

Narratives

Executive Summary

The Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District (SMPDD), specifically the Workforce Development Division, will have 27 AmeriCorps members serving in two counties of the Twin Districts Workforce Area. All of the AmeriCorps members will receive skills training in the construction field and will apply their acquired skills to repair and rehabilitate 20 homes of economically disadvantaged families in Forrest and Lamar counties. Ten of the 27 corps members will be full-time members. These 10 members will be recruited primarily from graduates of the Mississippi (MS) National Guard Youth Challenge Academy which targets at risk high school dropout youth ages 16-18 years old. In addition to housing repairs the full-time members will also be engaged in one-on-one personal development of an Education/Career Pathway Plan for their educational advancement beyond the high school equivalency diploma. They will register for a college course prior to or within 30 days of completing their AmeriCorps term of service.

The SMPDD Program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of Housing and Find Opportunity under the Economic Opportunity National Performance Measures. The CNCS investment of \$232,121.00 will be matched with \$104,563.00 in private partner and agency funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM/NEED.

HOUSING: Inadequate and substandard housing conditions are a major problem in the greater Hattiesburg area. This issue has been years in the making as the population ages. Elderly and disabled citizens on fixed incomes cannot afford the required maintenance and regular repair costs associated with home ownership. The problem was worsened when Forrest and Lamar counties were hit by three successive federally declared natural disasters: Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Hurricane Isaac in 2012 and an EF4 tornado in February 2013. In the City of Hattiesburg alone, which has less than 50,000 total residents, approximately 4,500 had severe housing problems and needs prior to the February 2013 tornado. Of that 4,500, 50% of them had 0%-30% of the area median income (1). Many of these citizens are elderly and/or disabled on fixed incomes, unemployed and/or underemployed. Forrest County has a poverty rate of 25.84% and per capita income of \$18,374. Lamar County has a poverty rate of 13.82% and per capita income of \$23,773. Mississippi has a poverty rate of 21.41% and per capita income of \$19,534. The United States has a poverty rate of 15.9% and per capita income of \$27,884. (2). The tornado hit more than 1,400 homes, either severely damaging or destroying them. This figure added to the already dire situation for the 4,500 residents

Narratives

who had severe housing problems prior to this disaster. The community at large came together along with the local disaster recovery agency and others to assist those without insurance or FEMA funds in recovering. There remains a waiting list with more than 200 families in Forrest and Lamar counties who continue to need home repairs or rebuilds. These families' situations have all been vetted and validated by our housing partners; they are just waiting for the miracles to happen in their lives. One of the major lessons learned after Hurricane Katrina was the longer it takes a community to take action to repair damaged homes, the worse the home becomes. Eventually, this delay can cause further, if not complete, deterioration and decay. The combined and sustained construction work of 27 AmeriCorps members can help to restore 20 of those homes.

(1) City of Hattiesburg 2013-2017 Consolidated Plan, January 1, 2013 December 31, 2017, City of Hattiesburg, MS Department of Federal and State Programs, Community Development Division.

(2) U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005-2009 5 Year Estimates.

FIND OPPORTUNITY. Young adults, in general, and those who have already dropped out of traditional high school, in particular, or who do not have educational aspirations beyond a high school diploma/or its equivalent, will enter into the work world unprepared. The graduates of the Mississippi National Guard Youth Challenge Academy are susceptible to regressing to nonproductive behavior if they lack transitional support post-graduation. The SMPDD AmeriCorps framework provides a structured program including daily professional and positive adult interaction and supervision. These activities reinforce the concepts that Youth Challenge graduates learned during the residency phase of the Youth Challenge program.

The June 2011 study of Megan Millenky and Dan Bloom concluded the following for enhancing the sustainability of what the residency phase gave these graduates: The next step for Challenge should be to experiment with ways to enhance the Post residential Phase of the program to offer participants continuing support when they return home to their communities and stronger connections to colleges and vocational training and jobs programs. With unemployment rates high for everyone, those without advanced training and schooling are at greater risk of spending a lifetime being either unemployed or underemployed. Forrest County has an unemployment rate of 6.8% and a workforce participation rate of 62.8%. Lamar County's unemployment rate is 5.6% and a workforce participation rate of 64.16% Mississippi has an unemployment rate of 7.3% and a workforce participation rate of 59.78%. The United States has an unemployment rate of 5.5% and a workforce participation rate of 63.8%. The relationship between educational attainment and economic security is strong, and a growing number of Mississippi jobs require some form of post-secondary education.

Narratives

Earning wages sufficient for a family's economic security also increasingly requires college coursework. Many families encounter poverty because they are unable to access jobs with quality wages. In Mississippi, 255,000 adults over 18 years old are in jobs paying \$9.70 per hour or less. In comparison, families of four need \$10.73 per hour just to reach the federal poverty level. Adults with an associates degree or some college earn \$10,900 more per year than those without a high school diploma (4).

Our program will address this need by recruiting 10 MS Youth Challenge graduates to become AmeriCorps members thus providing the bridge they need from Youth Challenge to advanced education beyond high school equivalency. Our purpose in pursuing the Find Opportunity performance measure is due to the large unmet need in Mississippi for youth who need a sustained, focused and structured program that will aid them in preparing for the present and future work opportunities in this state. Lieutenant Colonel King, MS Youth Challenge Director, supports this initiative and states that it really should be available state-wide given that the Academy enrolls attendees from the entire state of MS and adjoining states. The program will provide sustained individualized coaching and assistance by helping them learn about careers and teaching them how to develop a plan to attain their goals. They will enroll in course work beyond the GED after completing the AmeriCorps program.

(3) Bloom, Dan, Megan Millenky, Dan Bloom, Sara Muller-Ravett, Joseph Broadus, 2011. Staying on Course Three-Year Results of the National Guard Youth Challenge Evaluation. New York: MDRC

(4) MEPC Repaving the Road to College-Readiness. 2012

THEORY OF CHANGE.

HOUSING: The way to get more homes repaired or rehabilitated is to secure more manpower to put more workers hands in motion. By partnering with established local housing non-profits: Habitat for Humanity, a local church whose mission work is repairing homes for their elderly neighbors and church members, and a disaster recovery agency, our 27 corps members will be trained in construction skills and work with each of the listed entities to assist them in decreasing their waiting lists of well over 200 households in Forrest and Lamar counties. These corps members, once trained, will be a tremendous workforce for these needy non-profit agencies who depend primarily on volunteers to advance their work. The corps members will not duplicate, displace or supplant any employee of the partner agencies we work with. The corps member's impact will be greater, because they will be working with seasoned community leaders who know how to get things accomplished. All of the corps members will perform hands-on construction work. Some of them will have the

Narratives

opportunity to meet directly with the families, establishing a rapport with the family, talking with them about the construction work and progress. This interaction has a two-fold purpose. First, it serves to connect the corps members' experience and service with the family that will have their home repaired. One of the greatest benefits of community engagement is getting to know the stories behind the faces and the numbers. Second, it will also give the corps members hands-on experience with communicating with others and learning the skill of listening and responding to needs appropriately. The length of the AmeriCorps program lends itself to corps members really getting to know the community, allowing them to become a part of it. These corps members will make a significant contribution in decreasing the existing waiting list for houses needing repairs by repairing 20 homes and thus changing the lives of 20 individual families within our most vulnerable low-wealth communities. The reduced half-time members will also spend time out in the greater Hattiesburg community making presentations to community and professional groups to recruit community volunteers to assist in the repair projects and in planning and recruiting for the CNCS National Service Day projects.

FIND OPPORTUNITY: Our purpose in pursuing an AmeriCorps Program where one-third of our members meet the criteria under this national priority is based on the fact that the state of MS has a large unmet need with many youth who have no viable path to follow that prepares them for obtaining a job that will provide a sustainable living wage. Many, if not all of them, will be low-wealth individuals who were given a second chance to restart their life by enrolling in the MS National Guard Youth Challenge Academy. Graduates of the Academy need programs where they can continue the momentum they have started at Youth Challenge that have structure and a support system to continue to prepare them with skills and knowledge beyond the secondary education level. In addition to their work in the community repairing houses, these 10 corps members will be engaged in a self-development program which will lead to their enrollment in a post-secondary educational venue after completing their AmeriCorps Program year. Moreover, these 10 corps members will be informed during recruitment that they must be prepared to make a commitment which will require obligating 165 - 170 hours a month to the AmeriCorps Program to meet both their community engagement requirements and participate in their personal self-growth activities which are designed to help them identify and achieve their educational and career goals. They will participate in the following series through our local community college partner:

Education Connections Series: Pearl River Community College provides an overview of educational and training opportunities in a hands-on multi-session program that helps future students

Narratives

to research education and career pathways, taking the first steps toward the obtainment of a degree or certificate in a high-demand career field. The learning objectives of the Education Connections program include the identification of nineteen career clusters, locating information regarding educational and training requirements for at least five career pathways, identifying the steps to college and training enrollment, understanding federal student financial aid and other award programs and setting career goals. The series is presented over six one-hour sessions.

Building Success: Pearl River Community College provides a survival guide for academic and vocational success in this interactive workshop series that helps current and future college students learn how to use proven tools to achieve their goals in school and beyond. The learning objectives of Building Success include understanding the fundamentals of planning, setting goals, charting progress, identifying and implementing time-management strategies, naming multiple study skills strategies and building a personal student/career portfolio. The series is presented over six one-hour sessions.

They will also receive presentations from workforce professionals from our community partners at the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, who will give them insight into current and future job opportunities and share with them the educational requirements for those jobs. The program staff will also link them with a community mentor/coach and/or volunteers to participate in job shadowing and other direct methods of getting them fully engaged with preparing for their future. They will be exposed to resources that can assist them in preparing for standardized tests required to pursue the level of advanced schooling for the career path they select. By the end of the program year they will have put in an application for enrollment in a post-secondary course of study.

EVIDENCE BASE.

PRE-PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE:

HOUSING INTERVENTION: South Mississippi has seen its share of natural disasters over the past 9 years. Forrest and Lamar Counties are located in the Pine Belt Region. This region has experienced 2 hurricanes and one tornado, all of which have been federally declared disasters. After the massive devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Pine Belt region realized it had to take bold steps to recover from Katrina and be ready for future occurrences. The community came together and created a non-profit long term disaster recovery agency. That agency has taken the lead in recovery efforts that always hit the most vulnerable residents the hardest. Extensive disaster case management data confirm that these are the elderly and the disabled residents who live on small fixed incomes. The area also includes single parent households where the parent works but does not earn

Narratives

wages sufficient to live day-to-day and recover from unanticipated disasters. After Hurricane Katrina more than 1,600 families were assisted in the Pine Belt Region by local community, statewide and out-of-state volunteers. Previous AmeriCorps team members from throughout the nation assisted the community in those efforts. More than 400 homes were repaired; 12 new homes were rebuilt and gifted to the families, all of whom fell below the poverty level. This history was repeated again for Hurricane Isaac and the February 2013 tornado. A low-wealth community cannot recover rapidly or otherwise, without numerous willing hands to help out. More than 100 homes have been repaired in Forrest and Lamar counties since February 2013 by the community at large. However, there are still more homes to repair and time erodes these houses, making them unlivable. Unfortunately, families who have no place else to go continue to live in these substandard, unhealthy, unsafe homes. Twenty-seven AmeriCorps team members dedicated to working on repairing homes and restoring hope will make a significant difference in this community.

FIND OPPORTUNITY: Post-secondary education intervention: Millenky and Bloom reported in their "Staying on Course: Three-Year Results of the National Guard Youth Challenge Evaluation," June 2011 that high school dropouts face an uphill battle in the labor market that increasingly rewards skills and post-secondary credentials. Their study concluded that Youth Challenge graduates were more likely to obtain high school equivalency and to have earned college credits than their counterparts who do not complete school. They further found that members of the program group were more likely to be employed at the time of the survey and that they earned 20% more than their control group counterparts. Finally, they concluded that the Youth Challenge graduates would be better prepared for the challenging labor market conditions if they had follow-on services available to provide more support and structure during the transition year. The AmeriCorps Program we are proposing for 10 full-time members is an ideal fit for these Youth Challenge graduates. Our program gives them construction training and work experience as they repair 20 homes in the community. It also gives them the support structure needed to explore additional career options, learn about themselves and get one-on-one assistance in enrolling in post-secondary schooling.

NOTICE PRIORITY:

This AmeriCorps Program proposal design specifically provides support and resources that contribute to the improved economic opportunity priority by engaging 27 AmeriCorps members in Economic Opportunity Performance Measure 04, Housing. While wearing the AmeriCorps logo, they will be engaged in repairing, rehabilitating and rebuilding 20 homes of low-wealth and low-income families. 10 of the 27 corps members, all of whom will be full-time members, will benefit from

Narratives

Economic Opportunity Performance Measure 014, Find Opportunity, Post-Secondary Preparation. Many, if not all of them, will be low-wealth individuals themselves who will be recruited from the Mississippi National Guard Youth Challenge Academy graduates. The state of MS has a large unmet need with youth who have no viable path to creating a life that prepares them for obtaining skills through education to pursue a career that will provide a job with a living wage. They will receive self-development and planning tools from our local community college partner to aid them in advancing their educational level beyond the high school diploma, which will culminate in their enrollment in a post-secondary course of their choosing after the program year ends.

MEMBER TRAINING:

All corps members will receive hands-on construction training in at least two or more construction skills by the Construction Supervisor of our partner housing agencies. This will be hands-on training conducted primarily on the construction site. Skills comprehension and remedial training will be observed and corrected immediately at the construction site by the supervisor.

All corps members will receive comprehensive orientation training to the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program from the Program Manager and the full-time Trainer/Assistant Manager.

Training for all corps members will include personal and professional skills development. Life after AmeriCorps training consisting of numerous things, i.e., resume writing, job interviewing, professional etiquette and appearance, arriving to work on time, having respect for authority, etc. Training as just described along with other training like conflict resolution, working with difficult people, the value of team work, being a good communicator and practicing critical thinking and problem-solving skills and others will be provided throughout the program year.

They will receive presentations from workforce professionals from our community partners at the Mississippi Department of Employment Security, who will give them insight into current and future job opportunities and share with them the educational requirements for those jobs.

All other training will be provided by the SMPDD AmeriCorps Trainer/Assistant Manager. The trainer will obtain all AmeriCorps Program rules, including prohibited activities. These will be presented during the program orientation, they will be posted prominently within the administrative building and each corps member will receive a personal copy of the rules and prohibited activities for their continued review.

The Program Manager will train the corps members in the proper delivery of their AmeriCorps story. This will enable them to engage the community through public speaking by sharing the AmeriCorps message and recruiting local future AmeriCorps candidates as well as volunteers for local

Narratives

AmeriCorps planned projects for CNCS directed National Service Days. After the initial concentrated training takes place, all other training will be on an as-needed basis throughout the program year.

MEMBER SUPERVISION.

All housing partner agency construction supervisors will be familiar with all AmeriCorps rules and prohibited activities prior to the arrival of the AmeriCorps members to their site. They will receive this training from the AmeriCorps staff at the beginning of the program year.

Partner agency supervisors provide direct, on-site supervision of AmeriCorps members and are the most important link in ensuring that SMPDD's AmeriCorps program is successfully implemented. They provide corps members with an orientation to their site and ensure that the corps members understand the sites' safety policies and procedures. They will also supervise all construction skills training given to the corps members. All construction sites will have a qualified supervisor on hand at all times to guide and support the corps members with their work.

Continuous interaction and feedback will take place between the AmeriCorps staff and the on-site supervisors with monthly meetings taking place to ensure that the corps members are receiving progress reviews on their training and work accomplishments. Also, the site supervisor, with any assistance needed from the staff, is responsible for monitoring the number of hours a corps member has served in order to verify corps member's eligibility for the education award.

Service hours will be maintained on a log provided by the AmeriCorps staff, filled out by the corps member, monitored by the site-supervisor and completed weekly with site-supervisor approval indicated by signing and dating the Activity Log. The Log will be submitted to the AmeriCorps staff by the corps members as detailed to them during the orientation and training.

The construction site supervisors will be provided the opportunity to request additional training or clarification of AmeriCorps rules and expectations on a continuous and on-going basis throughout the program year.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE.

SMPDD was awarded an AmeriCorps Planning Grant for 2014-2015. Therefore, the full-time AmeriCorps Program Specialist will have time from grant submission until funding notification to put together a quality and comprehensive training program for the corps members.

All corps members, once recruited and accepted into the program, will be welcomed and received personally by the Program Manager. Team building will start on the first day and continue throughout the program year. Starting in September 2015 after all full-time, half-time and as many of the reduced half-time members are enrolled, they will all come together to go through a day long

Narratives

team building exercise that will be facilitated by a local volunteer who has presented these workshops in the past. Throughout the program year, other prominent and well-respected community leaders will be recruited to provide motivational presentations and share their personal story of life and career success.

The 27 corps members will be divided into three teams. Each team will select a team leader and assistant team leader, which will change over the course of the program year, to allow everyone on the team the opportunity to have leadership experience. These teams will build the nucleus for all team member group activities designed to facilitate bonding and sharing reflections from their recommended "journaling" activity. The teams will meet once a month to participate in reflection time. All corps members will meet together, at a minimum, once a quarter. This time will allow the entire team to stay connected with each other and share their individual experiences. All meetings will be held at the AmeriCorps program office.

All corps members will gain skills in construction, punctuality, commitment to the team goals, adherence to work rules and standards and following directives. Most importantly they will each learn about the importance of team work and respect for your work colleagues.

All corps members will participate in all State AmeriCorps activities and they will be exposed to the National Programs and Objectives by the SMPDD AmeriCorps staff. Public speaking and presentation opportunities about AmeriCorps will reinforce the AmeriCorps ethos and work ethic. Working in the community will expose them to the importance of corporate citizenship.

The full time AmeriCorps members will be recruited from the MS National Guard Youth Challenge Academy. If all 10 positions cannot be filled from there, we will recruit through the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) Job Centers. The half time and reduced half time members will be recruited from the community at large. Hattiesburg is a Certified Retirement Community with an active Osher Lifelong Learning Institute chapter. Presentations and recruitment will take place there along with multiple professional retiree associations. Also, there is a substantial veterans population in Forrest and Lamar counties due to our close proximity to Camp Shelby, an Army National Guard Training post. These groups will be approached to engage the veterans population in continuing their service in the community. Finally, we have 2 universities and one community college in Hattiesburg where we will recruit as well.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION.

All AmeriCorps members will be thoroughly informed during the program orientation about the AmeriCorps National and State program. They will be given the history of the program and provided

Narratives

an understanding of the impact this program has had throughout the nation. They will have an opportunity to link their local service with National Goals and Objectives. They will be presented the local goals and then tested for comprehension of those goals and objectives to ensure complete understanding of what their service year will entail and how it relates to the state and national program.

Each corps member upon completion of the AmeriCorps contract will be presented with a lanyard to wear immediately to identify them as an AmeriCorps team member. They will each receive t-shirts with the AmeriCorps logo. They will be told of the importance of wearing those shirts on a daily basis when performing AmeriCorps service. The Program Manager and Trainer/Assistant Manager will both have and wear AmeriCorps gear daily. When the construction teams are on construction sites they will be provided an AmeriCorps sign to place in the yard of the job site to let the community know that AmeriCorps members are working in their community. The AmeriCorps logo will be included on our website and on all correspondence from the AmeriCorps Program staff. Finally, the administrative building that will house the AmeriCorps Program will have a prominent sign out front identifying it as a State AmeriCorps Program.

Organizational Capability

Southern MS Planning and Development District (SMPDD), founded in 1967, includes 15 counties and 38 municipalities. SMPDD has strong relationships with the local governments, economic development entities, and educational and community organizations within its district. The SMPDD board of directors, including local elected officials, private sector and educational representatives drives the agency's mission to "Change Lives and Improve Communities." SMPDD currently administers programs funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration, the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging, the Corporation for National and Community Service (Foster Grandparent Program), the Mississippi Division of Medicaid and the Mississippi Development Authority. SMPDD, as fiscal agent for the Twin Districts Workforce Area (TDWA) covering 24 counties, is part of Mississippi's Workforce Investment Network (WIN) and is responsible for the oversight and certification of 11 full-time WIN Job Centers. SMPDD has a strong financial history as a steward of more than \$21 million in current federal, state and private grant awards and \$50 million in disaster related funding, with clear third party audits yielding no material findings through the history of those programs.

SMPDD's desire to operate an AmeriCorps program is driven by the reputation and success of the

Narratives

AmeriCorps program, the compatibility of AmeriCorps goals with the SMPDD mission and the opportunity to enhance the lives of the program members and our communities through the evidenced-based interventions of our proposed program.

The key staff that will ensure the success of the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program are:

Leonard Bentz, Executive Director, SMPDD. Mr. Bentz has more than 10 years in leadership positions in the public sector having served as a public servant and elected official. He is the responsible authority for allocating funding to support the match portion of the AmeriCorps grant program.

Tee McCovey, Workforce Division Director. Mr. McCovey has more than 20 years experience in the workforce development field. As the Workforce Division Director he is the first approval authority for all proposed new programs and provides general oversight to all programs that fall under the Workforce Division purview.

Rebecca Brown, Workforce Development Manager. Ms. Brown has more than 10 years of oversight of federal grants and grant awards, leading programmatic financial and administrative efforts. The current AmeriCorps Program Specialist, and the future AmeriCorps Program, reports directly to Ms. Brown. She provides a wealth of federal grants knowledge and has an extensive workforce network.

Shari White, Fiscal and Programmatic Analyst. Ms. White has 25 years of experience with monitoring, reporting and managing accounts for state and federal grants. It is safe to say she has been personally involved with hundreds of grants over the years. She currently monitors and does the fiscal reporting for a Foster Grandparents Program and the AmeriCorps Planning Grant. Ms. White will be responsible for all required fiscal reports associated with the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program.

Sheila Varnado, AmeriCorps Program Specialist and retired Army Colonel. Ms. Varnado has 8 years total experience in the non-profit community sector. First, as the Manager of a Long Term Recovery Program and then Executive Director of the Long Term Recovery Agency. She was responsible for the oversight, monitoring and reporting on both federal and private foundation grants totaling more than 6 million dollars. Varnado is responsible for planning the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program and ensuring all coordination and resources are in place to begin the program September 1, 2015. Her personal knowledge of the AmeriCorps NCCC and FEMA Corps programs will be helpful in implementing the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program. She has used her non-profit network to establish partnerships for the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program and will continue to do so.

Under the AmeriCorps Program, SMPDD will hire a Program Manager and an Assistant Manager.

Narratives

The Program Manager must have a bachelor's degree or higher level of education and at least three years of experience in non-profit and/or grant administration including at least two years in a supervisory role. The Assistant Manager should have prior work experience in program administration and strong clerical and organizational skills. A candidate with an associate's degree or higher and previous experience as an AmeriCorps member is preferred.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

SMPDD leadership will ensure that all of the AmeriCorps policies, rules and regulations are available to the staff, read and adhered to. The SMPDD AmeriCorps Program Manager will take the lead on ensuring compliance. Prior to joining the AmeriCorps program and again at orientation, members will be provided with AmeriCorps policies, rules and regulations and they must acknowledge receipt and understanding of these materials. Should a problem occur, the Program Manager will take immediate corrective action appropriate to the infraction. This action will be followed up with conversations with the immediate supervisor and the State AmeriCorps Specialist. Procedures will be enhanced, when necessary, to ensure the infraction will not happen again. Exiting a member from the AmeriCorps program for non-compliance will only be recommended as a last resort per the AmeriCorps guidelines.

The SMPDD Program Manager is responsible for visiting and knowing what is going on at each of the work site locations. Any violations will be shared one-on-one with the relevant leadership partner agencies/sites and all others who serve in a leadership role for the AmeriCorps members. The corps members will also be made aware, in general terms, of the non-compliance issue so that they can help in ensuring it will not happen again.

The AmeriCorps rules and regulations, key portions, will be shared with the service site supervisors and monthly check-ins and monitoring will help to ensure that infractions will not occur. Should they occur, they will immediately be brought to the appropriate level supervisor for resolution and action. They will be a part of the leadership team to ensure we all remain on task and on track.

SMPDD uses both internal and external review procedures to ensure compliance with all programmatic guidelines and relevant statutory guidance. An independent third-party auditor provides comprehensive audit on an annual basis. Internally, SMPDD's employee manual outlines agency policies regarding personnel policies, conflicts of interest, procurement, grievances, and compliance with federal, state and local laws and regulations. All staff members are required to review the employee manual and a record of receipt and review is kept in employees' personnel files. SMPDD distributes financial duties to ensure adequate checks and balances within the financial

Narratives

system. SMPDD closely monitors its subcontractors for programmatic, performance, records, procedural and fiscal compliance and will apply the same review procedures to the AmeriCorps program. Monitoring reviews are conducted for the year in progress. Monitoring records will be kept on file in the SMPDD Hattiesburg office and will be available for review by the granting agency.

Dr. Tammie Brown, Associate Professor of Education and Chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at William Carey University has agreed to serve as the sole evaluator for the SMPDD AmeriCorps Program. Dr. Brown will provide another set of independent eyes and scrutiny to the execution of the program. Her input and feedback will be provided to the entire SMPDD supervisory chain for review and action as required.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

COST EFFECTIVENESS.

The SMPDD AmeriCorps Program budget supports two staff members: a half-time Program Manager and a full-time Trainer/Assistant Manager. They will have the primary responsibility of meeting all of the program requirements pertaining to recruiting, training and retaining the 27 AmeriCorps members. The budget fully supports their salaries and benefits as well as resourcing their ability to travel to AmeriCorps events and work site locations.

Two staff members dedicated solely to this program is all that is required due to the depth of the Workforce Development Staff of the Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District (SMPDD) staff who will support many of their administrative and financial reporting requirements. Workforce Division has a full-time Fiscal and Programmatic Analyst who is well versed in working with federal grants and all of its components. The Workforce Development Manager, the direct supervisor of the AmeriCorps Program Manager, is also very knowledgeable of numerous federal grant programs having worked with grant programs for 10 years.

There is also money in the budget to contract, as needed, a construction supervisor to train the AmeriCorps members who will perform housing repairs when the partner housing agency does not have a qualified supervisor available. This person must have experience as a construction site supervisor. The contract will comply with all federal and SMPDD policies regarding service contracts.

The budget sufficiently supports the 27 AmeriCorps members and the work they will perform. The budget supports the travel requirements of the corps members and the staff to adequately monitor their service to the community. The program design lines up well with the theory of change. Through the use of our WIN Job Centers to deliver training it ensures a space to conduct the training.

Narratives

The non-CNCS resources are available and provided with private funding. The in-kind resources have been committed. The program as laid out in the Design and the Budget is fully resourced.

BUDGET ADEQUACY.

The budget has been checked and has no mathematical errors. There are formulas inserted in the Calculation box for each line item which details how the figure was calculated.

The budget is in full compliance with the CNCS Application Instructions.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

A. PROGRAMMATIC CLARIFICATION

1. Please describe the type of work that members will conduct on housing to support the intervention.

1. Members will perform a large array of services on housing including hands-on construction work, as determined by the construction manager for the work site, such as painting, raising walls, shingling roof, hanging siding, insulating houses, hanging drywall and work site clean-up.

B. BUDGET CLARIFICATION

1. Please provide a justification and explanation regarding factors that support the program's cost per MSY:

Federal funds are allocated to personnel expenses and member living allowances. In addition to member support costs, the grantee share more directly supports items and services necessary for a successful program, i.e., supplies, supervision, travel, training, etc. SMPDD is wholly committed to the goals of this program and is providing a 29% grantee share, 5% more than the minimum required 24% match. The current cost per MSY is required to support the program's goals of impacting the community by meeting housing needs and preparing members for future educational achievement.

2. Section I.F. Contractual and Consultant Services - The Construction Trainer/Supervisor costs in the budget are not addressed in the applicant narrative. In the clarification narrative field, please provide a justification regarding the costs for an on-call trainer and why these costs are necessary to support the goals of the program. Please also describe in what situations an on call trainer is necessary

Narratives

regarding sites and why they are necessary to support the goals of the program:

This program focuses on repairing and rehabilitating homes of economically disadvantaged families through partnerships with local non-profit housing entities. Our program identified work sites where members can serve and impact the community by addressing housing needs. However, due to these partner entities' limited funding and reliance on volunteers to serve in a supervisory capacity, projects may be placed on hold for long periods of time when a supervisor is unavailable. In order to ensure that members can consistently complete service hours as outlined in the members' terms of service, this program funds a Construction Trainer/Supervisor only on an as-needed basis. Funding a qualified Trainer/Supervisor ensures that members will have consistent access to service sites and is cost effective because it is only used when partner entities are unable to provide supervision.

3. Budget Compliance. Section H Evaluation - Please clarify costs as contract or consultant. If consultant, please provide calculations with daily rate.

Evaluation costs are contractual and will be paid based on services provided as outlined in an evaluation contract.

4. Section III B Federally Approved Indirect Cost Rate - Please provide copy of federally approved indirect cost rate agreement. Also please create separate line items for CNCS share of 3.21% and Commission fixed amount of 2.05%.

A copy of SMPDD's federally approved indirect cost rate agreement has been sent to the prime. We were unable to add the requested breakdown in the budget narrative due to space constraints. Please see the breakdown below.

CNCS amount of Indirect is as follows:

Total Salary and Fringe Benefits of \$70,042 + Member Costs of \$157,300 = \$227,342 x CNCS rate of 5.26% = \$11,958. This amount is divided into the categories: CNCS Share of 3.21% and Commission Fixed Amount of 2.05%

1. Total Salary and Fringe Benefits of \$70,042 + Member Costs of \$157,300 = \$227,342 x CNCS Share of 3.21% = \$7,298.00.

2. Total Salary and Fringe Benefits of \$70,042 + Member Costs of \$157,300 = \$227,342 x Commission Fixed Amount of 2.05% = \$4,660.00.

5. Funding is extremely competitive and limited this year. Having a low Cost Per Member Service year (MSY) is a competitive advantage. Applicants submitting with a low cost per MSY will receive higher priority for funding. Please consider decreasing the application's proposed cost per MSY

Narratives

by revising the CNCS share of the program budget, or provide a compelling explanation for why the cost/MSY cannot be decreased. CNCS will review both the individual program cost per MSY and the aggregate cost per MSY after the clarification period and may elect to make further decreases in cost per MSY and/or may be only able to partially fund applicants.

The current costs per MSY are necessary to achieve the program's goals of impacting the community by meeting housing needs and preparing members for future educational achievement. To accomplish these goals, the SMPDD program model includes 10 full-time member slots to provide a comprehensive service experience, primarily to the graduates of the Mississippi National Guard Youth Challenge program. The remaining members will include eight half-time and nine reduced half-time members.

Federal funds are allocated to member living allowances and personnel expenses. The program framework, with an emphasis on the full-time comprehensive member experience, affects the federal costs per MSY, but creates a unique bridge for connecting graduates of the Youth Challenge program with service and growth opportunities. In addition to member support costs, the grantee share more directly supports items and services necessary for a successful program, i.e., supplies, supervision, travel, training, etc. SMPDD is wholly committed to the goals of this program and is providing 29% of the program funds, 5% more than the required 24% match.

C. PERFORMANCE MEASURE CLARIFICATION

1. Please verify that the number of housing units repaired in Performance Measures O4 and OUTCM18443 will be made available for low income individuals, families or persons with disabilities as outlined in the Performance Measure Instructions.

The housing units repaired in O4 and OUTCM18443 will be made available for economically disadvantaged individuals and/or families (who are receiving or meet the income eligibility requirements to receive: TANF, Food Stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, SCHIP, Section 8 and housing assistance OR have a poor credit score OR are at least 60 days behind on one or more personal/family accounts) and families or persons with disabilities. Performance measure revised.

2. For Performance Measures O4 and OUTCM18443, applicants are required to demonstrate non-duplication of count regarding housing units. Please provide a justification that will ensure that the number of housing units repaired will only be counted once.

Housing unit counts for measure O4 will be non-duplicated. Performance measure revised.

3. Please describe the type of work that members will complete regarding the intervention to meet the standard of repair as outlined in the Performance Measure Instructions.

Narratives

Members will perform a large array of services on housing including hands-on construction work, as determined by the construction manager for the work site, such as painting, raising walls, shingling roof, hanging siding, insulating houses, hanging drywall, worksite clean-up and other activities as necessary to meet the standards of repair and development. Houses that are developed by definition under measure O4 are built new or substantially rehabilitated and include the replacing of major systems. Repair work is a more modest level of physical work on the unit, such as weatherizing, painting, replacing appliances or removing safety hazards. Performance measure revised.

4. Please provide a justification on how the applicant arrived at the at the target number of homes for Performance Measure PM O4 and OUTCM18443. Please explain how this target is ambitious.

Due to SMPDD's current planning grant, work is already being done to have member policies, procedures and scheduled activities in place. Because of this, "READY, SET, GO" design, SMPDD is prepared to launch housing related service immediately upon the start of the program. Partnering housing non-profit entities have identified service sites ready to launch. SMPDD has set an ambitious goal of completing an AVERAGE of two houses per month for 10 months. The scope of repairs may vary drastically and members will become more efficient in construction as they complete more service time, so a goal was set at 20 repairs/builds based on AVERAGE project time. This allows time for construction training, weather issues and unforeseen delays in projects to fill the 12 months of membership.

5. Please revise OUTCM18443 so that it measures a change in knowledge, attitude, behavior or condition. Currently this outcome simply restates output O4. Also, your outcome targets are identical to the output targets. In developing targets, grantees should take into account that the projected number of is unlikely to be 100% of the population. Please review and revise your outcome targets to more accurately represent changes in knowledge/skill, attitude, behavior, or condition that will occur as a result of the intervention.

The performance measure has been revised to:

Outcome: Households reporting a higher level of stability and security in their home environments.

Target: 16.

The number of economically disadvantaged households in homes made available in measure O4 that report a higher level of stability OR security at home once a house has been repaired, rehabilitated or built. Each home will only be counted once during the program year (non-duplicated) even if services may be provided to the members of the home more than once. Homes with multiple residents will only be counted once through their heads of household.

Narratives

Measured by: Number of Households reporting a gain in household stability and security.

Described Instrument: A pre-service and post-service survey will be administered to the residents of the housing units made available in measure O4. The instruments will capture data to be used in measuring how improvements in housing affect the overall feelings of stability and security in the household. Household stability is defined as the likelihood the individuals will be able to remain in the home as it is and carry out activities of daily living (over the short- and long-terms). Household security is defined as the level to which the household members feel safe in their environments with regard to factors such as weather, crime and home hazards.

6. For Performance Measure O14, please verify that the members counted in O14 meet the standard for economically disadvantaged that is outlined in the Performance Measure instructions.

The members counted in O14 will meet the standard for economically disadvantaged individuals and/or families (who are receiving or meet the income eligibility requirements to receive: TANF, Food Stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, SCHIP, Section 8 and housing assistance). Performance measure revised.

7. For Performance Measure O17, please provide a justification that members will register for a college course during the term of service or within 30 days after finishing a CNCS-supported program.

Members will register for a college course during the term of service or within 30 days after finishing a CNCS-supported program. During the term of service, the program staff will be working with members to create a personal education/career plan and, by the 10th month of service, to have made an initial decision and taken steps to enroll in post-secondary education. Performance measure revised.

8. Currently, the program has selected the objective Financial Literacy with OMSY allocated to this objective. If this program plans to include a financial literacy component, please describe this component and adjust the MSY allocations. If not, please de-select this objective from the Performance Measures.

The Financial Literacy objective has been deselected.

D and E. STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT SLOTS AND NO-COST MSY:

Southern Mississippi Planning and Development District is not requesting Strategic Engagement slots or No Cost MSYs for the 2015-2016 program year.

ADDITIONAL REVISION:

The agency approved indirect cost rate for SMPDD was lowered from 25% to 24.5% after the original submission of this grant. This version has been revised in the budget narrative, source of funds table and executive summary to reflect the new figures. Previous program total: \$337,035.00.

Narratives

Current program total: \$336,684.00. Previous CNCS share and current CNCS share: \$239,000.00.

Previous grantee share: \$97,735.00. Current grantee share: \$97,384.00.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics