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Executive Summary

The Peace Corps Fellows Program, at the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, is a fellowship program for returned Peace Corps volunteers at Western Illinois University. In addition to graduate coursework, Fellows receive specialized training in community and economic development and are enrolled as AmeriCorps members assigned to rural communities in Illinois. Members implement local projects, such as: downtown revitalization, business retention and expansion, and entrepreneurship development.

Rationale and Approach

1. PROGRAM DESIGN

a. Problem: During the 1990s, when much of the nation experienced unprecedented economic growth, much of rural Illinois was left behind. Rural communities in Illinois struggle with rising unemployment, low wages, and population decline. According to the Illinois Department of Employment Security's Local Area Unemployment Statistics, the 2007 unemployment rate in non-metro counties in Illinois was 5.4%. This was higher than both the national average, of 4.6%, and the state metro average, of 4.9%. In 2005, the average wage per job in non-metro counties in Illinois was \$30,565. That of metro counties was \$51,973; demonstrating an earning gap of \$21,410 between non-metro and metro residents (US Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration). Furthermore, this gap between rural and urban earning power has widened over time. In 1990, rural residents earned an average wage of \$20,006 while urban workers earned \$29,938 -- a difference of only \$9,932. When the 2005 average wage per job is adjusted for inflation, using the Consumer Price Index, the gap is \$14,327 in real dollars. According the Census Bureau, population in non-metro areas in Illinois decreased by 5.9% between 1980 and 2007; conversely, population increased in metro areas by 15.9% during the same time period (US Bureau of the Census, Population Estimates Program). The combination of these problems coupled with a faltering national/global economy is making it

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extremely difficult for rural residents to prosper and their communities to thrive. Due to a declining population and low wages, many rural towns in Illinois have a tremendous need for trained, committed, individuals to organize and coordinate local development projects, such as downtown revitalization, city planning, environmental conservation, health education, parks and recreation development, tourism promotion, and business retention and expansion on a full-time basis. Unlike their urban counterparts, most rural communities do not have professional staff in community and economic development positions. In order to address this, the Peace Corps Fellows Program places AmeriCorps members in small, rural communities to implement community and economic development projects and to build local capacity. The Peace Corps Fellows Program uses the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) definition of metropolitan statistical areas in delineating nonmetropolitan (non-metro) counties in Illinois; counties that are not classified as metropolitan (metro) are considered non-metro/rural. There are 102 counties in Illinois, 36 are considered metro and 66 counties are non-metro/rural. The Peace Corps Fellows Program specifically targets small, rural communities located in non-metro counties, as such the program serves otherwise underserved populations who are statistically economically disadvantaged. As an outreach unit of the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA), we're ideally suited to serve our target population: rural towns and counties in Illinois, and have been doing so since the establishment of our program in 1994. The IIRA, on the Western Illinois University (WIU) campus, has monitored conditions and trends in rural Illinois since 1989 and works with public and private agencies on local development and enhancement efforts. IIRA builds the capacity of community leaders by providing technical support, applied research, evaluation, and training across the state. Furthermore, it is a clearinghouse for information on rural issues, coordinates rural research, and works with state agencies on issues of importance to rural communities.

b. Solution: AmeriCorps Member Roles and Responsibilities. The Peace Corps Fellows Program

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requests a total of 10 MSYs, to be divided into 6 half-time (HT) and 7 full-time (FT) member slots.

The Peace Corps Fellows Program recruits returned Peace Corps volunteers (RPCVs) to serve as HT and FT AmeriCorps Members as part of a two-year graduate program at WIU. During their first year in the program, Members are enrolled as HT Members, serve an average of 20 hours per week at their host organization, and enroll in graduate classes to prepare them for the work they'll do during their second-year in the program. Second-year Members serve full-time, 11-month community assignments in small/rural communities across the state. Members provide leadership on community and economic development projects. In addition to their required graduate coursework, both first and second year Members participate in specialized training in community and economic development and are responsible for mobilizing local volunteers and engaging them in service. This is done in an effort to meet the need of communities for trained professionals to lead local development efforts. Most first-year Fellows are assigned to community organizations in lieu of traditional graduate assistantships on campus. Second-year Fellows are placed in communities that have demonstrated a need, a plan, and a commitment to work with the Fellow during the 11 month assignment to accomplish the community's development goals. These communities are required to pay a sponsorship fee to help offset the cost of the Fellow's work in their community. Second-year Fellows work an average of 37.5 hours per week for their host communities, work toward the completion of their master's thesis or applied project/portfolio, and attend relevant professional development workshops and conferences throughout their service term. Since member assignments involve various communities with various needs and priorities, the tasks and activities members will be involved in will vary accordingly. The following list of activities and member roles provide a general overview of the kinds of activities members carry out during their service, based on examples from recent HT and FT reports: volunteer recruitment and management, implementation of local action plans, coordination of activities for housing authority residents, implementation of surveys to assess

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community needs, creation of Geographic Information Service (GIS) maps for use in community and economic development, development of resource guides, provide technical training to volunteers and other community members, coordination of community clean-up days, development of partnerships within the community to enhance development efforts, facilitation among community organizations and governmental units to apply resources, knowledge, and skills, championing initiatives within the community (via presentations, press releases, etc.), coordinating recycling and e-cycling programs, updating and implementing green ways and trails plans on local and county levels. Community-specific details are reflected in each member's service plan which is developed at the start of each service assignment and discussed during the member and host site orientation.

c. AmeriCorps Member Selection, Training, and Supervision. Skills learned in Peace Corps, such as organizing volunteers, facilitating groups, and resolving conflict, are tremendously useful in community service and development. Therefore, Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), who have successfully completed their Peace Corps service overseas and who wish to pursue a master's degree with an emphasis on community development, are recruited into the program. RPCVs have a track record of dedication to community service therefore applying their skills and passion to National Service makes sense. The program, with its academic and community service components, is both rewarding and demanding. We screen applicant's carefully to ensure a good fit and high commitment level. Peace Corps assists the university in recruiting RPCVs via its website, notices in its e-newsletter for RPCVs, and other related publications. In addition to Peace Corps publications, our program conducts an active marketing campaign to RPCVs via advertisements in regional RPCV newsletters, national magazines (e.g. World View), and a direct mailing campaign to recently returned volunteers in the region. Interested individuals are sent informational materials, including an application, and are encouraged to visit our website www.peacecorpfsfellows-wiu.org for more detailed information. The AmeriCorps community service component is explained in program materials and website.

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Furthermore, all prospective Peace Corps Fellows/AmeriCorps members are required to visit campus for an all-day series of meetings/interviews prior to acceptance into the program. Acceptance into the program is competitive. An assessment of interest/commitment, aptitude, and experience of the candidate in performing community service are important selection criteria. Finally, all candidates must meet WIU graduate school and departmental requirements for acceptance to the university before program consideration. Because our program is based on the Peace Corps Fellows/USA model, it specifically recruits Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, as such, our applicant pool therefore is not comprised of members from host communities. Instead, applicants to our program represent the diversity of the country at large. Our corps is comprised of a diverse group of individuals representing diversity in gender, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation, etc.

Member training and supervision takes place on an ongoing basis in our program. Graduate coursework is completed the first year in the program and is complemented by the ongoing opportunity (and commitment) to attend professional workshops and conferences throughout the member's full-time community service assignment, during their second year in the program. Half-time Members take at least two semesters of graduate coursework and participate in training workshops and conferences before they begin their service as Full-time Members. For example, Members take a graduate course entitled Small Community Development that explores recent trends in the economic development of small rural communities in Illinois and the skills necessary to approach development projects in such communities. In addition, Members attend the Community Development Institute (CDI), a 5-day comprehensive training program in community and economic development designed for community leaders and development practitioners. The goal of CDI is to equip participants with the tools and strategies to improve the economy and quality of life in their communities. Through their participation in these courses, Members develop the following skills: effective communication, conflict resolution, building capacity in communities, building teams,

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collaboration, volunteer recruitment and management, and other leadership skills. Furthermore, Members receive training through their campus work assignments with staff from the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs. In this way, Members learn first-hand the issues and problems faced by small towns. In addition to the coursework described above, a day-long workshop addressing relevant professional development topics is provided each semester to AmeriCorps members. Recent workshop topics include: Rural Health and Housing Trends* Networking skills * Business and Communication Etiquette * Rural Transportation Needs and Resources * Bench-marking in Community Development * Maintaining Continuity in Community Development * How to Build a Grassroots Leadership Team * The Three C's of Community Development: Cooperation, Collaboration, and Communication" * Resources, Partnerships, and Regionalism * Leadership Development Through Community Action * Tips From the Field--A Panel of Fellows/AmeriCorps Members * Volunteer Rewards, Recognition, and Participation * A Symposium on Ethics in Community Development. AmeriCorps Members also attend state and national professional conferences, such as the annual State Rural Economic Development Conference held in Peoria, and the International Community Development Society's annual conference, where they are exposed to state of the art practices in rural development and have opportunity to interact with community leaders and representatives of development organizations. Before the start of the internships, an orientation meeting is held with AmeriCorps Members, site supervisors, and liaison committee members. At the orientation meeting, the responsibilities of all parties are clearly established and national service requirements are explained. For example, topics addressed during orientation meetings include the following: 1) Overview of AmeriCorps, CNCS, and ICVCS, 2) Roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and liaison committee, 3) Member rights, responsibilities, and benefits, 4) Service Plan development, 5) Guidelines for monthly reporting, 6) Peace Corps Fellows Program support and supervision, 7) Upcoming AmeriCorps events including LeaderCorps and National Days of Service, and 8) AmeriCorps Oath. In each community, a liaison

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committee of three to five local citizens is formed. The liaison committee is responsible for developing a clear, reasonable, and measurable service plan, based on the previously submitted application. The service plan is the guiding document for measuring performance, supervision, and monitoring. The service plan includes clearly defined project goals and objectives, an action plan, and a timeline. One member of the liaison committee is designated as the supervisor and assigned responsibilities for daily oversight. The supervisor and liaison committee meet with the Member on a regular basis to monitor service plan progress. Monthly reports are submitted by the AmeriCorps Member with copies sent, usually electronically, to the liaison committee and supervisor, program staff, and academic advisor. The number of volunteer, volunteer hours, and projects accomplished are tracked on monthly reports and kept in a database. This ensures that everyone is kept up to date on progress at each site. Furthermore, program staff conducts quarterly site visits to meet with the liaison committee, supervisor, and Member. Frequent reviews, by the liaison committee, the site advisor, and program staff, of progress being made under the service plan ensure that the Member is effective and supported.

As Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, our Members have already made a commitment to service on the international scene. As AmeriCorps members in our program, they now have an opportunity to apply this commitment and their skills to national service. It's a win-win situation and nurtures their dedication to a life of service and civic responsibility. We provide training materials and periodic workshops that provide members with the basis for understanding civic responsibility, civic skills training and its relationship to volunteerism, and the importance of lifelong community service. The curriculum for these workshops is in keeping with WIU's strategic plan, which identifies civic responsibility a priority across campus. Furthermore, Members are given the opportunity to reflect on their service throughout their community assignment via: their monthly report; site visits; and their final report, where they are asked to reflect on their entire experience in our program and make

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connections to their future plans.

d. Outcome: Performance Measures. Three performance measures will be addressed during the proposed three-year period:

1) Residents of economically disadvantaged communities will receive professional skill development trainings. Members will coordinate or provide skill development trainings to a minimum of 250 rural residents via various community outreach services, such as community newsletters, presentations, and consultations. As a result of the trainings, 75% of participants will report an increase in relevant skill development.

2) Rural communities will be better able to meet locally-identified needs and will have accomplished development goals, due to the recruitment and management of local volunteers. As part of the application process to host an AmeriCorps Member through our program, communities identify their top priority needs for members to help address during their service. We measure members' accomplishments against the identified goals of each community in order to assess progress. By the end of each grant year 500 community volunteers will have been recruited and will log a total of 4000 volunteer service hours in order to complete 20 community projects. A total of 1,500 volunteers will be recruited over the 3 year cycle of this grant (2011 - 2014) and will serve a combined total of 12,000 hours while completing 60 community projects.

Member monthly progress reports, which include a count of community volunteers recruited, description of projects carried out, volunteer hours logged, and relevant training received, will be used to track and monitor progress toward meeting program goals. In addition to these, member performance evaluations, host site program evaluations, and member's final reports will be considered when measuring outcomes.

e. Volunteer Generation. Most Members are sponsored by community-based organizations that depend on volunteers to meet their goals. The involvement of community partners is a factor in the

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site selection process. As part of the application, the sponsoring organization must gather letters of support from community groups as evidence that there will be widespread participation by community volunteers in the program. Furthermore, prior Peace Corps experience and additional training during the program equip our Members to succeed in mobilizing volunteers. The Volunteer Training and Support Manual, published by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs, serves to assist Members and interested communities in their efforts to recruit, train, and manage volunteers. During the proposed three year period, 30 AmeriCorps MSY's will recruit, train, and coordinate a total of at least 1,500 volunteers, for a combined total of 12,000 volunteer hours accomplishing at least 60 significant community projects in the areas of downtown revitalization, health education, park and recreation development, environmental conservation, and business retention and expansion.

Members will be working to directly benefit community-based organizations in at least 30 disadvantaged Illinois communities, thereby improving their capacity for community service.

f. Partnership and Collaboration. The Peace Corps Fellows Program operates from a core set of values (based on the Community Development Society's agreed upon Principles of Good Practice; www.comm-dev.org) that include recognizing that people have a right to participate in decisions that affect them; broad based involvement of citizens is the ideal method of conducting community business; and maximizing interaction in a community increases the potential for effective development. Prior to the placement of a Member, the community must demonstrate a willingness to actively involve broad representation of citizens in project planning and implementation.

Communities are encouraged to bring together leaders and citizens from diverse backgrounds when forming the liaison committee to work with the Member and when raising funds to support the placement. In our effort to lead by example, we bring together a wide array of community partners and agencies across the state to assist us as part of our program assessment, which in turn informs the planning and implementation of our program. The group of participating partners varies each year,

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thus providing feedback that is diverse.

The program has developed strong collaborative relationships with many state and federal organizations, including Illinois Rural Partners, the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, the University of Illinois Extension, USDA-Rural Development, and the Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCEO). These organizations have assisted our program in many ways, including mentorship and technical assistance to AmeriCorps Members, assistance finding appropriate site placements, and financial support. In addition to these partnerships, during the last 3 years, we have subcontracted the Peace Corps Fellows Program at Illinois State University (ISU) to assist with member recruitment, placement, and supervision. This has allowed us to increase the reach and depth of our impact.

g. Sustainability. The social infrastructure put in place by the service that members provide has a long-lasting positive impact on communities and enhances their capacity to meet future challenges. Furthermore, the value of investing in hiring a community development professional was also made evident. Each host site develops its own service plan and performance measures for the duration of the internship. According to monthly reports and supervisor confirmation, the objectives set forth in those work plans are either fully accomplished in the eleven-month period or well underway. The Fellows Program is currently supported by a diverse group of sources, including the university, host-site communities, work-study funds, and the existing AmeriCorps Formula grant. Over the years, the program has nurtured partnerships with numerous local organizations in over 100 rural communities, including village boards, chambers of commerce, resource conservation and development councils, non-profit community development organizations, civic groups, regional planning councils, community park districts, county health departments, and community development corporations. The list of partners with whom we've worked over the years is impressive. These partnerships are essential to the long-term sustainability of this program and host communities' efforts. It has been our experience that these sorts of public-private partnerships produce long term

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results with local buy-in and support.

Since our AmeriCorps Members only serve a community for eleven months, one of their primary responsibilities is to build the community's capacity to effectively initiate, implement, and manage projects independently. Although the AmeriCorps Members provide direct service on specific projects, they are very cautious not to create a dependency on their skills. Thus, our Members put a lot of time and energy into the transfer of skills to community volunteers. Much of the last three months of a member's service is spent working with volunteer leaders to ensure that all projects can be carried forward after the member's departure from the community. When necessary the Fellow/AmeriCorps member gradually moves away from direct service on projects to an advisory role to provide time for new project leaders to become proficient with project related tasks and responsibilities. This conscious capacity building effort on the part of the Fellows/AmeriCorps members promotes the sustainability of projects and allows community volunteers to maintain momentum after the Fellow/member leaves. Nothing can promote the sustainability of community development efforts in rural communities better than a having a dedicated person working full-time on projects and that coalesce the community in to action. Take, for example, Carroll County, Illinois: When Peace Corps Fellow/AmeriCorps member Dave Keiser began his service year in Carroll County he needed to draw the entire county together and overcome skepticism from former attempts at community and economic development. There existed quite a bit of disagreement among the citizens as to what development strategies the county should pursue. To meet these challenges, Dave drew on both skills he learned in Peace Corps and his academic preparation while at WIU. According to Cathy Brunner, Carroll County Economic Development Corporation President, "Dave has consistently demonstrated the ability to connect with individuals and manage his volunteer base. He understands group dynamics and adapts easily to different situations and personalities with little difficulty." Dave's Peace Corps service in Morocco gave him some of the necessary skills to bring the interested citizens of

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Carroll County together into a cohesive and effective group. Dave's enthusiasm, experience, and commitment to community and economic development, allowed him to increase citizen participation, with regard to economic development, in Carroll County. One of the most important accomplishments of Dave's time in Carroll County was the creation of the Carroll County Economic Development Corporation (CCEDC). Dave led the fledgling organization using a strategic visioning process. He then aided the group to more coherently organize itself by becoming a corporation with 501(c)(3) non-profit status. Goals identified through strategic planning included economic development services, attracting new businesses, retaining existing businesses, and ensuring the continued economic growth of Carroll County. As a result of the service assignment, a 16-member, all-volunteer, board of directors was formed; volunteer action teams were established; a three-year strategic plan and budget were developed; and \$90,000 was raised locally to continue to efforts of the new corporation. The community showed their support for the new corporation by donating thousands of volunteer hours and dollars to projects they identified during the visioning process. In addition to establishing the economic development corporation, Dave began building linkages to regional resources. For example, he worked closely with former Fellow/AmeriCorps member, Christian Tscheschlok (then the director of the Rock Falls Community Development Corporation, Rock Falls, IL) to guide the county through the process of creating the not-for-profit organization. Furthermore, he collaborated with the regional office of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the IIRA on a countywide business retention and expansion program. The effort was successful in bringing about the relocation of a major employer, Medallion Cabinetry, to the county. The cabinet manufacturer expected to bring 250 jobs to the county, over three years. Through these approaches, Keiser helped Carroll County to tackle economic development with a regional outlook. In his eleven months in Carroll County, Dave added so much to the community that they didn't want to let him go. At the conclusion of his service assignment, he signed

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a two-year contract to stay on in Carroll County as director of the newly created Carroll County Economic Development Corporation.

Organizational Capability

2. ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY:

a. Organizational Background. The AmeriCorps program is managed within the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA) at Western Illinois University. IIRA seeks to improve the quality of life for rural residents by partnering with public and private agencies on local development and enhancement efforts. It was established in 1989 and since then has been leading projects dedicated to rural community and economic development, value-added agriculture, alternative energy, health care, technology (including Geographic Information System, GIS), education, housing, public transportation, public management, and volunteer recruitment and management. IIRA accomplishes this through its three-step outreach process: facilitating strategic visioning in communities, providing technical assistance to address community-identified needs, and providing personnel to lead local implementation efforts. It is here that the Peace Corps Fellows Program and its AmeriCorps members come into play. It is Fellows, serving their AmeriCorps assignment, that carry out the implementation of community-driven service projects. As such, they provide a "front-line" outreach capacity for the IIRA to deliver on its mission.

During FY2010, the IIRA received more than \$1,881,600 in external funding. That year, the Institute's total budget, including grant, fee-for-services, and appropriated funds amounted to \$3,543,000.

From its inception in 1989, the IIRA has generated more than \$27,259,600 in external funding.

Funds have been received from:

- * Corporation for Nation and Community Service
- * US Economic Development Administration

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- * US Dept. Of Commerce
- * US Department of Agriculture
- * Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation
- * University of Wisconsin
- * Various State of Illinois Agencies
- * Eastern Illinois University
- * University of Illinois
- * Southern Illinois University School Of Medicine
- * Western Illinois University
- * The Energy Foundation
- * Verizon Foundation
- * Various Communities, Government Organizations, Non-Profits, and Businesses throughout Illinois

The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs has had a wealth of experience in administering federal grant funding. Since its inception in 1989, the Institute has successfully administered more than \$3,769,411 in federally funded programs.

In the last five years the IIRA has received funding from the Corporation for the AmeriCorps*State and VISTA programs. A little more than 4% of our total funding came from the Corporation for FY 2010. We anticipate a similar percentage for this grant cycle. The proposed project represents 3.7% of our total funding.

All funds received are managed by WIU's Grants Accounting and Business Offices and are subject to WIU's audit requirements and Governmental Accounting Standards Board rules. The Grants Accounting Office, in conjunction with the IIRA accountant (Kristi Kupka), will provide an accounting of funds and expenditures as required by the grant.

b. Staffing. The key staff persons responsible for the program are: 1) Karen Mauldin-Curtis, Program

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Manager: Karen is an alumna of the Peace Corps Fellows Program. She earned a Master of Arts in Geography from Western Illinois University, served her community internship in Cambridge, IL, and completed her Peace Corps service in the Dominican Republic. As manager of the program, she is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the program, including design and supervision of programming and training activities, internship/service site placement and support, management of grant funds, and development of program partnerships; 2) Karen Peitzmeier, Internal Coordinator: Karen Peitzmeier has a Master of Science in Leisure Studies from Oklahoma State University. She joined the program's management team in June 2005. Her primary responsibilities include recruiting returned Peace Corps Volunteers/Members, coordinating training activities, and site support; 3) Carrie Skees, Administrative Liaison: Carrie is a graduate of Western Illinois University with an emphasis in Human Resource Management. She has worked with the program since April 2008. Her responsibilities include daily administrative tasks, maintaining regular communication with prospective and current Members, general accounting of program accounts, tracking member and alumni activities, and coordinating member recognition events. Additional IIRA and WIU staff involved with financial management of the program include: Kristi Kupka and Shannon Sutton. As Accounts Manager at the IIRA, Kristi oversees the fiscal management of all grant-sponsored projects at IIRA, including the Peace Corps Fellows Program. As Grants and Contracts Administrator in the Accounting Office of WIU, Shannon tracks and reports the program's financial progress on WBRS and monitors compliance of grant and university financial policies. Furthermore, Shannon meets with program and Commission staff during program visits to answer questions and provide required financial documentation.

c. Multi-State Applicants Only: N/A

d. Multi-Site Applicants Only. Because it is our mission to assist small, rural communities across the state, we are by necessity a multi-site program. Prospective host/service sites must apply to host a

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Peace Corps Fellow/AC member. The application process entails: 1) initial meeting with program staff, 2) a formal application to host a member, 3) a meeting with the prospective member and program staff, and 4) follow-up discussion with program staff. During the first meeting, program staff explain how the program works, the benefits (to service sites and to members), the costs, and the roles and responsibilities of all parties. Once a community is ready to apply for a member they prepare and submit a written application stating their needs/goals and prioritizing possible projects for the member to carry out. In the application they also identify their plan for sustaining efforts once the member's term of service is complete. Furthermore, they must demonstrate support for their request from a broad spectrum of community leaders/residents and establish a liaison committee (comprised of 3 - 7 community members willing to serve in a volunteer capacity for the duration of the assignment, to help guide the effort and introduce the member to key networks in the community) to help ensure the member's integration into the community and the successful completion of projects. Site selection is made through a competitive process and based on their demonstrated need, appropriateness of possible projects, and the fit between their need and the skills and interests of the available members at the time. Once a possible match between site and member has been identified, a follow-up meeting is scheduled to allow prospective sites and prospective members to meet and discuss the possible scope of work and explore the work site, etc. The site selection process is complete once need and compatibility have been established and all parties agree to move forward. At that point, selected service sites commit, in writing, to sponsoring a member and dates are set for member and site orientation and member start and end dates. The application and selection process is rigorous and adheres to grant provisions. Only those communities who demonstrate a compelling need, a sustainable plan, quality and engaged leadership, and a commitment to support the efforts of the member with both human and financial resources are selected. Program staff monitor and support members' and sites' progress via the monthly progress reports submitted by members and signed by their supervisors. Furthermore,

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program staff make quarterly site visits to ensure compliance (programmatic and fiscal), celebrate recent successes, and discuss additional support, if necessary. Sufficient funds are budgeted for staff travel in order to accomplish this important management task. In addition to our own staff support, we are able to tap our network of statewide partners (e.g., Illinois State University, University of Illinois, Rural Partners, and other IIRA personnel) to provide technical assistance to members and host sites. Service sites tend to be new each year; however, we do allow sites to apply for subsequent and/or multiple members if they can demonstrate a compelling need and a sound/sustainable plan that supports their request. The Fulton County Highway Department and Southern Illinois HealthCare are examples of such sites. Prior to the placement of members at any site, the program has no previous programmatic and/or funding relationship with them. All sites (and members) have the opportunities to connect with other sites (and members) at program-sponsored meetings/trainings at statewide conferences, and via electronic and print updates from the program, including AmeriCorps and Commission-specific information. Because it is in our programmatic interest that members succeed in their assignments and that service sites' needs are met, we go to great lengths to select sound sites, place capable and committed members, and monitor their progress throughout the duration of the assignment.

e. Current Grantees Only.

Enrollment: We have been successful in enrolling members. Our current member enrollment rate is 100%. We expect to meet our enrollment rate for the proposed grant period.

Retention: We have been successful in retaining members. Our current member retention rate is 100%. We expect to meet our retention rate for the proposed grant period.

Cost Per MSY: We are asking for the full cost per MSY. Because the program operates statewide, it requires significant staff time for member and host site support, sizeable travel expenditures for site

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visits, and considerable investment in member trainings.

f. Special Circumstances (N/A)

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

COST EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY: a. Cost Effectiveness / Cost Per MSY. The Peace Corps Fellows Program is applying to CNCS for operational funding in order to continue our statewide program. The requested funds will allow us to serve rural communities across the state and meet their increasing demand for assistance with community development efforts. The budget presented in this application covers expenses associated with both half-time and full-time member assignments. The total request of \$130,000 for the 2011-2012 grant year will support 10 MSYs (7 full-time and 6 half-time members) at a rate of \$13,000 per MSY. We are asking for the full cost per MSY due to the nature of the service provided, the large service area being covered, and the rural nature of the communities that we serve. Because the program operates statewide, it requires significant staff time for member and host site support, sizable travel expenditures for site visits, and considerable investment in member trainings. Nonetheless, the program is quite cost-effective to CNCS. This is due to significant financial support from the university and participating communities. In addition to non-Federal sources providing the bulk of funding for the on-campus portion of the program, the program utilizes work-study funds when appropriate. The Peace Corps Fellows Program maintains a close relationship with Western Illinois University's Financial Aid Office and Federal Work Study (FWS) program. In fact, in the last three years, 9 Members received funding through work-study for community service projects that they were involved in during their campus studies (either prior to becoming AmeriCorps Members or while serving as half-time members). The Fellows Program will continue to work to increase the number of Fellows funded by FWS and other university monies when appropriate.

The financial support from host communities is striking. The sponsorship fee to host a full-time

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member is currently \$22,500 and \$7,040 for half-time members. As in the past, we are not requesting any funds from CNCS to pay living allowances to members since community sponsorship fees will provide the necessary funds for FY11. With regard to living allowances, it should be noted that the program provides FT members with a living allowance of \$12,815, rather than the minimum \$11,400 that is required by CNCS. In addition, Western Illinois University is also committed to the program and pays for a portion of staff salaries and HT member living allowances. It also provides in-kind contributions in the form of technical assistance and other operating support. Again, this cash and in-kind support is not listed as grantee match so that we can use these funds as match on other grants. As in the past, we will continue to actively seek community and university financial support to leverage funding from CNCS and other partners.

b. Current Grantees Only (Extent to which you will increase program's share of costs and/or deepening impact/broadening reach). We are decreasing our reliance on federal support in a number of ways. First, we have increased the cost of community sponsorship from \$20,000 to \$22,500 for FT members. The willingness on the part of host communities to absorb the higher cost of supporting a member is additional evidence of the value they place on the work our members do and the long-term impact of their service. Next, our existing relationship with the Peace Corps Fellows Program at Illinois State University (ISU) gives us access to a greater number of sites for member placements. This enables us to expand our services in order to meet the growing need while increasing the amount of community funding for our program, without significantly increasing the workload for program staff. Finally, with an increasing number of alumni graduating from the program we are continuing to explore the creation of alumni giving circles to raise non-grant dollars to be used for professional development opportunities for Members and host sites.

c. Special Circumstances N/A.

d. Budget Adequacy. When the \$130,000 requested from CNCS is added to the other program funding

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sources, there will be a minimum of \$213,509 to run the program next year. This amount of money is necessary to run the program for three reasons: First, our program is located in a rural area and works with resource poor rural communities across the state. This significantly increases the program travel, training, and supervision costs. Second, the amount of financial support we can request from these communities is limited. Third, it allows us to fund member living allowances through non-federal sources. The majority of non-federal funds will be from host communities. This money is used to pay the living allowances of members that work with the host communities. Assigning members to live in their host site communities during their service year has enabled the program to meet its objectives of volunteer recruitment and successful implementation of community development projects. In fact, members have produced the following outputs over the past 2 years. They have recruited, trained, and coordinated over 4000 volunteers and accomplished over 50 significant, volunteer driven, community development projects. The outcomes of these activities have made the communities more self-reliant and improved the quality of life for their residents. Program funding for last year allowed us to pay the stipends of full and part-time members and send them to multiple training and conference events. It paid for staff time to run the program and provide support to Members in the field. It also paid for sizable travel expenditures for site visits to members at their host sites. In addition, we have been able to pay for normal operating costs of the program. Our funding request to AmeriCorps for this grant cycle is the same amount as for the last two budget years. We feel confident that we will be able maintain the same quality programming, provide the same training opportunities for our members, and anticipate the same outcomes on a larger scale by partnering with ISU, and using the additional monies from community sponsorships and financial support from alumni to cover any incremental costs of running the program.

e. EAP and Full-time Fixed Amount Applicants Only. N/A.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

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PLAN FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT AND IMPROVEMENT: The Peace Corps Fellows Program has a strong commitment to continuous improvement. As such, we have in place various mechanisms to track and evaluate progress toward meeting and achieving our program's objectives. The program tracks Member progress based on information provided in each member's monthly report. Supervisors provide confirmation of progress by signing each member's monthly report and in direct communication with program staff during the regularly scheduled site visits. Furthermore, at the conclusion of each assignment, members and supervisors submit a final report summarizing achievements, evaluating the experience, and making suggestions for improvement to the program. Program staff review these reports and make adjustments in program activities when necessary. Furthermore, the program will employ an external evaluator (please see budget), to review the above materials, assess the achievement of program objectives, and make recommendations for improvements.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

CLARIFICATION SUMMARY:

*Confirmation of desired grant award start and member enrollment period start date: August 1, 2011.

*Budget Clarifications:

- 1) All 13 members will receive the required background checks. ISU will cover the cost of background checks for the 5 members they will recruit, place, and supervise. WIU will cover the cost of the remaining 8 members. The cost for background checks in the budget includes the cost of FBI checks.
- 2) All grant-funded program staff (both at WIU and ISU) have received the required background checks; results are on file at the Peace Corps Fellows Program office on the WIU campus.

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- 3) Catering/food costs for member trainings have been removed from the budget.
- 4) Full-time members will receive a living allowance totaling \$12,815, per member; the application narrative (i.e. the COST EFFECTIVENESS and BUDGET ADEQUACY section) and Budget Section 2 now reflect this.
- 5) A copy of the current Indirect Cost rate was emailed to CNCS and the Serve Illinois Commission at the time of initial application submission. It was resubmitted, via email, to both parties on May, 1, 2011.
- 6) The budget (see Budget Sections below) has been revised to address the clarification requests.

* Programmatic Clarifications:

- 1) Results from a survey of local governments in Illinois, entitled: An Assessment of Technology and Community / Economic Development Issues, conducted in the summer of 2009 by Western Illinois Regional Council (WIRC) and the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs (IIRA), supports the assertion that: "Unlike their urban counterparts, most rural communities do not have professional staff in community and economic development positions." According to survey results, "only 17.8 nonmetro municipalities employed an economic development professional, compared to 35.6 in metro areas." Furthermore, the results indicate that the funds available to support economic development activities in nonmetro municipalities lagged behind their metro counterparts, "nonmetro municipalities' allocated \$37.81 per capita, for economic development activities in FY2009, while metro municipalities' allocated \$55.56 per capita, for the same activities."
- 2) Each year new host sites are selected and matched with the skills and interests of incoming members; we are currently in the process of selecting host sites for the FY2012 service year. Overall, we target economically disadvantaged, rural (nonmetro) communities and/or counties in Illinois and refer to the U.S. Census Bureau for demographic information and economic indicators. The table

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below, lists current demographic information/economic indicators for some current and likely host sites:

Key Economic Indicators for Current and Prospective Areas Served

Key Economic Indicators for Current and Prospective Areas Served

Economic Indicator Fulton County, Illinois Knox County, Illinois McDonough County, Illinois

Nonmetro Illinois State of Illinois United States

Current or Prospective Community/County Current Prospective Current & Prospective -- -- --

Population 2010 37,069 52,919 32,612 1,679,801 12,830,632 308,745,538

Population 2000 38,250 55,836 32,913 1,705,887 12,419,293 281,421,906

Population 1990 38,080 56,393 35,244 1,680,018 11,430,602 248,709,873

Population Change, 1990-2000 0.4% -1.0% -6.6% 1.5% 8.6% 13.2%

Population Change, 2000-2010 -3.1% -5.2% -0.9% -1.5% 3.3% 9.7%

Unemployment Rate, 2005-2009 7.9 7.9 8.1 8.0 7.2

Median Household Income, 2005-2009 \$40,681 \$38,535 \$32,337 -- \$55,222 \$51,425

Target Region's Income as a Percent of State's 73.7% 69.8% 58.6% -- -- --

Persons in Poverty, 2005-2009 13.6% 15.9% 22.5% 14.3% 12.4% 13.5%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010 Census Redistricting Data, 2005-2009 American

Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3) - Sample Data, and 1990

Summary Tape File 3 (STF3) - Sample Date (Online).

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3) Relationship with Illinois State University: The Peace Corps Fellows Program at WIU subcontracts the Peace Corps Fellows Program at ISU to assist with the recruitment, placement, and supervision of part- and full-time members. Our two PCF programs share a long history of collaboration dating back to our joint creation in 1994. Although the programs are now managed separately, we continue to work together when appropriate to serve rural communities in Illinois. By subcontracting ISU through this grant, our program is able to serve more communities in the state and thereby increase the reach and depth of our impact. PCF program staff at ISU are in regular communication with program staff at WIU and report quarterly on member progress.

CLARIFICATIONS PART 2

Performance Measure Clarification: Although the intermediate outcome target was decreased from 75% to 50% in the last submission, the number of individuals served was doubled, from 250 to 500. Hence, increasing the total number of individuals targeted to improve skills up to 250 (50% of 500) from 187 (75% of 250). Therefore, there is a net gain/increase (of 62.5) in the number of individuals who will report improvement in at least one relevant professional skill. The target measure is rigorous for a number of reasons. First, it is important to note that our members will be serving small, rural/nonmetro communities and will therefore have access to fewer individuals and will face more unique location-related challenges than members serving urban/metro communities. For example, in some cases, current members are serving communities with total populations of 500 or fewer. The size (i.e., population) of these service sites limits the number of relevant individuals available to serve/train. Therefore, doubling our target number of individuals being served is a challenging target to meet. Furthermore, the sometimes isolated location of the communities being served also affects the number of individuals reached. Conditions in these communities are such that transportation to

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meetings/trainings isn't always available or reliable, further limiting access to the intended audience. Finally, it is worth noting that in addition to addressing economic opportunity for rural residents by coordinating relevant professional development trainings for individuals, our members also work to affect the economic opportunity for the community at-large by building the capacity of local groups, such as the chamber of commerce, small business association, and community and economic development organizations, etc. As such, our members' service enhances the economic climate of host communities. For example, when members work with local volunteers to plan and implement shop local campaigns or downtown beautification efforts, they increase foot traffic on "Main Street" which can increase sales and keep small businesses in business, thereby retaining (and or creating additional) jobs in the community.

Programmatic Clarification: Our program is committed to creating and supporting an AmeriCorps identity among our members. This is evident in the following ways:

- 1) In our recruitment materials/process we actively promote AmeriCorps service as one of the benefits of our program. As Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, our prospective AmeriCorps members come to us with a record of service. They are often looking for an opportunity to apply lessons learned abroad to under-served communities back home. In fact, it is the opportunity to continue to serve, this time "stateside" through AmeriCorps, that attracts many candidates to our program.
- 2) We provide all members with an orientation to AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps service gear. As an AmeriCorps*State program, we use the AmeriCorps logo on all relevant programmatic paperwork, reminding members and their supervisors that we're part of a larger, national service effort.
- 3) As part of their service, our members participate in AmeriCorps*State events sponsored through the Serve Illinois Commission, such as: LeaderCorps and National Service Recognition Day. Additionally,

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our members participate in National Days of Service and AmeriCorps Week. Each of these activities further strengthens their individual and collective identity as AmeriCorps members.

4) In closing, it is worth mentioning that in the June 2010 report, "Transforming Communities Through Service", our program was recognized by the Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) and the American Association of State Service Commissions (ASC) as one of "52 of the Most Innovative AmeriCorps Programs in the United States". Our program was honored to be recognized in this way as it reflected the unique way in which our members, tapping their Peace Corps service experience, are "getting things done" for rural communities in Illinois. Our members are proud to have served both overseas, with Peace Corps, AND domestically, with AmeriCorps.

Budget Clarification: Please see Budget Section 1C and 1G for revisions.

Thank you for this opportunity to clarify our application for funding.

CLARIFICATION PART 3:

Performance Measure: In our efforts to demonstrate the high impact of our members' service on rural residents, we've revised the Intermediate Outcome to show that 75% of 500 participants receiving job skills trainings will report increased knowledge.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our application.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Performance Measures

SAA Characteristics

- AmeriCorps Member Population - None c
- Geographic Focus - Rural
- Geographic Focus - Urban
- Encore Program

Priority Areas

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Economic Opportunity | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stewardship |
| <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Healthy Futures |
| <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Veterans and Military Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input type="checkbox"/> | <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disaster Services | |
| <i>Selected for National Measure</i> <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Grand Total of all MSYs entered for all Priority Areas 10

Service Categories

Other Community and Economic Development Primary Secondary

Volunteer Recruitment

Service Category: Other Community and Economic Development

Measure Category: Not Applicable

Strategy to Achieve Results

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

Members will recruit and coordinate local volunteers to implement locally-identified community projects.

Members implement local projects, such as: downtown revitalization, business retention and expansion, entrepreneurship development, jobs skills trainings, not-for-profit board development, computer literacy development, community branding and marketing campaign, park clean up and downtown beautification events. In order for any of these community-wide activities to take place and for them to be sustained over time, local volunteers must participate in the planning and implementation process.

Since our AmeriCorps Members only serve a community for eleven months, one of their primary

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

responsibilities is to build the community's capacity to effectively initiate, implement, and manage projects independently. Although the AmeriCorps Members provide direct service on specific projects, they are very cautious not to create a dependency on their skills. Thus, our Members put a lot of time and energy into the transfer of skills to community volunteers. Much of the last three months of a member's service is spent working with volunteer leaders to ensure that all projects can be carried forward after the member's departure from the community. When necessary the AmeriCorps member gradually moves away from direct service on projects to an advisory role to provide time for new project leaders to become proficient with project related tasks and responsibilities. This conscious capacity building effort on the part of the AmeriCorps members promotes the sustainability of projects and allows community volunteers to maintain momentum after the Fellow/member leaves.

Results

Result: Output

AmeriCorps members will recruit and supervise local volunteers to plan and implement locally-identified community development projects.

Indicator: community volunteers recruited

Target: By the end of each grant year, 400 community volunteers will have been recruited to help plan and implement locally identified community projects.

Target Value: 400

Instruments: Members' monthly progress reports and volunteer sign in sheets will be used to verify the number of volunteers recruited.

PM Statement: Local volunteers will be recruited to plan implement locally-identified community development projects in an effort to meet local needs and build local capacity for sustainable development. By the end of each grant year, 400 community volunteers will have been recruited and supervised to carry out community projects.

Prev. Yrs. Data:

Result: Intermediate Outcome

As a result of the effort to recruit and supervise local volunteers, communities will successfully plan and implement community projects to meet local needs.

Indicator: Number of community projects implemented.

Target: Local volunteers will be better prepared and organized to plan and implement projects that meet local needs. A minimum of 20 community-based projects will be completed.

Result: Intermediate Outcome

Target Value: 20

Instruments: Members' monthly progress reports will be used to verify the number of projects planned and implemented.

PM Statement: As a result of the effort to recruit and supervise local volunteers, communities will successfully plan and implement community projects to meet local needs. Local volunteers will be better prepared and organized to carry out projects. A minimum of 20 community-based projects will be completed.

Prev. Yrs. Data:

National Performance Measures

Priority Area: Economic Opportunity

Performance Measure Title: Job training/Skill development

Service Category: Other Community and Economic Development

Strategy to Achieve Results

Briefly describe how you will achieve this result (Max 4,000 chars.)

Members will conduct an assessment of local job skills, identifying existing strengths and needs. In response, they will coordinate or provide relevant professional skill development trainings to residents of economically disadvantaged communities. Trainings may include, but are not limited to: computer literacy, resume writing, interviewing skills, financial literacy, etc.

Result: Intermediate Outcome

Result.

Residents of economically disadvantaged communities who participate in trainings will report an increase in jobs/professional skill development.

Indicator: Professional skill development.

Target :75% of 500 participants will report increased skill development in at least one relevant skill area.

Target Value: 375

Instruments: Participant evaluation forms (pre-post tests) and member progress reports.

PM Statement: 75% of residents who receive professional skill development trainings will report skill enhancement in at least one relevant skill area.

Result: Output

Result.

Residents of economically disadvantaged communities will receive professional skill development trainings.

Indicator: O2: Individuals receiving job training services.

Target :Members will coordinate or provide skill development trainings to a minimum of 500 rural residents via various community outreach services, such as community newsletters, presentations, and consultations.

Target Value: 500

Instruments: Members' monthly progress reports describing activity and number of participants/recipients. A pre and post test of participants will be used to measure the impact of the training received.

PM Statement: Residents of economically disadvantaged communities will receive professional skill development trainings. Members will coordinate or provide skill development trainings to a minimum of 500 rural residents via various community outreach services, such as community newsletters, presentations, and consultations.

Required Documents

Document Name

Status

Evaluation

Sent

Labor Union Concurrence

Not Applicable