve youth in culture or supportive relationships. Interventions will range in duration, frequency, and dosage dependent upon identified needs, and resources. Most opportunities will span the course of several

## Narratives

hours, such as afterschool activities or weekly youth groups; however, cultural camps and other interventions such as wellness and healing conferences, may span an extended period of time.

Volunteers will be recruited locally by members, and will be central to YSP implementation. Volunteers will assist by participating in wellness coalitions and assisting the member to organize/host interventions, conduct outreach to youth and adults to participate in events, generate resources, and gather feedback for evaluation.

In addition, members may occasionally participate in an independent service activity unrelated to the above youth development goals that members may develop and/or execute on their own or with the community. Any such activities will be allowable under CNCS rules, approved by the RurAL CAP program coordinator, and amount to less than 10% of service hours verified by the local supervisor or another appropriate supervisor trained in AmeriCorps regulations, the reporting of service hours and allowable/prohibited activities. This is to allow flexibility to further engage members in the community and respond to unique service needs.

AmeriCorps members, recruited locally from the communities they serve, are a highly effective means for building youth resiliency and preventing substance abuse and suicide in rural Alaska. AmeriCorps offers remote, rural Alaskan communities with very few or no people/infrastructures working on this priority issue a valuable resource for community change. With their one year, 1,700 hour commitment, members can make a tremendous impact in a community of 200-750 people. During the course of a year, members have the opportunity to involve ALL community residents, youth, and organizations in activities that reduce youth substance abuse and suicide. This role also provides members with the ability to deeply engage a significant portion, if not all, of local youth in healthy activities. In these remote, isolated communities, the result of 260 youth (or more than 10 per community) achieving the short or long term projected outcomes can have a substantial, community-wide impact influencing other youth, family members and decision-makers.

The YSP member offers a unique contribution in increasing local capacity to address critical needs. In addition to building the capacity of wellness coalitions, the member's partnership with BHAs will expand and strengthen BHA's substance abuse/suicide prevention services. Given the high rates of behavioral health issues in rural Alaska, BHAs are often overwhelmed with providing crisis intervention services and are unable to dedicate sufficient, if any, time to prevention. AmeriCorps members, with their focus on volunteer generation, are ideally suited to fill this void.

Locally recruited members are particularly effective in meeting the targeted need. Through their intimate knowledge of the community culture, youth needs, and resources, members utilize the

## Narratives

program's valuable training and support to quickly become effective change agents. Meaningful time can then be devoted to building capacity and service activities, increasing sustainability. The AmeriCorps focus on community engagement is consistent with core values of Alaska Native cultures, evidenced by the large number of volunteers and volunteer hours generated by 15 BIRCH members - 1,985 volunteers and 9,871 service hours in 2012. This powerful combination can lead to lasting community and individual change long after the AmeriCorps program has ended.

EVIDENCE BASE: The Youth Success Program aims to address the high rates of youth substance abuse and suicide in rural Alaska through increasing resiliency and its protective factors. Five decades of research have demonstrated that resiliency, the ability to "bounce-back" and overcome challenges, is associated with reductions in numerous youth risk behaviors including substance use, suicide, delinquency, and school failure. Researchers have agreed upon a common set of 25 protective factors within the individual, family, community, and society/culture that contribute to resiliency (Goldstein, S. Brooks, R. Eds. Handbook of Resilience in Children, 2013).

The YSP aims to focus on increasing two of the most relevant protective factors contributing to resiliency for the target population: cultural identity and supportive adult relationships. Among indigenous populations these factors are synergistic: cultural values, knowledge, and traditional skills were passed from one generation to the next through mentoring, storytelling, and supportive relationships. Experimental and longitudinal studies of demographically similar indigenous populations (Native Hawaiian and American Indian youth) provide a moderate level of evidence that the proposed interventions will lead to an increase in resiliency thereby decreasing substance use/suicide.

\* Cultural Identity \* Culture may be defined as the, "sum total of ways of living including values, beliefs, traditions, protocols, rituals, language, behavioral norms, ways of knowing, and styles of communication" (US DHHS. To Live to See the Great Day that Dawns: Preventing Suicide by American Indian and Alaska Native Youth and Young Adults. SAMHSA, 2010). Numerous studies have underscored the importance of cultural teachings to the health and wellbeing of Alaska Native/American Indian youth (U.S. D.H.H.S. To Live to See the Great Day that Dawns: Preventing Suicide by American Indian and Alaska Native Youth and Young Adults. SAMHSA, 2010), (Goldstein, S. Brooks, R. Eds. Handbook of Resilience in Children, 2013), (Yu. M.S. Culture and environment as predictors of alcohol abuse/dependence symptoms in American Indian youths, 2007.) Research suggests, "the most resilient Native youth are those who are culturally and spiritually grounded" (Goodkind et. al. Promoting Healing and Restoring Trust: Policy Recommendations for Improving

## Narratives

Behavioral Health Care for American Indian/Alaska Native Adolescents. Society for Community Research and Action, 2010).

LaFromboise (attached) studied 212 American Indian 5-8th grade students, living on or near reservations in the upper Midwest United States. She found enculturation, the participation in traditional activities and identification with Native culture, to be the strongest predictor of higher levels of resilience. In addition, when students from high-risk families developed high levels of resilience, it increased their ability to adjust and cope with inconsistency and adversity (pg. 196). While her study examined several predictors (factors) of resilience, the strongest predictor was enculturation, demonstrating strong evidence that engagement in traditional culture may lead to positive outcomes for youth (pgs. 203-204).

\* Supportive Relationships \* Werner's longitudinal research (attached) studied 698 babies born on the Hawaiian island of Kauai in 1955. Werner found that one third of the babies lived with families who experienced four or more risk factors. Her research followed these children from birth through adulthood, exploring an array of risk and protective factors and their impact on development and resilience across the life-span. The Kauai Longitudinal Study is the only study to examine human development from birth through midlife among an indigenous population undergoing rapid cultural change. For this reason, Werner's research was selected as convincing support for the YSP.

Youth from the high risk group, who reported having supportive, trusting adults, were more likely to not have serious learning, health, or behavioral problems in adolescence, and grew to become thriving adults despite their history of hardship. The supportive adults were much like "surrogate" parents - grandparents, elder mentors, youth leaders, and church members. Further, this study found that the single act of opening up opportunities - to develop healthy relationships, engage in community or cultural activities - was in and of itself a catalyst for high-risk individuals to become successful adults.

\* Alaska Native Emerging Resiliency Studies \* There is an emerging base of protective factor and resiliency research from specific tribes in Alaska. While the research may not be fully generalizable across all Alaskan tribes, the findings, in conjunction with the research cited above, provide secondary evidence for the Youth Success Program's model of delivery.

Lisa Wexler interviewed Inupiaq youth ages 11-18 in northwest Alaska to better understand the challenges they face and learn what practices and resources they rely on to overcome adversity (Wexler, L. Lived Challenges and Getting Through Them: Alaska Native Youth Narratives as a Way to Understand Resilience, 2014). Two strategies, cited by students, are of particular relevance:

## Narratives

Developing/maintaining relationships with others and practicing subsistence skills of living off the land.

Allen and Mohatt developed a prevention model based on protective factors identified by Yupik community members, from selected southwestern communities. This research represents the first empirical test of a model of protective factors for Alaska Native people (Allen, J. et al. A Protective Factors Model for Alcohol Abuse and Suicide Prevention Among Alaska Native Youth, 2014). Their research studied model interventions on 413 rural Alaska Native youth ages 12-18. This prevention model included providing youth opportunities for community involvement, fostering relational supports within families, and facilitating strategies to aid youth in seeking out family and friends in times of stress. Findings from this research show that these interventions are significant in the prevention of youth substance abuse and suicide.

The YSP will use the research-based High/Scope processes to ensure best-practice-delivery methods when members are working directly with youth. The High/Scope training provides instruction on adolescent development, resiliency theory, and specific interaction strategies to increase youth engagement, learning, and support (Smith, C. et al. Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study, 2012).

Additionally, the former BIRCH program, for which the YSP is partly modeled, has achieved documented impacts for youth. In 2010, 98% of youth engaged regularly in youth group sessions (at the time, a secondary member activity) reported an increase in positive personal identity with 68% reporting increased social competencies. Data from the attached 2013 evaluation of BIRCH, the first year BIRCH focused program outcomes on youth, showed consistent improvements in youth developmental assets for the domains of social competency, community support, and boundaries and expectations. Please note that as part of RurAL CAP's continuous improvements in AmeriCorps program design, the methodology used and evaluated for BIRCH is different from those being proposed by the YSP.

**NOTICE PRIORITY:** The Youth Success Program will serve as a multi-focus intermediary for a consortium of tribal/city councils, non-profits, and schools in rural Alaska. For the last 20 years, RurAL CAP's AmeriCorps programs have partnered with these organizations to bring service opportunities to some of the most remote, under-resourced, and culturally unique corners of our nation that otherwise would not have the capacity or resources to benefit from AmeriCorps.

Consortium communities will be scattered throughout rural Alaska with potentially over a thousand miles between sites, and with tremendous geographic and cultural diversity among the

## Narratives

state's 227 distinct tribes. The consortium members will implement the Strategic Prevention Framework that allows community stakeholders to guide the program's interventions that are unique and relevant to each community. Through this flexible program, communities are able to self-direct their project and respond to youth substance abuse and suicide through culturally appropriate interventions. While all members will be serving under the CNCS Healthy Futures focus area, the program does serve two high priority, rural community needs of substance abuse AND suicide prevention. Please note that the NOFO's Glossary refers to addressing "a compelling community need or set of needs" through "proposed theory(ies) of change and program model(s)", inferring that one or more is acceptable.

As part of RurAL CAP's mission to serve low-income communities, the YSP will target consortium service sites in economically distressed communities which are communities where at least 70% of the population earns less than \$16,120 and less than 30% of working aged residents worked in all four quarters of the prior year. In the 2014 BIRCH program year, 14 of the 15 members served in "distressed" communities, as classified by the Denali Commission, an independent federal agency supporting infrastructure and economic development in rural Alaska. The host organizations are most often tribal councils that do not have organizational capacity to fund the match requirement of AmeriCorps or have the financial management capacity necessary to sustain an AmeriCorps program. On behalf of the partner sites, RurAL CAP leverages CNCS and match resources, provides member training and member and fiduciary oversight - all at no cost to consortium members. RurAL CAP's strong financial controls, program staff expertise, working relationships with rural Alaska, and our ability to leverage funds on behalf of the program make us an ideal umbrella organization to serve high need communities that otherwise would not be able to access AmeriCorps.

RurAL CAP annually recruits consortium sites through a competitive selection process in the fall. Attached to this application are all Memoranda of Understandings from current partner communities - similar agreements will be in place with all 25 program year 2015-16 communities. Consortium applications will be vetted based on need and capacity to reach program goals. RurAL CAP has successfully filled all member slots awarded to our AmeriCorps programs using this selection process. Consortium sites will collectively address needs and share promising practices, youth development strategies and problem solving through participation in regular teleconferences, program newsletters and training opportunities.

**MEMBER TRAINING:** Members will be trained through an orientation at the start of service and an in-service training approximately five months later. Member training will be designed with

## **Narratives**

input from host organizations, project partners, and current and former members. Members will be trained upon four core competencies: 1) the national AmeriCorps model, including prohibited activities; 2) theory of change; 3) the SPF process; and 4) youth engagement resources and tools, including High/Scope. Members will also receive training on working with wellness coalitions, volunteer recruitment and management strategies, project planning, leadership development, and more. Additional member training will be provided through on-going weekly team teleconferences, on-line opportunities for self-paced skill building, one-on-one training with staff and technical support partners, and staff site visits.

Members and their host site supervisors will be made aware of prohibited activities and rules during the recruitment process and orientation, where they receive a copy of the YSP AmeriCorps and RurAL CAP policy manuals. Members and supervisors will sign a participation agreement to abide by these policies. Project plans from members, weekly activity logs, monthly reports, communication with each site, and staff site visits will be used by supervisors and the program coordinator to review and monitor member and volunteers activities for prohibited activities and ensure any questionable activities are prevented and correctively addressed.

**MEMBER SUPERVISION:** Host communities will select a site supervisor, typically a staff member of the host organization, who provides daily on-site supervision of the member. The site supervisor commits to participating in training, conducting weekly meetings with the member, completing all required paperwork, and communicating monthly with the coordinators. RurAL CAP will provide training to all site supervisors at the beginning of the service year remotely through a PowerPoint module and accompanying teleconference. A post-test must be passed to ensure retention of key information: Member Supervision; AmeriCorps and RurAL CAP Policies and Procedures; Prohibited Activities; Reporting Requirements; Developing and Maintaining a Work Plan; Project Planning and Management; Civic Engagement; Leveraging Resources to Support AmeriCorps Projects; Conflict Resolution; and Training on Youth Engagement and Prevention.

Over the past 20 years, RurAL CAP has developed and refined a successful distance-delivery system to provide strong support to supervisors located across Alaska. Two full-time YSP coordinators, located in Anchorage, will work together to ensure members are following program rules and regulations, are not participating in prohibited activities, and have adequate support to successfully complete their service. The coordinators will be supervised by a manager who will monitor the coordinators diligence and success in meeting program goals and objectives.

**MEMBER EXPERIENCE:** In communities with a severe lack of educational and job

## Narratives

opportunities, the YSP offers valuable skill building, connection to national service, and professional and educational development, which would be otherwise unavailable. Previous RurAL CAP members, many of them qualifying as "Opportunity Youth", have gone on to use their education award and/or find local employment based on the professional development provided by AmeriCorps. This has provided a profound and life-change experience for so many RurAL CAP members. For example, Anna May Ferguson of Togiak (BIRCH, 2005-2007), unemployed prior to AmeriCorps, established a youth group engaging teens in positive, skill-building activities during her service. Following AmeriCorps, Ferguson used her education award towards a social services degree in Anchorage, then returned to Togiak to continue to support youth. On behalf of her tribal council, she wrote and received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to establish the Togiak UNITY (United Indian Tribal Youth) Youth Council. (UNITY is a national network organization promoting personal development, citizenship and leadership among Native American youth.) This grant and other leveraged resources has provided Ferguson with employment to this day to guide the Youth Council, which has become known across Alaska for its dynamic community initiatives and provides Togiak youth with yearly opportunities to present at national tribal events and conferences. Ferguson has also mentored two BIRCH members who have served under her guidance. This is just one example of the many powerful impacts AmeriCorps has had on rural Alaskan member participants. In addition, the collaboration with BHAs opens the opportunity for members to be mentored into a BHA position following service. This creates a powerful service experience that will contribute to member retention, increase community impact, and promote continued civic participation.

During training and support activities, RurAL CAP coordinators will create a sense of shared vision and purpose, and develop a member support network. By creating an esprit de corps, RurAL CAP has structured their AmeriCorps programs to ensure members feel like part of a collaborative team, despite the vast distances that separate their communities. RurAL CAP works closely with the other providers of similar services, including regional and state nonprofits, and tribal organizations to build a broader support network for members. To connect members with each other, participation in weekly group teleconferences will be required and members will be paired with 2nd year members as mentors. Members will be encouraged to reflect on and learn from their service through weekly reflection logs. YSP members will also plan/participate in three national days of service events to reinforce the esprit de corps. Members will help recruit, and as possible, partner together with RurAL CAP Foster Grandparent Volunteers who may be serving children in their same communities. When appropriate, members will be invited to join VISTA teleconference trainings and events, and will be

## **Narratives**

connected with other national service volunteers around Alaska.

**COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION:** At RurAL CAP's central office located in Anchorage, AmeriCorps signage is displayed, member photos and sites will be mapped, and news/media, updates and a program newsletter will be posted on the RurAL CAP website. YSP members will be instructed to follow similar branding and representation strategies; they will receive AmeriCorps apparel to wear during all service hours and signage for their work space. In accordance with prohibited/ unallowable activities, RurAL CAP staff will address the limits and restrictions of wearing and using AmeriCorps gear.

To ensure that members are aware they are AmeriCorps members, RurAL CAP will begin the service year with an orientation that outlines the national service model and civic engagement. Upon returning to their homes, members will be required to publicize their new role within their communities through hosting community events, presenting at tribal council meetings, making presentations at the local school, and posting flyers around the community.

### **Organizational Capability**

**ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING:** RurAL CAP is a statewide 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, established in 1965 "to empower low-income Alaskans through advocacy, education, affordable housing and direct services that respect our unique values and cultures." RurAL CAP builds capacity in partnership with communities through distance-delivery of quality services with the vision "Healthy People, Sustainable Communities, Vibrant Cultures". In FY 2013, RurAL CAP employed 950 Alaskans in 79 communities with a total annual budget of over \$41 million. One in four Alaskans in poverty participates in a RurAL CAP program.

The YSP benefits from six staff members at RurAL CAP; there are no vacant positions. Community Development Director, Cathie Clements, (supervised by Executive Director) will be responsible for YSP oversight: partnership building, monitoring compliance, accountability, reporting, and evaluation. She brings 20+ years of cross cultural community development experience in rural Alaska and Africa to the program, including 12 years administering AmeriCorps programs. Environmental Program Manager, Eric Milliken, (supervised by Director) will be responsible for project management: planning, staff supervision, fiscal management, monitoring, and reporting. An AmeriCorps alum, Mr. Milliken has six years of experience working with and managing AmeriCorps programs, and over five years of experience working with Native communities. AmeriCorps Coordinators, Charlie Ess and Sonia Vent (supervised by Manager), will coordinate day-to-day YSP activities: recruitment, enrollment, training, member and supervisor support, tracking outcomes, and

## Narratives

completing reports. Mr. Ess has coordinated AmeriCorps programming at RurAL CAP since 2007, and Ms. Vent since 2011. Statewide youth development leader, Amy Gorn, will provide technical training and skill development. She has lived and worked in rural Alaska, served with AmeriCorps, is a certified instructor for High/Scope Youth Development Methods. Budget Coordinator, Gloria Kelly has provided fiscal oversight and reporting for AmeriCorps programs since 2008 and has 14 years of grant administration experience.

Financial and programmatic orientation is provided to staff through training at the start of employment by the HR department and direct supervisor. Training and technical assistance is ongoing throughout employment. Training is based on RurAL CAP's policies and procedures manual which aligns with Office of Management and Budget circulars and other federal/state funding regulations. Staff working with AmeriCorps also use RurAL CAP's AmeriCorps Coordinator Handbook, approved by the State Service Commission. RurAL CAP uses a nationally recognized internal evaluation system to ensure projects are on target: Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA). ROMA aligns outcome measures with the agency's Applied Strategic Plan and results are reviewed quarterly. RurAL CAP also contracts with an independent evaluator to conduct program evaluations and comply with CNCS evaluation criteria.

In FY13, over 100 different sources of funding contributed to the annual agency budget of \$41M, demonstrating sound programmatic and fiscal oversight through successful agency audits. RurAL CAP has administered eight AmeriCorps and VISTA programs since 1994, and currently operates three, in addition to statewide administration of the Foster Grandparent Program. RurAL CAP is governed by a 24-member Board of Directors who support AmeriCorps programming by advertising positions, recognizing accomplishments, and building partnerships. RurAL CAP's eight FTE Accounting Department monitors funding and completes financial reports. The former BIRCH program, upon which the YSP is modeled, performed satisfactorily on its last audit and has a history of taking corrective action immediately upon notification of a concern from Serve Alaska or CNCS.

This program is built on input from communities and lessons learned from 10 years with BIRCH, including program evaluations, community needs assessments, memorandums with local service locations, and working with other partners. On the local level, coalitions will identify and guide interventions to be implemented through a youth program that focuses on cultural activities and supportive relationships, and is administered through a positive, structured environment, while on the program level, partner and community feedback will be used to strengthen and structure program management and decision making.

## **Narratives**

**COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** RurAL CAP's comprehensive system for monitoring compliance and accountability internally and at service locations has been refined since 1994, with input from Serve Alaska, CNCS, independent auditors, and outside reviewers. AmeriCorps rules, regulations, and prohibited activities will be described in the YSP Manual and reviewed with members during orientation and on an on-going basis through teleconferences, reports, and individual check-ins with coordinators. Compliance and accountability are ensured through staff review, training, site visits, and monitoring of activities and reports. The YSP will be governed by the annually-updated AmeriCorps Coordinator Handbook and YSP Manual. Members and supervisors will be required to participate in trainings, where they review prohibited activities and sign a contract agreement outlining duties, expectations, infraction consequences, and policies, as well as complete a prohibited activities test. Host organizations will complete a Memorandum of Agreement with the site supervisor, member, and RurAL CAP, which outlines the same details. Infractions will be prevented and detected by coordinator and site supervisor review and approval of proposed member activities during group teleconferences, individual check-ins, activity reports, and timesheets. Questionable activities will be identified and resolved immediately by program staff, site supervisors, and members. If members/sites are out of compliance, service will be suspended until corrective action is confirmed. Program staff will meet weekly to discuss progress and identify problems and solutions, responding to compliance concerns and conveying policy updates to sites promptly. Program files will be maintained at the central office.

**PAST PERFORMANCE FOR CURRENT GRANTEES AND FORMER GRANTEES:** During the last full program year, the former BIRCH program had 100% enrollment and 29.4% retention - a low retention year (70% retention is more typical) due to compelling personal circumstances or offers of employment, as members cope with a challenging economy. Attrition is often due to the challenging socio-economic conditions in rural Alaska, including high rates of poverty, substance abuse, domestic abuse, and suicide (Status of Alaska Natives 2004, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska, Anchorage). Members or their families may be at-risk for behavioral health challenges that can be an obstacle to member service. However, RurAL CAP will continue to enroll members that can increase their own personal capacity through the position, in addition to providing a significant community impact. In program year 2012, the former BIRCH program met all performance measurement targets. The program was restructured in program year 2013 to include an emphasis on youth outreach and engagement. During this time of adapting and learning from new measures, the program did not reach the performance measurement targets established. A corrective

## Narratives

action plan was immediately implemented to remedy program shortcomings and redefine program success. Results for the 2014 BIRCH program year are on target for meeting performance measures. RurAL CAP has not had any compliance issues during the last three years of program operations.

To increase retention, staff are enhancing member recruitment (to further increase the applicant pool), continuing to strengthen supervisor selection and support systems (recruitment and training/technical assistance), referring members to RurAL CAP's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for counseling services and resources, as needed, and exploring options for increasing the member stipend through increased partner support. The program contracted with an independent evaluator; feedback has been compiled to develop the new YSP model, and addresses improvements to member retention and meeting performance measurement targets. To address the retention rate, RurAL CAP has also decreased the number of service positions available. While this application represents an increase in the number of members as compared to the former BIRCH program, RurAL CAP has eliminated other programs, decreasing its total rural service members from 45 to 25, which will strengthen the applicant pool. In addition, the YSP includes an "Economic Opportunity" Performance Measure, to capture economically disadvantaged members who leave for employment.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

COST EFFECTIVENESS: Based on RurAL CAP's 20 years of experience adequately budgeting for the costs of similarly designed AmeriCorps programs, this budget is sufficient to administer the YSP effectively, while meeting performance measurements. CNCS's cost per member share for the YSP is \$13,930. Other than the current three years of funding for the BIRCH program which has been a fixed award grant, only allowing \$13,000/member, RurAL CAP has typically received about \$15,800 per member. Therefore, the \$13,930/member requested is a decrease.

The YSP addresses the high rate of substance abuse and suicide in rural Alaska through prevention. In 2010, substance abuse cost the Alaska \$1.2 billion (The Economic Costs of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse in Alaska, 2012 Update) and is among the most costly of health problems nationally. Rural communities are often isolated, have limited health services, and a wide array of contributing social issues. Prevention of youth substance abuse and suicide reduces the financial burden for medical services on already overburdened health clinics. Investing in community-based prevention services is cost effective and would reduce the amount of funds needed to treat substance abuse/suicide issues in rural Alaska.

RurAL CAP has a consistent history of fulfilling matching and leveraging requirements. In addition to CNCS funds, the program needs \$457,459. Non-CNCS resources obtained for the 2015-16

## Narratives

program year include: 1) RurAL CAP's annual Community Service Block Grant funding (\$210,457 for YSP); 2) \$97,977 leveraged from the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services Tobacco Prevention and Control grant; 3) Communities are cash-poor but dedicate substantial in-kind contributions (local site supervisor time, member office space/supplies, and access to phone, fax, internet); 5) RurAL CAP covers over \$20,000 in unmet indirect. RurAL CAP's 4 FTE Development Department has a 93% success rate when submitting funding applications and will be submitting at least two applications to identified funders for remaining YSP funding this winter. Pending the result of these requests, any additional program funds will be secured over the course of the next 12-15 months, or budget gaps will be filled by agency resources. With an operating budget between \$34-40M, primarily from state and federal grants and private foundations, RurAL CAP exhibits the capacity to effectively meet this target.

\*SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR COST EFFECTIVENESS\*: RurAL CAP does not request a waiver on match or an exception on cost per MSY. The justification for requesting the maximum cost per member is based on the reality of maintaining an effective program in resource-poor, high-cost communities. The YSP will serve a difficult to reach, underserved, primarily Alaska Native population. The difficulty and expense of travel (tickets from rural communities to Anchorage typically exceed \$800) contributes to the high cost of supporting rural members. YSP members receive a living allowance of \$1,200 per month and live in rural communities where a gallon of milk can be as high as \$12.00 (cost of living up to 39% above the U.S. average). Fuel costs are significantly higher in rural Alaska than Anchorage, where residents pay as much as \$10.00/gal. The weekly cost for food for a family of four with children ages 6-11 is \$336.85, more than double that of Anchorage (State of Alaska, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Alaska Economic Trends, July 2014).

BUDGET ADEQUACY: Three types of funds support the YSP. 1) CNCS covers primarily staff and fringe, a portion of member stipends and fringe, member travel, FBI checks, and site visits at \$348,249. 2) RurAL CAP has leveraged \$308,434 in match funding, that covers additional staff and fringe, member stipends and fringe, in-service training, and supplies. Of this, \$97,977 is cash match from the State of Alaska, Dept. of Health and Social Services and \$210,457 is cash match from RurAL CAP's annual Community Service Block Grant. An additional \$149,025 will be leveraged before the start of the program. 3) The third type of support (not listed in budget or tracked as official match) includes in-kind contributions or funds that covers local site supervision, office space, supplies, and additional training and staff support. The overall budget of \$805,708 adequately funds the essential staffing, training, and operational support required to accomplish YSP program activities.

# Narratives

## Evaluation Summary or Plan

Youth Success Program AmeriCorps members will engage community youth in activities designed to enhance connection to their culture, and increase the amount of peers and adults that they can turn to when they are stressed. Cultivating cultural knowledge and increasing supportive relationships in Alaska Native Youth through 'developing and maintaining relationships with others, and continuing to practice subsistence living...has been show to develop the youth's self-reliance' (Waxler, 2014).

The program will collect baseline data from participant youth using a pre-participation survey focused on the identified cultural connection and supportive relationship developmental assets. In the fourth quarter of the program year, post-intervention surveys will be completed with at least 80% of the youth who attend 20 meetings or activities which has been set as the minimum participation dosage that will effect positive change. The YSP coordinators will compile the data from the pre and post surveys and use the data collected to report on performance metrics to CNCS. The reported measures will be the number of youth who show a measurable increase in their knowledge of cultural skills and the number of youth who report an increase in their supportive relationships.

An independent evaluation was commissioned by RurAL CAP during the current BIRCH grant period, and RurAL CAP will solicit a new independent evaluation for this award. While the performance metrics will focus on short/long term outcomes, the independent evaluator will respond to two research questions: Did participant YSP youth increase their supportive relationship usage? Did youth show a measurable increase in connection to culture? The evaluator will conduct a cohort study on participant youth from the 2016 program year. The evaluation will focus on data analysis of the completed pre and post surveys, and random telephonic interviews with participant youth. To ensure a meaningful evaluation and an adherence to scientific principles the evaluator must hold a post graduate degree in either the social or health sciences, have experience conducting studies with the Alaska Native population, and have a history of completing program evaluations for the non-profit or government services field. The estimated cost of contracted evaluator time is \$4,000, which will be paid from agency matching funds.

## Amendment Justification

N/A

## Clarification Summary

Programmatic Clarification Items

## Narratives

1. Please describe the role volunteers will play in the program's intervention.

Volunteers will be a critical component of program delivery for the Youth Success AmeriCorps Program. The essential function of the program is to engage youth in healthy activities, in order to increase youth connection to culture and supportive relationships which will lead to an increase in resiliency

The program volunteers are recruited locally and assist program implementation by participating in wellness coalitions, assisting the member organize and host interventions, conducting outreach to youth and adults to participate in events, generating resources, and gathering feedback for evaluation. The volunteer participation directly helps foster intergenerational cultural knowledge transfer and increase the number of adults that youth participants can turn to when they need help. The volunteerism also helps increase community buy-in and engagement in the programs.

In Hooper Bay, for instance, volunteers attend almost every youth group session. Volunteers engage the youth in making traditional crafts, in building animal traps and nets, in skinning and tanning hides, and story-telling in the Yupik language. The volunteer-led youth activities vary from community to community but the knowledge transfer is essential for program success. The community elders are the keepers of cultural knowledge and their participation in the program is essential for cultural knowledge to transfer between generations.

In addition to community volunteers supporting the youth group, the youth participants themselves volunteer in support of their community. During community based volunteer service projects, AmeriCorps members host volunteer events to serve their community that are well attended by participant volunteers. The volunteer events are a chance to build youth skill sets while instilling a spirit of service among participant youth.

2. Please describe how the applicant will train and adequately prepare the supervisor to manage AmeriCorps members.

Site supervisors are employees of the host agency that receives an AmeriCorps member placement. The site supervisors are both vetted ahead of the service year, and trained at the front end of the service year by the RurAL CAP program coordinator. Through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), the supervisor commits to participate in training, and to provide weekly (if not daily) meetings with

## Narratives

the AmeriCorps member. The site supervisor participates in the member recruitment process and is interviewed and vetted by RurAL CAP staff. The purpose of this process is two -old, one to set the clear expectation of what supervising an AmeriCorps member entails, and to ensure that the member will have access to high quality supervision with a supervisor that is bought in to their service year.

Once sites and supervisors are identified, RurAL CAP hosts an electronic webinar to train the host site supervisors in the beginning of the program year. The supervisor training webinar covers the history and mission of AmeriCorps, the history of RurAL CAP's AmeriCorps programs, prohibited activities, strategies for supervising members, and where to go to for help. Site supervisors then take a quiz to ensure that they understand their role and that the training will result in practical application of knowledge. Site supervisors are provided a supervisor manual that is updated annually. This manual contains reference material, updated program standards, and member support strategies.

The AmeriCorps program coordinator is in constant contact with site supervisors in addition to the required trainings, the program coordinator will reinforce program needs and provide technical assistance. There is phone contact with each site supervisor on at least a monthly basis. In addition to one-on-one support, the program coordinator will host a quarterly supervisor webinar that covers best practices, member support, and AmeriCorps program requirements to ensure that site supervisors are well equipped to be the first line of support for program members.

### D. Strategic Engagement Slots

1. What percentage of your slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities? What is your program's plan, if any, for outreach and recruitment of member of the disability community?

Each Fall, RurAL CAP engages in a state-wide annual recruiting campaign for AmeriCorps members and host organizations. The recruiting campaign includes targeted emails, radio spots, web advertisement, printed materials through the mail and available at conferences, and interviews with print and TV media outlets. All of the application and recruitment materials will encourage people with disabilities to apply for service positions through the Youth Success Program.

The Youth Success Program requires that members are able to host regular youth gatherings, be

## Narratives

public representatives for the program and AmeriCorps, report on their progress, and recruit and support volunteers. The essential functions of the member position make for a very inclusive position description that can accommodate people with disabilities. In past program years, the program has invested in training and supporting members who have barriers to service such as: computer illiteracy, a lack of professional skills, people with childcare needs, and poor English literacy and reading comprehension. The Youth Success Program is equipped to provide reasonable accommodations for people experiencing a disability and would welcome and support the service of people with disabilities.

2. No additional slots are requested at this time.

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:

1. No additional slots are requested at this time.

OTHER:

Performance Measure Clarification

As per guidance from Serve Alaska (Alaska's State Service Commission), the reference to youth attending a minimum of 20 learning experiences as a criteria for the Performance Measure Output and Outcomes has been removed - because an impact should not be contingent on the number of events the youth attend, but by the overall change in connection to culture or supportive relationships achieved (regardless of the number of education sessions attended). With the removal of this criteria, the estimated Output has increased from 325 to 400 clients (youth) participating in health education programs.

As per guidance from Serve Alaska, the instrument to measure the Outcome has been modified from a pre/post test survey to an impact evaluation survey administered to regularly participating youth at least twice (mid-way and at the end of the member's year of service). This will improve the program's ability to collect data, evaluate program impact and meet performance targets due to challenges in tracking new youth participation and collecting pre-surveys from youth who join program activities at

## **Narratives**

varying times during the members service year or whose participation is episodic, and challenges collecting post-tests from youth or who discontinue their participation before the end of the member service year, or when a member does not complete service.

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A

### **Grant Characteristics**