

Narratives

Executive Summary

Playworks Massachusetts proposes to have 15 AmeriCorps members who will provide a school-wide evidence-based program designed to utilize play to create supportive environments with reduced bullying where all students feel safe, supported and fully engaged in school in low-income schools in Massachusetts. 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 75 volunteers who will be engaged in assisting with components of the Playworks AmeriCorps program as well as projects and events. This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$162,890 will be matched with \$496,946, \$420,000 in public funding and \$76,946 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

1. PROBLEM/NEED: Bullying presents one of the greatest health risks to children and youth. 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).

Bullying has negative impacts on everyone in the school--the victim, the one who bullies and the bystanders. 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, delinquency, physical injury and suicide. In elementary school students, the link between being a victim of bullying, being a bully and lower academic achievement is substantial (Glew et al, 2005; Schwartz, 2003). UCLA psychologist found that victims of bullying are less likely to participate in school, raise their hand in class, complete their homework and show a general disinterest in school (Wolpert, 2011). Those who bully others are also at risk of getting into fights, being suspended and receive poor grades (violencepreventionworks.org). For victims, the fear of continued victimization causes students to distance themselves from social connections, feel unsafe at school and feel as if they do not belong at school. This leads to disengagement from class and skipping school altogether out of fear and social isolation (National Education Association). A single bullying situation can have wide-ranging impacts on the student who bullies, the student they bully and the overall climate of the school leaving both

Narratives

victim and offender at risk for poor school success.

Bullying has been a concern in the Commonwealth for several years with efforts to create safe and supportive schools taking a top priority with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). In 2010 anti-bullying legislation passed after several high profile incidents raised awareness about the devastating impacts of bullying. Unfortunately, implementation of the legislation varied and did not include accountability for collection and monitoring of data leaving a hole in published information about incidents of bullying. As a result In April 2014, Governor Deval Patrick signed H. 3909, "An Act Relative to Bullying in Schools." The legislation requires school districts, charter schools, approved private-day schools, residential schools and collaborative schools to develop bullying prevention plans that will ensure they remain safe and supportive places for the Commonwealth's students to learn and thrive. It also includes procedures and accountability for collecting, maintaining and reporting bullying incident data. These new requirements will support the accurate and timely collection of data to develop an even deeper understanding of the extent of bullying in elementary schools across the Commonwealth.

Bullying and harassment are a growing problem in Massachusetts. The 2013 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 39% of Massachusetts youth reported being bullied on school property and a recent survey of the health of Boston children completed by the Boston Public Health Commission and Boston Children's Hospital in 2013 found that over one quarter (27.1%) of Boston children ages 6-17 years reported being bullied at school in the past year. Moreover, the greatest percentage of students reported being bullied in school were elementary students, ages 6-10 years (37.0%). The majority of bullying incidents involved teasing, name-calling and threatening with the motivation for bullying simply "just to be mean" or to "impress others."

To better understand the need in the local context where published data is nascent, Playworks works closely with the school leaders through on-site visits, observations and information collected from a school interest survey to understand the school's experience and their expressed need for support to create positive school environments that reduce bullying behaviors. When developing new partners, Playworks will first ensure schools meet our eligibility standard that a minimum of 50% of students receive free or reduced price lunch. These schools not only experience bullying but, more importantly, lack the necessary resources to fully address the problem. In the 2014-15 school year, Playworks Massachusetts AmeriCorps members worked with schools in Massachusetts where 82% of students qualified for free/reduced lunch. We anticipate that our Playworks Massachusetts AmeriCorps program will serve the same school population in the coming school year. Playworks will

Narratives

then prioritize the highest need schools in the Boston Public Schools and Lawrence Public Schools-- ones that have the fewest resources combined with the greatest need for creating a safe recess and ensuring the creation of a unsafe environments. Lastly, in selecting our AmeriCorps service sites, we will actively pursue partnerships with state designated level three and level four schools to implement our evidence-based program and place members to impact academic engagement.

2. THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL:

Each Playworks AmeriCorps member will utilize play at their assigned, low-income elementary school to create a safe and inclusive environment where students can become academically engaged. This theory of change is backed by statistically significant data that shows that providing a well-trained adult at recess created a high functioning recess that led to a positive recess climate that had improved recess organization (16% higher at high functioning recesses), improved students feelings of inclusion (32% higher) and improved use of positive language (18% higher). The positive recess climate led to an improved overall school climate where students were much more likely to feel physically (36% higher) and emotionally safe (39%), much more likely to feel they belong (42% higher) and had a greater sense of connection to school (34% higher) (Journal of School Health, 2015).

RECESS is the central focus of the Playworks AmeriCorps program because it is the time when bullying and conflict are most likely to occur. Members maintain a constant presence on the yard during recess, teaching and modeling pro-social skills such as respect, positive language and problem solving. In addition, to reinforce the behaviors and positive culture being developed during recess, members implement additional program components to promote respectful social behavior. CLASS GAME TIME: Members work with individual classes and their teacher using kinesthetic learning as a means to teach important social and emotional skills, including the tenets of respect and inclusion, so students become comfortable actively participating in games with their peers. JUNIOR COACHES: Members facilitate a leadership development program with a group of upper elementary students, providing training in the after school-hours and ongoing support as they become "Junior Coach" leaders who model positive behavior, lead games and assist with conflict resolution at recess for younger students. LEAGUES: Members facilitate non-competitive, developmental sports leagues each school semester, encouraging participation from students who have not previously felt comfortable playing sports. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Members work with their school administration to identify and develop one to two school community events aimed at engaging families within the school community. At the events, members use play as a catalyst for creating unique opportunities for students, parents and teachers to build relationships and a sense of belonging within the school

Narratives

community. SUMMER PROGRAMMING: During the summer months, Playworks Massachusetts will explore a "pilot" partnership with BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life), Boston Public School's designated partner for summer learning. BELL's summer programming focuses on learning activities that prevent academic learning loss, while improving the social, physical and emotional development of participating students. As part of this pilot members would support the entire five week summer session (six hours a day, five days a week). Members would lead daily recess for summer students, as well as run Class Game Time, teaching conflict resolution and social emotional skills during the elective periods. Playworks would place members at summer learning sites where students from their school are attending, therefore working with their students year round.

Through this proposal two AmeriCorps members will serve as "peer support" members. Our peer support members serve alongside other members at their school sites on a rotating basis and are critical to program continuity. Peer support members have the benefit of gathering program best practices from school to school and spreading these resources from site to site through peer-learning. In addition, peer support members provide a unique opportunity for peer-to-peer reflection on-site during each rotation. Lastly, having a trained member prepared to assume full-time duties at a school site if another member has an extended illness or exits early ensures we can provide programming at a school site without a gap in services.

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

Playworks intends to measure the long-term outcome of increased academic engagement through a modified version of the Social and Character Development Survey (SACD). This survey is validated to measure key indicators of engagement as described by CNCS as increased class participation,

Narratives

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.

3. EVIDENCE BASE:

Playworks uses an evidence-based approach backed by an independent 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 schools from six different cities were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups. Random assignment of schools helped to ensure that there were no systematic differences between the treatment and control groups' observed and unobserved characteristics and that the differences in outcomes between the two groups could be attributed solely to the effect of Playworks. To improve the statistical precision of impact estimates and reduce the chance of differences between the treatment and control groups in the characteristics of schools, random assignment was conducted within matched groups (pairs, trios or foursomes) of schools that were similar in terms of observable characteristics. The impacts on students, teachers and schools were determined by comparing the average outcomes in treatment and control 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 in Massachusetts.

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

Narratives

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. All schools in the study had at least 50% of students eligible for free or reduced meals. After one year of exposure to Playworks, students showed statistically significant increases in the following four protective factors as compared to students with no exposure to Playworks: problem-solving skills, meaningful participation in school, goals and aspirations, and physical activity. All four protective factors are associated with positive social and academic outcomes. 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 in Massachusetts.

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

4. NOTICE PRIORITY: The Playworks AmeriCorps program focuses on the CNCS Priority Area of

Narratives

Education and will measure the outcome of increased academic engagement through standard performance measure ED27A. Playworks AmeriCorps members serve in low-income elementary schools, modeling and promoting pro-social skills, maintaining a constant positive presence during recess and mentoring small groups of student leaders, to create a school climate that allows all students to feel safe, more engaged and ultimately improve their academic performance. Members use play to teach and model skills such as respect, empathy, problem solving and conflict resolution as they transform recess and school climate. 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.

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).

5. MEMBER TRAINING: Based on the current Playworks training calendar, members receive over 135 hours of professional development training to enhance their term of service. The term of service kicks off in mid-August with an intensive week long pre-service training (8.5 hours per day). Pre-service training begins with a day of orientation including an introduction to AmeriCorps, discussions about what it means to serve, a review of the member contract, prohibited activities and an AmeriCorps swearing-in ceremony. The remaining week of training focuses on skill development (e.g. group management, inclusive play, conflict resolution among students, communication with diverse populations and Playworks curriculum).

Member trainings continue throughout the rest of the service year. In the four weeks following pre-service, members participate in trainings three afternoons per week for 2 hours each, focusing on the development of professional skills including timekeeping, data collection and entry, loan forbearance, community engagement and volunteer recruitment. From October to June, trainings once a week (2 hours each) will include topics such as bullying prevention, cultural competency, peace promotion and service event planning. Members also attend "Life after AmeriCorps" and "Education Award" trainings, as well as an AmeriCorps graduation ceremony. To support peer-to-peer learning and reflection, all members attend training together and trainings are located at our partner

Narratives

schools. Giving members the opportunity to collaborate at their peer's service site helps establish a healthy AmeriCorps community.

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

6. MEMBER SUPERVISION: AmeriCorps members are directly supervised by four Playworks program managers. The role of the program manager is to train, support and guide a pod of 4-5 members through their term of service, as well as serve as the direct liaison between members and their service sites. Program managers plan and facilitate over 135 hours of training as well as reflection and community building opportunities to ensure members are well-supported. Program managers typically have at least two years of Playworks experience at a school site or equivalent experience in youth development. To adequately train supervisors, Playworks program managers participate in required trainings set by the national office including AmeriCorps program management (approved activities, prohibited activities and timekeeping), communication strategies, training facilitation and supervisory techniques.

Although the Playworks program manager serves as the member supervisor, the school principal or partnership manager provides additional on-site support for the the member throughout the day. This individual works with Playworks program manager and member to support program implementation at their school site. The principal or partnership manager introduces the member to school staff, meets with the program manager and member to discuss program progress, as well immediately notifies the program manager if any issues arise. They also allow the program manager and member to do a "teacher training" to orientate school staff on Playworks, allowable AmeriCorps activities and prohibited activities.

Managers support members during weekly site visits, provide ongoing mentorship, conduct formal performance evaluations, as well as meet with school administration each month. Site visits, which occur at a minimum once a week, provide the opportunity to observe the member's skills and give feedback, as well as time to discuss what challenges exist at the site. In addition to these scheduled visits, members can reach their manager immediately by phone or email in the event they need support. One-on-one meetings with members occur bi-monthly to identify and document member's personal and professional goals and objectives for their year of service. In total, members will receive five "goals and objectives" reviews and three formal performance evaluations during the year.

Narratives

7. MEMBER EXPERIENCE: Playworks AmeriCorps members walk away from service with a variety of beneficial skills and experiences gained during their term of service. Specific skills that members develop include proactive group management, youth development and mentoring, relationship building, lesson planning and facilitation--all skills that are particularly valuable in the education field. To equip members with strategies to communicate the value of their service experience, Life After AmeriCorps training is tailored to the specific professional interests and goals of the Playworks AmeriCorps members each school year.

Playworks strives to create a member experience that not only provides professional development, but also opportunities for reflection to promote a lifelong ethic of service. Throughout the term of service, group and individual civic reflection times are provided as a means to connect with other members and discuss the role members play in society. Members also participate in two "service and motivation" workshops that utilize interactive activities to focus on their service experience and inspirations. To connect Playworks AmeriCorps members to the larger AmeriCorps service movement, members participate in national days of service and have the opportunity to serve alongside Massachusetts Service Alliance AmeriCorps members from other organizations. For example, we coordinate joint service projects with organizations like Tenacity, Mass Mentoring and City Year to encourage collaboration and innovation in support of the community. Playworks Massachusetts also leads two annual service events--Playworks Play for Peace and Playworks Run for Recess--to demonstrate the power of play to the community.

To recruit a corps that is representative of the communities Playworks serves in Massachusetts, our local city staff conduct outreach with organizations in the neighborhoods surrounding our service sites, including nearby universities, community colleges, after-school programs, professional associations and summer camps. Local staff also table at community events and notify our volunteer base about AmeriCorps openings, as well as posting on local job boards.

8. COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION: Playworks Massachusetts strives to develop a strong AmeriCorps identity and pride amongst members. Members learn about AmeriCorps during the interview process, trainings and reflections, and practice explaining AmeriCorps to others. The AmeriCorps logo and Massachusetts Service Alliance logo are proudly displayed on our website and each member's bulletin board at their school site indicates that "AmeriCorps serves here." Lastly, members are provided AmeriCorps gear packs containing Playworks AmeriCorps shirts, sweatshirts and pins, which they are required to wear while serving. Program Managers ensure members serve in their gear and provide ongoing support when necessary.

Narratives

Organizational Capability

1. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING: Playworks Massachusetts is a \$2 million organization with a 9-year track record of successfully implementing programs. Organizationally, Playworks has a multi-tiered management structure in place to support to the Playworks Massachusetts AmeriCorps program. A national board of directors provides fiscal oversight and support to our national leadership, and our national team provides support and guidance. Regional Executive Officer David Dial directly supervises Playworks Massachusetts Executive Director Max Fripp.

Mr. Fripp is responsible for the fiscal management and development, day to day operations, and leadership and supervision of Playworks Massachusetts staff. Mr. Fripp, who has 15 years of experience building and managing efficient nonprofit programs, is supported by a local board of directors who provide leadership and counsel, monitor program operations and fiscal reports, and represent the needs and interests of the community. Mr. Fripp also collaborates with our national support team to manage the financial reports of the Massachusetts AmeriCorps grant, with emphasis on allowable AmeriCorps expenses, expense report coding and budget development.

AmeriCorps program management in Massachusetts is handled by a team of program staff: 1 program director, 4 program managers and 1 program associate. Program Director Casey Kuzio is responsible for general program management and oversees member recruitment, trainings and workshops, and directly supervises and supports the program managers. Program Managers Betsy Calkins, Amber Johnson and Rebeca Pazo (and one additional to be hired for the 2015-16 school year) directly supervise the AmeriCorps members and the relationship with their placement sites. Program managers supervise, train, support and guide the member through their term of service ensuring AmeriCorps compliance through regular site visits, written objectives and reviews. Program Associate Marcus Johnson is 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.

Playworks Massachusetts has both experience and dedication to providing Playworks AmeriCorps program to Massachusetts schools. Playworks Massachusetts was fortunate to have National Direct members serving from the fall of 2007 to the spring of 2013. In addition, Playworks Massachusetts currently partners with the Massachusetts Service Alliance to place 13 AmeriCorps members in Massachusetts schools during the 2014-15 school year. Our experience has taught us not only how to accurately manage AmeriCorps members, but has allowed our program to impact more youth in the

Narratives

community. Our experience in completing desk reviews, site visits, financial desk reviews, and progress and financial reporting has taught us to develop efficient reporting procedures.

As a national organization, Playworks has a proven record of managing large, multifaceted grants. In addition to our current one-year grant with the Massachusetts Service Alliance, we are currently in our first year of our third three-year AmeriCorps funding cycle with National Direct. We are beginning our third year of our fourth three-year AmeriCorps funding cycle with the California state commission, our second year of three year AmeriCorps funding cycles with the Utah and the North Carolina state commissions, and our first year of three year AmeriCorps funding cycles with the Maryland and Louisiana state commissions. For the 2015-16 school year we are applying for AmeriCorps funding at both the national level, through our continuation grant application, and at the local level through this application. We understand that we cannot receive two AmeriCorps grants to fund the same project. Our goal is to sustain our partnership with the Massachusetts Service Alliance (in a current 1-year grant) and support our local program through state funding. Therefore, if we are awarded this state grant, our Massachusetts AmeriCorps members will serve within Massachusetts and Playworks national will place National Direct members outside of Massachusetts.

From the beginning, the Playworks Massachusetts 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 families--to identify the strengths and challenges of the program. We use 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. As another example, when AmeriCorps members plan their community engagement projects, they first complete a school needs assessment and then work with school administrators and volunteers to organize an event that meets the identified needs.

2. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Playworks is dedicated to ensuring compliance with all

Narratives

AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Locally, the program director is responsible for attending all trainings and technical assistance calls offered by the Massachusetts Service Alliance, and provides program staff with ongoing training and support to ensure compliance with regulations and prohibited activities. The program director holds 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 managers are then responsible for reinforcing the information from the meeting and ensuring compliance at member service site locations. 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, an AmeriCorps Program Manager (ACPM) from the Playworks national office oversees regular audits. Monthly meetings are dedicated to the specifics of our Massachusetts AmeriCorps program including member hours, member activities, volunteer recruitment and any ongoing projects. The ACPM conducts 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 design and submit to the ACPM a plan to address the issue. Upon approval, the program staff have a designated amount of time to resolve the issue, and a follow-up meeting is held to ensure compliance.

Finally, our AmeriCorps program is monitored across Playworks national organizational structure to ensure compliance. 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: National Direct AmeriCorps members successfully served in Massachusetts from school year 2007-08 to school year 2012-13. During 2012-13, fifteen national direct members served through Playworks Massachusetts (100% enrollment) and thirteen members were retained (87%). No compliance issues or areas of weakness/risk were identified. As a Massachusetts Service Alliance grantee during the 2014-15 program year, thirteen AmeriCorps member currently serve at sites across the Commonwealth. Our Massachusetts Service Alliance enrollment rate was 100%, and to date we have retained all but two members. One slot was converted

Narratives

to two half time slots and one half time member started service in January. We aim to improve our retention rate by targeting recruitment efforts on community resources and engaging applicants specifically looking to complete a minimum of one year of service. During the year, we focus on increasing member support through reflection and recognition. A six-week civic engagement reflection series focuses on privilege, power and motivation, while ongoing member recognition corresponds with the Playworks core values: healthy community, healthy play, inclusion and respect. Members receive a certificate of appreciation when they receive a core value and we celebrate as a group at training.

Playworks Massachusetts was very successful in collecting and reporting data as part of the Playworks National Direct grant. In 2012-13, Playworks exceeded our outcome target (ED27) for the number of students increasing their level of school engagement with 71% of students increasing their overall scores. Playworks Massachusetts was instrumental in collection of survey data collecting 493 surveys from 15 schools. This was 25% of the total surveys collected by Playworks National indicating strong capacity to collect data and show change. On standard performance ED2, Playworks also exceeded our target output indicating Playworks Massachusetts ability to successful set and achieve targets with the Education Focus area.

Playworks Massachusetts is currently under a one-year grant with the Massachusetts Service Alliance within the Healthy Futures focus area. As Playworks Massachusetts aligns with Playworks national, we are applying for this grant under the Education focus area. Playworks is confident in our ability to collect and report under standard performance measures ED1, ED2 and ED27A.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

1. COST EFFECTIVENESS: For the proposed request of \$13,300 per MSY, Playworks Massachusetts will provide daily programming for approximately 8,100 children resulting in a significantly cost-effective program of \$0.61/child/day (of which we request \$0.18/child/day from AmeriCorps). This investment, less than one dollar per day per child, will provide significant school-wide impact reducing bullying and exclusionary behavior and improve attention in class. While many programs serving elementary schools focus exclusively on small, designated groups of students through classroom teaching, individual tutoring and/or mentorship, the Playworks AmeriCorps program provides a unique model that serves the entire school population in both large and small group settings. This comprehensive approach increases the number of students directly impacted by our members, thus achieving a very cost effective program.

Reclaimed teaching time is another cost-benefit for our service sites. Data from the random

Narratives

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

Of the total program budget, \$893,455, we propose \$627,455 in non-CNCS funding to successfully implement our AmeriCorps program. To raise the additional funds, Playworks Massachusetts requires a financial investment from our school service sites of \$30,000 per year. School fees totaling \$540,000 (18 schools x \$30,000) in non-CNCS resources will support the cost of our program. Each school signs a memorandum of understanding that documents the school fee, as well as outlines monthly billing through the appropriate district office. The remaining match amount of \$87,455 will be funded through general operating grants from the Highland Street Foundation (\$75,000 commitment) and Boston Foundation (\$12,455). Playworks Massachusetts also benefits from other local partnerships with the Brown Brothers Harriman, Fidelity Investments and New Balance. This diversified revenue stream will successfully provide the cash resources to support this project.

The proposed request of \$13,300 per MSY is an increase from the current cost per MSY on our one-year grant. Next year we propose to raise the member living allowance to the new maximum amount of \$25,060. Throughout the years, we have consistently paid the maximum living allowance and we have found that it helps us attract a more diverse pool of higher 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 increase in the cost per MSY would help to offset the cost associated with this increase while we continue to maintain a high match percentage of 70%.

2. BUDGET ADEQUACY: Playworks Massachusetts is confident that the attached budget is submitted in compliance with budget instructions and is adequate to fund the proposed program based on our prior experience managing the Massachusetts Service Alliance grant and National Direct funding.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Playworks places a high value on both 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 Massachusetts AmeriCorps members.

In 2013 Playworks received results from a random controlled trial completed by Mathematica Policy

Narratives

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.

Outcome Evaluation: The Playworks outcome evaluation will assess the full Playworks program implemented by members at individual school sites. The program follows the Playworks theory of change which posits that by placing a well-trained adult at recess created a high functioning recess that led to a positive recess climate (improved recess organization, improved students feelings of inclusion, improved use of positive language). A positive recess climate leads to an improved overall school climate where students were much more likely to feel physically and emotionally safe, much more likely to feel they belong and have a greater sense of connection to school. The evaluation is designed to answer the following questions with measurable outcomes and targets of success:

(1) Do students feel more emotionally and physically safe at recess?

- 90% of teachers report an increase in safe, healthy play during recess
- 85% of teachers report a reduction in incident of bullying
- 85% of teachers report a reduction in physical and verbal conflict
- 85% of teachers report a reduction in disciplinary incidents
- 90% of teachers report an increase in the level of cooperation among students
- 90% of teachers report a positive increase in the overall school climate

(2) Are children able to resolve conflicts and cooperate with their peers better?

- 85% of teachers report an increased conflict resolution skills during recess
- 90% of teachers report an increase in the level of cooperation during class time
- Junior Coaches will increase their skills in conflict resolution (70%), leadership (60%) and teamwork skills (70%)

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

Narratives

activity, Junior Coach assessments (pre/post) and school staff surveys (spring only) 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 Massachusetts AmeriCorps 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 and focus groups with Massachusetts AmeriCorps members and their program managers resulting in in-depth qualitative data.

Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data will be completed by the Playworks Department of Evaluation staff with support from the Playworks Massachusetts staff. The Playworks Department of Evaluation is led by Jennette Claassen, who has over ten years experience managing internal and external evaluations. Results will be compiled into a report for review by Playworks Massachusetts staff and others as requested. Staff will utilize the results to improve program process to better serve its members. Playworks will utilize internal staff to complete this evaluation and expects it to have zero budget implications.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

CLARIFICATION ITEMS

This application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of \$162,890, 13.00 Member Service Years (MSYs), 13 slots, at \$12,530.00 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

Narratives

reduction in the cost/MSY as is requested further in the letter.

RESPONSE: The Executive Summary, Budget and Performance Measures have been updated to reflect the funding levels indicated above and a request for two No-Cost MSYs. No Strategic Engagement slots 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 serving full-time for the entire school year, Playworks AmeriCorps Members become an integral part of their school communities.

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

Narratives

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.

B. BUDGET CLARIFICATION

1. 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 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.

Narratives

RESPONSE: As instructed in this Clarification letter, we have adjusted the cost per MSY in our budget from \$13,300 down to \$12,530. In addition, we have included a request for two No Cost MSYs and modified the budget accordingly. Changes to the budget also include a cost adjustment in the healthcare line item. The following changes were made to the Budget:

SECTION I

- A. Personnel Expenses - Program Director percentage of time reduced to 40%, Program Manager percentage of time reduced to 45%, Program Associate percentage of time reduced to 60%
- B. Fringe Benefits - Reduced based on the updated percentage of staff time
- E. Supplies - Program supplies multiplied by 14 schools, AmeriCorps gear packs multiplied by 15 members
- G. Member Training- First Aid/CPR and Off Site Workshops/ Team Building Activities multiplied by 15 members
- I. Other Program Operating Costs - Fingerprinting costs and TB Tests multiplied by 15 members

SECTION II

- A. Living Allowance multiplied by 15 members
- B. Member Support Costs - FICA, Worker's Compensation, and HealthCare multiplied by 15 members. Healthcare reduced to \$160 per month

SECTION III Administrative Costs changed based on calculations above

In addition, the Cost per MSY was updated to \$12,530 and two No Cost MSYs were added to the budget. The Match was updated to reflect the new Grantee share, including School Fees for 14 schools.

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

Narratives

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: Playworks operates in Massachusetts low-income schools every day of the school year. We use play to improve the school climate for every student who is enrolled. 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.

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

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: After responding to questions from CNCS through the clarification process, Playworks will not utilize a survey to determine completion rates under ED2. The revised process involves collecting enrollment information directly from the school.

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

Narratives

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 Massachusetts AmeriCorps program will serve school sites where at least 50% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Our current Massachusetts 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.

Narratives

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 5,670, the desired confidence level at 95% and the confidence interval a margin of +/-5. The required sample size is 360 but we anticipate surveying 441 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 other AmeriCorps grants and used the results as a guide for setting realistic targets for Playworks Massachusetts. This calculation has been adjusted to account for the two additional No Cost per MSY members.

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

1. ITEM: What percentage of your slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities? What

Narratives

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:

ITEM: Please respond to the following and add the additional slots to your budget and executive summary, and adjust your performance measure targets and MSY allocations:

RESPONSE: The budget, executive summary, performance measure targets and MSY allocations have been adjusted to include a request for two No Cost MSYs.

1. ITEM: The number and type of slots requested. Please confirm that for the MSYs requested, the additional members will only engage in activities aligned with the proposed member activities outlined in the application narrative.

RESPONSE: Two full-time No Cost MSY slots are requested. These two additional members will only engage in activities aligned with member activities originally proposed in the application narrative.

2. ITEM: A description of resources that will be provided to adequately support the additional members and how they are sufficient to; support the member support costs, management, oversight, program operations, and the program activities.

RESPONSE: The two additional members will be supported through similar resources as other members, including school fees and foundation and individual donations. These resources will be

Narratives

sufficient to support member costs, management, and program operations and activities.

3. ITEM: Source(s) of non-CNCS funds. Provide a brief description of the amount, classification (cash or in-kind), source(s) (State/Local, Federal, Private) for all resources secured to manage, monitor, and support these additional members.

RESPONSE: School fees in the amount of \$30,000 per school (cash, state/local), for a total of \$60,000 for the two additional members, will be used to support these additional member slots. Any remaining amount will be funded through foundation and individual donations.

4. ITEM: The organization's capability and capacity to successfully implement, manage, and monitor the additional members.

RESPONSE: Playworks has the capacity to successfully manage these two additional members and will do so in the same high quality manner that all AmeriCorps members are supported and monitored. The additional members will be supervised by a Program Manager and grant implementation will be managed consistent with the activities described in the original application.

In the event of natural disaster or emergency situation, members may be called upon to assist with the response. If the response is required, the hours contributed by the members would count toward their service commitment.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics