

Narratives

Executive Summary

Playworks Utah proposes to have 10 full-time AmeriCorps members who will provide a school-wide evidence-based program designed to utilize play to create supportive environments with reduced bullying where all students feel safe, supported and fully engaged in low-income schools in Utah. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for positively impacting the entire school environment and, thereby, creating a safe space for students to increase their overall academic engagement. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 54 volunteers overall who will be engaged in supporting Playworks Utah program components as well as projects and events. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$132,000 will be matched with \$307,333, \$220,500 in public funding and \$86,833 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

1. PROBLEM/NEED. Utah Governor, Gary Herbert, in his proposed 2015 legislative agenda, recognizes the need to invest in and improve education in the state of Utah. In fact, K-12 Education ranks #2 as a priority for improvement in Utah and has been a top 3 priority for Utah residents since 2004. (Kroes, 2012) Unfortunately, a barrier to achieving educational excellence is the current school to prison pipeline that is alive and well in Utah. "The Utah State Office of Education reported nearly one in five of all Utah students dropped out of high school in 2013." (Fingerpaints to Fingerprints, 2014) Furthermore, one third of inmates in our state's prisons have not achieved high school completion. Newly published research also shows that disparities in discipline rates among diverse ethnic and socio-economic youth populations, students attending low-income schools, have the biggest barriers to achieving academic success and ultimately finishing high school. (Fingerpaints to Fingerprints, 2014) Reversing this trend lies in addressing troubling trends in student engagement, incidents of bullying and overall school climate. The school communities Playworks Utah serves have all identified these issues as having significant effects on student engagement and achievement in school.

Growing evidence shows dropping out of school is not an isolated event but rather a process of disengagement from school that often begins in elementary school. Research has found that dropouts can be predicted in elementary school through studying academic and engagement issues (Balfanz & Herog, 2005). One of the largest influences of strong student engagement is a positive school environment (chks.wested.org). Therefore, it is critical that elementary schools create environments

Narratives

that promote and sustain student engagement as a means for increasing the long-term outcomes of students. This includes reducing incidents of bullying that have a negative effect on school climate and student engagement.

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

Research compiled by www.stopbullying.gov cited that involvement in bullying, as victim or the one who bullies, creates barriers to learning for all students and is associated with a host of negative outcomes including increased risk of poor academic performance, truancy, and delinquency. In elementary school students, the link between being a victim of bullying, being a bully and lower academic achievement is substantial (Glew et al, 2005; Schwartz, 2003). UCLA psychologists found that victims of bullying are less likely to participate in school, raise their hand in class, or complete their homework; they also show a general disinterest in school (Wolpert, 2011). Those who bully others are also at risk of getting into fights, being suspended and receiving poor grades (violencepreventionworks.org). For victims, the fear of continued victimization causes students to distance themselves from social connections and feel unsafe at school. This leads to disengagement from class and skipping school altogether out of fear and social isolation (National Education Association). A single bullying incident can have wide-ranging impacts the overall climate of the school, leaving victim, offender and observers at risk for poor school success.

The importance of school climate and its association with positive student outcomes have been increasingly recognized by researchers. Rebecca London characterizes a positive school climate as, "includ[ing] 4 main components: (1) physical and emotional safety at school; (2) positive relationships with peers and adults; (3) support for learning; and (4) institutional environment that fosters school connectedness and engagement" (Journal of School Health, 2015).

Several indicators show that Utah schools are currently having difficulty maintaining positive school climates. Prior to beginning programming in Utah schools, Playworks conducted a needs assessment with students and teachers to better understand the climate on elementary school campuses. Almost half of students (48%) indicated some form of bullying (teasing, pushing, name-calling) was an issue at their school. In addition, 55 percent of teachers surveyed reported physical

Narratives

fights occurred on average two or more times a week, and 64 percent said verbal fights occurred at least two or more times a week. Student feelings of being unsafe, excluded or bullied move students towards feelings of disengagement rather than engagement. Furthermore, Utah education professionals and teachers are finding that the period of the school day that has the highest rates of office referrals, incidents of bullying, exclusionary behavior, suspension rates and other factors that lead to student disengagement, is recess.

Transforming an entire school climate is vast and fits well with a term of service by a full-time AmeriCorps member. The Playworks Utah AmeriCorps program will target low-income elementary schools in Utah that face enormous barriers to student success, are especially vulnerable to unsafe school environments, and are at-risk for bullying, which can lead to decreased academic engagement. When developing new partners, Playworks ensures schools meet our eligibility standard that a minimum of 50% of students receive free or reduced price lunch. In the 2014-15 school year, Playworks Utah members worked with schools where 80% (average) of students qualified for free/reduced lunch. We anticipate that our Playworks Utah AmeriCorps program will serve the same school population in the coming school years. Playworks Utah operates in our partner schools every day of the school year. Full-time AmeriCorps members are vital to our program as they possess the consistency and commitment to run a strong full day program in a low-income elementary school.

2. THEORY OF CHANGE.

The Playworks AmeriCorps program model provides a school-wide intervention based on a caring adult modeling positive behavior and creating a safe and inclusive environment where students become academically engaged. Our model consists of six components. (1) RECESS: Recess is the central focus of the Playworks AmeriCorps model, as it is the time when bullying and conflict are most likely to occur. Each full-time AmeriCorps member will utilize play at their assigned low-income elementary school to create an inclusive environment where all students feel safe and engaged. Members will maintain a constant presence on the playground during recess, teaching and modeling pro-social skills such as respect, positive language, and problem solving. To reinforce the behaviors and positive culture developed during recess, members will implement additional program components emphasizing respectful social behavior throughout the day. (2) CLASS GAME TIME: Members will spend time with individual classes at their assigned school to teach the games offered at recess and introduce the tenets of respect and inclusion, so students become comfortable actively participating in games with their peers. During these individual class sessions, members will serve alongside teachers to increase teacher comfort with providing additional opportunities for positive play

Narratives

throughout the school day. (3)JUNIOR COACHES: Members will facilitate a leadership development program with a group of upper elementary students, providing at least 15 hours of training in the after school-hours and ongoing support as they become "Junior Coach" leaders. Junior Coaches model positive behavior, lead games, and assist with conflict resolution at recess for younger students. (4)OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL TIME: In schools where there is a need, members will implement a before-school recess that reinforces our positive-play model. (5)LEAGUES: Members will also facilitate non-competitive developmental sports leagues, encouraging participation from students who have not previously felt comfortable playing sports. (6)COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Members will work with their school administration to identify and develop one to two school events aimed at engaging families within the school community. Members will use play at these events as a catalyst for creating unique opportunities for students, parents, and teachers to build relationships and a sense of belonging within the school community. Finally, members will participate in service projects on national days of service, and may also participate in various weekend service projects and events throughout the larger community to support the spirit of service and bond with volunteers and AmeriCorps members in the area.

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

Playworks Utah focuses on recess because it is the time when bullying, exclusionary behavior and conflicts are most likely to occur. Research shows that bullying occurs two to three times more often at school than any other location and tends to thrive where there is the largest amount of students and the least amount of supervision (Smith, 2010) with over 70% of incidents happening on the playground (Glew, et al, 2005). To prevent bullying, studies show that the most effective interventions are those that improve overall school climate (Masiello and Schroeder, 2014). Research from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Healthy Students demonstrates that schools with strong school climates allow students to increase their academic engagement, therefore, boosting student achievement.

Playworks AmeriCorps members are ideally suited to provide this intervention. Appropriate adult supervision is crucial to the reduction of bullying and the creation of a positive school climate, but

Narratives

increased pressure on schools to deliver annual improvement in standardized test scores has created a concentration of financial resources on classroom staffing and instructional strategies. As a result, schools lack the capacity, both in personnel and funding, to develop a robust and productive school climate strategy. As dedicated, enthusiastic individuals who are recruited to serve in the communities where they are from, members are the perfect ambassadors to impact schools. Playworks AmeriCorps members will spend each school day focused on creating a positive school climate and reducing bullying, as well as deepening impact beyond the school day through community engagement. To be physically and emotionally present to hundreds of students on a daily basis for an entire school year can be daunting; it requires an individual committed to creating change even when challenges seem insurmountable. The passion and spirit that AmeriCorps members bring to their service provides perspective and resilience for implementing the Playworks Utah program.

The Playworks intervention follows a theory of change, detailed in our logic model, that indicates transforming recess improves the larger school climate which decreases bullying and enables students to increase their academic engagement. Playworks Utah is an evidence-based program proven to transform elementary school climates. Playworks will measure the long-term outcome of increased academic engagement through a modified version of the Social and Character Development Survey (SACD). This survey is validated to measure key indicators of engagement as described by CNCS as increased class participation, increased perception of school climate and increased attachment to school. Playworks will utilize the total score on the engagement scale to determine increases from beginning to end of the year. Playworks will implement the teacher-reported survey on a random sample of students each school year of the grant cycle twice; at the beginning of the school year and again at the end of the school year. We will utilize Education Measures ED1, ED2 and ED27A to measure outputs and outcomes as detailed in the logic model submitted according to CNCS directions.

3. EVIDENCE BASE.

Playworks uses an evidence-based approach backed by an experimental study that resulted in several statistically significant findings indicating strong evidence that support causal relationships between Playworks and the intended outcomes.

In May 2013, Mathematica Policy Research in conjunction with Stanford University released the results of a randomized controlled study "Impact and Implementation Findings from an Experimental Evaluation of Playworks: Effects on School Climate, Academic Learning, Student Social Skills and Behavior" (<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com>). The study is currently in review at the Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR) and publication is expected. Twenty-nine

Narratives

schools from six different cities were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Random assignment of schools helped to ensure that there were no systematic differences between the treatment and control groups' observed and unobserved characteristics and that the differences in outcomes between the two groups could be attributed solely to the effect of Playworks. To improve the statistical precision of impact estimates and reduce the chance of differences between the treatment and control groups in the characteristics of schools, random assignment was conducted within matched groups of schools that were similar in terms of observable characteristics. The impacts on students, teachers and schools were determined by comparing the average outcomes in treatment and control school using regression models that were customized to the unit of analysis. All statistically significant impacts are based on the MHT adjusted p-values. The overall design and methodology (strong internal/external validity) of this study allows the results to be generalized to schools with similar characteristics (urban, diverse, high poverty) implementing the full Playworks program.

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

"Physical Activity and Positive Youth Development: Impact of a School-Based Program" (Journal of School Health, 2011) used a quasi-experimental design that analyzed data from 159 low-income schools from 2001-2007. Outcomes were 5th grade student scores (n=13,109) on the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), which was administered state-wide. Scores from students attending schools with Playworks programming were compared to scores from students attending schools without Playworks programming. After one year of exposure to Playworks, students showed statistically significant increases in the following four protective factors: problem-solving skills, meaningful participation in school, goals and aspirations, and physical activity. All four protective factors are associated with positive social and academic outcomes. With strong design and methodology (internal/external validity), outcomes associated with this evaluation can be generalized to schools with similar characteristics implementing the full Playworks program.

Stanford University completed a quasi-experimental study of Playworks, "Playing Fair: The Contribution of High-Functioning Recess to Overall School Climate in Low-Income Elementary

Narratives

Schools" (Journal of School Health, January 2015), in six newly implementing schools all sharing similar characteristics including high-poverty, high percentage of racial diversity and academic challenges. Qualitative (structured interviews and observations) and quantitative (teacher and student written surveys) data was collected in the fall and again in the spring to create a pre/post analysis. The study concluded that students felt more included, more connected to the school and their Playworks coach, had a higher sense of belonging at school and felt more physically and emotionally safe.

All evaluations included schools implementing the full Playworks model with the exception of the Community Engagement Initiative which was developed after the time of the evaluation.

To support the classification as "strong evidence" Playworks is submitting the following two studies: "Playing Fair: The Contribution of High-Functioning Recess to Overall School Climate in Low-Income Elementary Schools" and "Impact and Implementation Findings from an Experimental Evaluation of Playworks: Effects on School Climate, Academic Learning, Student Social Skills and Behavior".

4. NOTICE PRIORITY. Research has identified that school engagement is an indicator of long-term academic and social outcomes. Engagement has been shown to include a student's physical and emotional safety at school as well as their overall feelings of connectedness to the school community (www.chks.wested.org). A safe school environment fosters the intellectual and social interactions that academic achievement requires. Likewise, a student who feels connected to their school community reports higher levels of interest and engagement in their academic work (National School Climate Center--www.schoolclimate.org). Students who feel others have high expectations of them and have high levels of opportunities for meaningful participation are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and motivation that helps them succeed academically and socially.

In January 2014, the Department of Education (DOE) issued "Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline" to all schools. This guide emphasizes that "developing positive school climates and improving school discipline policies are critical steps to raising academic achievement." The DOE recognizes that to improve student academic performance, schools must first create spaces where students feel safe and included and, therefore, able to become academically engaged.

The Playworks theory of change posits that by creating a positive recess climate, schools can shift their overall school climate, thereby allowing students to feel safe, more fully engaged and, ultimately, improve students' academic performance. Members serve throughout the school day modeling and promoting pro-social skills, maintaining a constant positive presence during recess, and mentoring

Narratives

small groups of student leaders. Improving student academic performance falls into the AmeriCorps Education funding priority.

5. **MEMBER TRAINING.** The Playworks Utah AmeriCorps program has developed a robust and comprehensive member training strategy. The member service year is kicked off by an intensive two-week pre-service training, and is augmented by additional monthly trainings throughout the year. Pre-service training takes place during early-August (M-F, 9am-5:30 pm) and begins with a day of orientation (8 hours). Orientation topics include a Playworks overview, introduction to AmeriCorps (including presentations by Playworks AmeriCorps alumni, videos and discussions), prohibited AmeriCorps activities, member contracts, Performance Measures, and working with volunteers. Members also view an in-depth video covering member contracts and expectations, as well as the member handbook and payroll/benefits/grievance procedures. The day concludes with an AmeriCorps swearing-in ceremony. The remaining two weeks of training focus on skill development (e.g. group management, inclusive play, conflict resolution among students, communication with diverse populations, Playworks curriculum, and CPR/First Aid). Emphasis is placed on team-building and promoting an AmeriCorps identity. Training formats range from a lively activities to serious and thoughtful discussions on major issues that kids face in our schools.

During the four weeks in September following pre-service, first-year members participate in trainings three to four days per week (2.5 hours each). These trainings dive deeper into program components, reflection and discussion about service, data collection, and recruiting and working with volunteers. From October to June, Playworks hosts trainings once a month (2.5 hours each), covering professionalism, prioritizing/organizing, bullying, youth with special needs, abuse-related mandated reporting, gender on the playground, family and community engagement, service projects, and member motivation. Toward the end of the term, the Life After AmeriCorps training is led by staff, Playworks AmeriCorps alumni and consultants. Training topics include resume writing, skill assessments, employment options at Playworks, and the Education Award.

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

6. **MEMBER SUPERVISION.** The 13 AmeriCorps members will be supported and supervised by two Program Managers, who serve as the direct liaison between members and participating schools. Program Managers typically have at least two years of experience at a school and demonstrate

Narratives

exceptional performance in a youth setting to lead and motivate. Program Managers participate in more than 20 hours of national training that incorporates AmeriCorps topics such as program requirements and prohibited service activities, how to work with and motivate volunteers, supporting a member's term of service, member recruitment, communication skills, and program evaluation.

Program Managers support and supervise members through bi-weekly site visits, regular performance evaluations, trainings, liaison with school administration/staff, and ongoing mentorship. In case of an emergency, each school principal (or designee) provides immediate supervision. During site visits, members and Program Managers may discuss what is going well and what challenges exist at the school. Members and Program Managers identify goals and objectives for the coming month and assess progress over the most recent month. This approach encourages members to reflect on their performance and learn from their supervisor who has direct field experience in program implementation and in responding to challenges at school sites. Program Managers conduct one-hour quarterly performance evaluations which assess members' competencies in program component implementation, professionalism, community engagement and school relationship.

7. MEMBER EXPERIENCE. Playworks Utah provides its members with an experience that is authentic, hands-on, meaningful, and deeply rewarding. Our members serve their schools on a full-time basis, becoming mentors, coaches and role models to the children they support. Students, teachers, school leadership, and administrative staff all know and appreciate the member's invaluable contribution to improving the overall climate of the school. In particular, members help students who may be seen as "discipline problems" transform into cooperating team players. Students who are seen as shy or excluded become engaged student leaders and develop bonds with members that are deep and impactful. With Playworks, a member is given the tools and support to lead kids, many of whom are facing tremendous challenges in their lives. The members help students learn new ways to handle difficult situations, how to interact with their peers, how to settle disputes without fighting, and the social, cognitive, and emotional benefits that fun, safe, healthy play brings. The rewards and satisfaction of doing so, and the experience of having such a positive transformative effect on the lives of the children they serve, is a life-defining experience for many of our members. Members develop skills in group management, youth development, lesson planning and facilitation -- all skills that are particularly valuable in the education field. As a result, by the end of their service, members become youth development professionals with the skills to implement high-quality programs.

From day one of training, Playworks orients members to the ethic of service, civic responsibility, active citizenship, diversity, and inclusion. These points are actively discussed and emphasized at

Narratives

regular trainings throughout the year. The national days of service and monthly service projects are integral expressions of the members' service commitment. Past projects have included "Family Recess" with kids who are supported through Hopekids and are experiencing terminal illnesses on Make a Difference Day, assisting Userve in the 20th anniversary service project at Red Butte Gardens for 9/11 Day of Service, and partnering with The Salt Lake Bicycle Collective to repair and build bikes for at-risk youth on Martin Luther King's Day of Service.

To recruit a corps that is representative of the communities Playworks Utah serves, local city staff conduct outreach with organizations in the neighborhoods surrounding our service sites, including nearby universities, community colleges, after-school programs, and summer camps. Playworks also posts AmeriCorps position announcements at local colleges/universities, and depends on referrals from our school and community partners.

8. COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION. Playworks Utah has established a cohesive AmeriCorps identity for our members as a means of maintaining high morale. Members learn about AmeriCorps during the interview process, trainings and reflections, and practice explaining AmeriCorps to others. The AmeriCorps logo is proudly displayed on our website and on the member's bulletin board at each site. Members are provided AmeriCorps gear packs containing Playworks AmeriCorps shirts and sweatshirts and are required to wear the logo while serving. Swearing-in and graduation ceremonies, special AmeriCorps attire, trainings and events also serve to impart the special nature of members' service.

Playworks Utah recently collaborated with other AmeriCorps programs in the planning of the AmeriCorps 20th Anniversary celebration. This included participating in a large scale service project, and leading multiple professional development workshops for members serving through other programs. Playworks also continues to foster strong connections with other AmeriCorps programs by actively participating in the planning of regional conferences and sharing best practices.

Organizational Capability

1. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING. Playworks boasts an 18-year track record of successfully implementing programs in schools across the nation. Organizationally, Playworks has a multi-tiered management structure in place to provide strong support to Playworks Utah AmeriCorps program. A National Board of Directors provides fiscal oversight and support to our national leadership, and our national team provides support and guidance to each local office.

In our four years of operation, Playworks Utah has both the experience and dedication to providing Playworks' AmeriCorps program to schools in Utah. Playworks Utah has been fortunate to partner

Narratives

with UServe Utah since 2012, and currently 11 members are serving children in Utah schools through the Playworks Utah AmeriCorps program. The Playworks Utah Executive Director is Chris Conard. Mr. Conard is responsible for overall program oversight, fiscal management, day-to-day operations, and leadership and supervision of staff.

A team of experienced program staff are trained to manage the members who will serve in Utah, including: one Program Director, two Program Managers, and one Program Associate. The Program Director is responsible for general program management, and will oversee member recruitment, trainings and workshops, and directly supervise and support the Program Managers. The Program Managers will directly supervise the AmeriCorps members and the relationship with their placement sites. Program Managers will train, support and guide the member through their term of service ensuring AmeriCorps compliance through bi-weekly site visits, written objectives, and bi-annual reviews. The Program Associate will be responsible for the paperwork and administrative requirements associated with the grant, including but not limited to timesheets, member service activities, member enrollment and exit, and sign-in sheets.

Nationally, Playworks has effectively managed an AmeriCorps program through National Direct and state commission grants since 2004. We are currently in our second successful year of our first three-year funding cycle with UServe Utah.

The Playworks program has evolved and improved with direct input by school staff, families, and local communities. The original development of the Playworks program was in direct response to a need identified by school principals who were troubled by the chaos and disruptive behaviors on the playground. Principals expressed that these behaviors created an environment where students were not participating in healthy play and that often spilled over into the classrooms, disrupting the learning process. In 1996, Playworks founder, Jill Vialet, launched a play-based program to specifically address this situation.

Since then, Playworks has worked closely with students, parents, school teachers, and principals each year to tailor and coordinate programming at each school site. In addition, Playworks solicits input at the end of each school year asking stakeholders -- school staff, children and youth and families -- to identify the strengths and challenges of the program. We have also used annual surveys to identify training needs among teachers and other school staff. Aspects of the Playworks program that have evolved over the years, such as the Junior Coach Leadership Program, have been modified based on the needs of the schools and communities we serve. Playworks also develops partnerships and collaborations with nonprofits working to improve outcomes for youth in Utah, including The

Narratives

Boys and Girls Clubs of South Valley and Neighborhood House. Playworks members engage their students' families and caregivers through community service projects (e.g., family fun nights, school beautification projects), as volunteers at recess and after-school activities. Playworks also encourages increased community involvement through our local Board of Directors who provide leadership and counsel to the Executive Director, and is made up of business professionals, a school district official, health care professionals and other community leaders.

2. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Playworks is dedicated to ensuring compliance with all AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Our AmeriCorps program will be monitored at both the national and local level to prevent and detect compliance issues. The Program Director will be responsible for attending all trainings and technical assistance calls offered by UServe Utah, and will provide program staff (Program Manager and Program Associate) with ongoing training and support to ensure compliance with regulations and prohibited activities. The Program Director will hold weekly program meetings with the program staff to discuss on-going service activities and events, corps member support and development, as well as challenges that need to be addressed.

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

To monitor compliance at the grantee level, Playworks' national office has three national AmeriCorps Program Managers (ACPM) to support grant implementation and compliance across the country. Each ACPM supports a cluster of Playworks offices and holds monthly meetings with the local Playworks program staff. Monthly meetings will be dedicated to the specifics of our Utah AmeriCorps program including member hours, member activities, volunteer recruitment and any ongoing projects. The ACPM will also oversee timesheet audits and two member file audits during the year; at the beginning to make sure onboarding paperwork is complete and accurate, and after the members complete their term to ensure a proper exit. If instances of risk are found, the Executive Director and program team will design and submit to the ACPM a plan to address the issue. Upon

Narratives

approval, the program staff have a designated amount of time to resolve the issue, and a follow-up meeting will be held to ensure compliance.

Finally, our AmeriCorps program will be monitored across Playworks national organizational structure to ensure compliance. Staff in Playworks' national Program, Finance, and Human Resources departments are trained in AmeriCorps requirements. The Finance Director is responsible for all AmeriCorps financial reporting and works closely with the Executive Director to ensure proper reporting. Human Resources staff work to stay up-to-date on AmeriCorps regulations as they pertain to members, and provide guidance to program staff on member management, including disciplinary actions.

3. PAST PERFORMANCE: Playworks Utah is currently in the second year of our performance measures. During the first year of programming (2013-2014), Playworks successfully demonstrated impact on students with 3,726 students increasing their academic engagement which was above our target. In the summer of 2013, one of our schools lost funding last minute and were unable to partner with Playworks financially, thus we did not meet our output target. We were short 478 students which represents the one school we were unable to serve. In 2014-2015, we anticipate reaching both our output and outcome targets. We have placed members at our target number of schools, thereby reaching our outputs. For 2014-2015 we have successfully collected our baseline surveys, and we anticipate solid data collection during the spring.

In the most recent full year of program operation (2013-14), our Playworks Utah enrollment rate was 100% (10 of 10 members enrolled), and our retention rate was 81.8% (9 of 11 members retained). We are working to improve our retention rate by continuing to target recruitment efforts on community resources and engaging applicants specifically looking to complete a year of service. We will also focus on increasing member support, including enhanced reflection and recognition opportunities. During the 2014-15 program year we enrolled 100% (10 of 10) of our members and to date we have retained 92% (11 of 12 members retained) of our members. We are pleased to report that we were not under corrective action at any time during the last grant cycle.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

1. COST EFFECTIVENESS: For the proposed request of \$13,300 per MSY, Playworks Utah will provide daily programming for approximately 6,180 students, resulting in a cost-effective program of \$0.48/child/day (of which we request \$0.15/child/day from AmeriCorps). This investment, less than a dollar per day per child, will provide significant school-wide impact, reduce bullying and exclusionary behavior, and increase readiness to learn. While many education programs focus

Narratives

exclusively on designated groups of students through classroom teaching, tutoring or mentorship, Playworks provides a unique model that serves the entire school population in both large and small groups. This comprehensive approach increases the number of students directly impacted by members, achieving a very cost effective program.

Reclaimed teaching time is a cost-benefit for our service sites. Data from a randomized control study shows that classroom teachers at Playworks' schools saved an average of 10.5 hrs./year transitioning from recess to learning activities. Teachers at Playworks schools reported that they spend 9.37 fewer hrs./year addressing behavioral and disciplinary issues, allowing for more focused teaching time -- adding to the overall program's cost efficiency.

Of the total program budget, \$533,662, we propose \$360,762 in non-CNCS funding to successfully implement our AmeriCorps program. To raise the additional funds, Playworks Utah will require a financial investment from our school service sites of \$24,500 per year. School fees totaling \$294,000 in non-CNCS resources will support the cost of our program. Our second source of match will come from foundation and corporate support. In our years as a UServe Utah AmeriCorps grantee, we have consistently raised the matching funds necessary to cover all of our program expenses.

The proposed request of \$13,300 per MSY is the same as our current cost per MSY for the 2014-15 program year. A significant reason for maintaining this cost per MSY is that we plan to raise member living allowance to \$22,554. Throughout the years, we have consistently paid a high living allowance to our AmeriCorps members and have found that it helps us attract a more diverse pool of high quality applicants that are reflective of the communities we serve. We believe this is particularly important for next year due to the recruitment challenges we faced during our current program year. The cost associated with this increase will be absorbed into our match amount of 68%.

2. BUDGET ADEQUACY: Playworks Utah is confident that the proposed budget presented is adequate to fund the program, based on our organization's prior experience managing the UServe Utah grant and National Direct funding. The budget is based on efficient operating budgets currently used in other Playworks AmeriCorps state programs, as well as the current Utah budget. The submitted budget was carefully reviewed by our National Finance Director and will be sufficient to allow us to meet our desired program elements, outputs, and outcomes for our AmeriCorps program.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Although not a requirement, Playworks engages in regular internal and external evaluations. Findings from past evaluations have shaped our programming and assisted us in gaining a better understanding of our impacts and strategies for supporting Playworks Utah AmeriCorps members.

Narratives

In 2013 Playworks received results from a random controlled trial completed by Mathematica Policy Research and Stanford University. The evaluation assessed both the implementation of Playworks as well as the impact of the program on several key domains. Findings for both implementation of the program as well as our impact were positive, showing several statistically significant results. Playworks has utilized the results to better understand strengths and areas of growth. In addition, we are in the beginning stages of assessing the results to determine what direction to take for future evaluation.

During the UServe Utah grant cycle, Playworks plans to implement an outcome and process evaluation. Both evaluations will be completed internally by Playworks staff:

Outcome Evaluation: The Playworks outcome evaluation will assess the full Playworks program implemented by members at individual school sites. The program follows the Theory of Change described in the full application and in the Logic Model which is attached. The evaluation is designed to answer three questions: (1) Do students feel more emotionally and physically safe at recess? (2) Are children able to resolve conflicts and cooperate with their peers better? and (3) Are students more academically engaged? The evaluation design will incorporate detailed, in-depth analyses of a variety of data points from teachers about student perceptions and behavior changes. We will use observations of playground activity, Junior Coach assessments and school staff surveys to help determine results.

Process Evaluation: Playworks will conduct a process evaluation to determine whether aspects of our program implementation are effective and to better understand the members experience. The process evaluation will address the following evaluation questions: (1) How satisfied are UServe Utah members with the Playworks training, (2) What challenges do members face in implementation of the program, and (3) What Playworks strategies facilitate members' abilities to implement the program at school sites? The process evaluation will include interviews with UServe Utah members and their program managers.

Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data will be completed by the Playworks Department of Evaluation staff with support from the Playworks UServe Utah staff. Staff will utilize the results to improve program process to better serve its members.

Narratives

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

CLARIFICATION ITEMS

This application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of \$133,000, 10.00 Member Service Years (MSYs), 10 slots, at \$13,300.00 cost per MSY.

GENERAL

ITEM: Please ensure that your Executive Summary, budget, and performance measures reflect the funding levels indicated above and the inclusion of strategic engagement or no-cost MSYs or a reduction in the cost/MSY as is requested further in the letter.

RESPONSE: We have reduced our Cost per MSY to \$13,200 and updated the Executive Summary, Budget, Performance Measures, and Logic Model to reflect the reduction in Cost per MSY as well as the modification to 10 MSY/10 slots under consideration. No Strategic Engagement or No-Cost MSYs are being requested at this time.

A. PROGRAMMATIC CLARIFICATION ITEMS:

Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled 'Clarification Summary'

1. ITEM: Please provide an example of a typical daily/weekly schedule for a member and discuss how the proposed member activities justify a full-time service engagement.

RESPONSE: A typical daily schedule for a Corps Member includes: facilitating a Recess block of approximately two hours (organizing cooperative games, providing opportunities for vigorous physical activity, managing Junior Coaches), providing pre/post recess check-ins with Junior Coaches, leading three to four 40-minute Class Game Time sessions daily, and leading a two-hour Junior Coach training weekly. In addition to the daily interaction with students, Members use prep time to plan lessons, collaborate with teachers and school staff, connect with parents and collect program data. For several weeks during the school year the Members also plan and facilitate practice for developmental sports leagues and coach a weekly game against other Member schools. In addition, during the school year Members develop one to two community engagement events to engage families within the school community. Each of the program components serve to reinforce the behaviors, positive culture, and mutual respect being developed throughout the school day. Through

Narratives

serving full-time for the entire school year, Playworks AmeriCorps Members become an integral part of their school communities. Engaging students at their school sites full-time is essential for rapport-building and creating a healthy community.

2. ITEM: Please provide additional details about the following aspects of the proposed interventions: the Junior Coach component, service-learning, after-school programming, and in-class support.

RESPONSE: Junior Coach Leadership program provides a selected group of 4th and 5th grade students weekly trainings that focus on teaching valuable skills in leadership, conflict resolution, inclusion and community action, successfully improving their self-esteem, self-advocacy, leadership ability, and desire to improve academically. Junior Coaches then "serve" in their role during the recess blocks by facilitating activities for younger students, modeling positive behavior, utilizing conflict resolution skills when conflicts occur, and practicing skills learned during trainings. Members set goals with Junior Coaches to focus on during their rotation, provide ongoing coaching and mentorship to Junior Coaches while "on duty", and provide feedback during post recess check-in meetings. Members work with teachers to identify and support students that would benefit the most from participating in this program, specifically identifying a portion of students who would benefit from increased academic engagement.

During the after school hours, Members will lead Junior Coach trainings, facilitate practices and coach games for their developmental sports leagues, work with fellow Members to develop their community engagement events for families, recruit volunteers, and participate in ongoing professional development throughout the year.

Members lead instructional game time with individual classes throughout the year during Class Game Time. During this time, Members teach foundational skills, norms, and expectations that will prepare students so they can confidently and actively engage in recess. This includes teaching critical skills to support their social and emotional development such as fair play, inclusion, and conflict resolutions skills. Teachers are present during these individual Class Game Time sessions and are encouraged by the Member to promote the transfer of these skills into the classroom.

3. ITEM: Please revise the Executive summary to reflect the budget amounts for which you are being clarified.

Narratives

RESPONSE: The Executive summary has been revised to reflect 10 MSYs at \$13,200 per MSY.

B. BUDGET CLARIFICATION

Please respond to the clarification items in the 'Budget Narrative' section of the application unless otherwise indicated

1. ITEM: The narrative describes an initial two-day member training. Yet, the budget narrative does not include this expense. Please clarify.

RESPONSE: The member training is conducted by Playworks staff, so the primary costs are staff time which are included in the Personnel Costs in Section I of the grant. Additional minimal costs such as staff and member team building activities during pre-service are accounted for separately in Section G, Staff Training and Section G, Member Training.

2. ITEM: Section G - Staff Training. What costs are included in the line items in this section?

RESPONSE: There are two items included in Section G - Staff Training. The first is a team building activity that takes place during pre-service. The purpose is to have an event, such as a trip to a baseball game or a scavenger hunt, where staff and members can get to know one another. The second item includes costs that are allocated for the required Utah Program Director's retreat and Program Director meetings.

3. ITEM: Section G - Member Training. What costs are budgeted for the Off-site workshops and team building activities for members?

RESPONSE: The activity budgeted in the Member Training line item is a team building activity that takes place during pre-service, such as a trip to a baseball game or a scavenger hunt, where members get to know one another as they prepare to begin their service year.

4. ITEM: Revise the budget to reflect the funding level at which you are being clarified.

RESPONSE: The budget has been revised to reflect the funding level at which we are being clarified and a reduction in the Cost per MSY.

5. ITEM: 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. Please make the associated budget revisions in the budget itself and provide a narrative response in the clarification section of the application narrative.

RESPONSE: We have reduced our Cost per MSY to \$13,200.

C. PERFORMANCE MEASURE CLARIFICATION

Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants or in the 'Clarification Summary' field, as appropriate.

ED2 OUTPUT

1. ITEM: The survey completion rate cannot be used as a proxy for the number of students enrolled for five months. The measure must count the actual number of students who completed the program. Please revise the instrument description to describe how the program will ensure that all students who complete the program are properly counted.

RESPONSE: The following revised statement has been updated in the Performance Measure section under the Instrument Description for ED2:

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

Students counted in ED2 will have completed the program, which is defined as enrollment in school for at least five months. Playworks will get student enrollment information directly from the school. Students enrolled for a minimum of five months will be counted in our target.

2. ITEM: Please clarify who will administer the survey included under ED2.

RESPONSE: A survey will not be used to determine completion rates under ED2. Enrollment

Narratives

information will be obtained directly from the school and will not utilize a survey. The survey will be completed by teachers under ED27A.

3. ITEM: Explain how participants in the population will be uniquely identified.

RESPONSE: Schools track individual student enrollment information. Playworks will get individual student counts directly from the school, uniquely identifying those who were enrolled for a minimum of five months.

ED5 OUTCOME

RESPONSE: Playworks is proposing standard outcome measure ED27A (not ED5.)

1. ITEM: Please specify how much improvement on the teacher survey is necessary to be counted as "improved."

RESPONSE: Students will be counted as "improved" if they increase by at least one point on at least 2 indicators where they scored low at baseline.

2. ITEM: Given that there are differential rates of participation, explain how exposure or intervention dosage will be measured.

RESPONSE: All students included in the performance measure targets will receive the minimum dosage of five months of the Playworks program which includes daily Recess and monthly Class Game Time. Additional dosage is provided to some students through participation in Junior Coach program and/or developmental sports leagues. These activities benefit not only the students directly engaged in them, but also enhance the recess program which benefits all students in the school. These additional hours are not included in our calculation of dosage for the performance measures.

In order for us to properly assess whether the sampling plan you propose is appropriate, please provide the following information:

1. ITEM: Provide demographic information on the population at the site level and discuss whether there are any variations across the sites. At a minimum, provide data on the number of students eligible for FRP lunches.

RESPONSE: Playworks Utah AmeriCorps program will serve school sites where at least 50% of

Narratives

students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Our current Utah AmeriCorps schools vary from 65% to 90% FRP lunch eligibility.

2. ITEM: Clarify the sample size (including sample size per site), the process/method you will use to calculate it and the selected level of precision (99%, 95%, 90% confidence interval). In your process of selecting the sample size, please also address attrition.

RESPONSE: Playworks designed a sample frame that uses random assignment and is inclusive of all students balanced across grades 1-5. The random selection of students supports the use of standard statistical measures of precision. Playworks calculated the sample size based on the total expected population size of 4,658, the desired confidence level at 95% and the confidence interval a margin of +/-5. The required sample size is 355 but we anticipate surveying 450 students. This estimate includes a 10% attrition rate. By utilizing a random sample and standard statistical measures of precision, Playworks is able to validate that the sample is representative of the larger population and, therefore, we are able to generalize the findings to all the students we serve. Playworks implemented this instrument last year in ServeUtah and other AmeriCorps grants and used the results as a guide for setting realistic targets for Playworks Utah.

3. ITEM: Describe the process you will use for selecting participants as part of your sampling.

RESPONSE: Teachers from each grade level 1st-5th are randomly selected to participate. Teachers are instructed to select a random sample of their students based on the size of their classes. Using the class roster, teachers identify 10 students based on the following process: (1) For classes with 20 students or less, teachers select every third student until a total of 7 students are selected. (2) For a class with 21-30 students, teachers select every fourth student until a total of 7 students are selected, (3) For a class with 31 or more students, teachers select every fifth student until 7 students are selected. This process allows us to cover the entire class in the sample frame and acquire the needed sample size.

4. ITEM: Confirm that generalizations of findings from these data will be restricted to the population receiving the specified dosage of the intervention.

RESPONSE: Yes, we will generalize the findings to the total number of students from ED2 (those completing the program with the appropriate dosage).

D. STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT SLOTS

Narratives

1. ITEM: 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 members of the disability community?

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

2. ITEM: Request for Strategic Engagement Slots

RESPONSE: We are not requesting Strategic Engagement slots at this time.

E. MSY WITH NO PROGRAM FUNDS ATTACHED CLARIFICATION:

ITEMS 1 - 4: Request for No-Cost MSYs

RESPONSE: We are not requesting No-Cost MSY slots at this time.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics