

United States House of Representatives

Committee on Appropriations

Project Request Summary

Subcommittee, Agency and Account Information

Subcommittee

Labor, HHS, Education

Agency

Department of Education

Account

Elementary & Secondary Education (includes FIE)

Project Information

Project Name:

After School Matters

Amount Requested:

\$1,033,325

Project Description:

After School Matters is a unique non-profit, public private partnership offering after school programs to thousands of high school teens in Chicago. It is distinctive in that it is an intermediary organization. It engages community and teaching organizations, as well as independent instructors, to create and teach curricula for out-of-school time programming through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. This method provides the widest possible range of opportunities. This range covers five content areas: gallery³⁷ (arts), science³⁷ (science), sports³⁷ (sports), tech³⁷ (technology), and words³⁷ (communications). Such diversity lets teens find programs that appeal to their ever-changing interests and enables After School Matters to quickly address shifts in workforce trends in Illinois.

Apprenticeships are the core model of After School Matters. They allow high school teens to receive stipends while learning marketable skills in a professional atmosphere from industry experts. The instructor-to-student ratio for apprenticeships is 1:15, and the ideal program incorporates two instructors working with 30 teens. Apprenticeships mirror real jobs in many ways. Prospective teen apprentices must fill out applications, interview with After School Matters staff, and maintain professional standards of attendance, conduct, and dedication. The professional concepts developed in these programs provide teens with the maturity and knowledge to enter the workforce of Illinois. Some apprenticeships, such as the lifeguard and sports officiating programs, certify or license teens for summer jobs with public partners and other employment opportunities.

The most skilled and mature teens can refine their abilities in advanced apprenticeships. These intensive programs have more rigorous demands of dedication and quality, slightly higher stipend payments, and more sophisticated and ambitious final projects. Such projects include professional performances, technology services, and commissioned public or private artwork.

After School Matters expects all apprenticeships to focus on a core set of basic work readiness skills and “soft skills” that employers demand. These skills cut across academic and professional fields and include:

WORK READINESS SKILLS

Attendance
Punctuality
Dependability
Respect
Cooperation
Politeness
Diligence
Flexibility
Open-mindedness
Appropriate dress
Appropriate language
Interviewing skills
Resume Development

APPLIED SOFT SKILLS

Teamwork
Leadership
Effective oral and written communication (including presentation)
Time management
Prioritization of tasks
Following directions and instructions
Proper care and use of resources and facilities
Use of appropriate tools and resources
Conflict resolution; negotiation
Problem-solving
Decision-making
Acquiring, organizing, and interpreting information
Creativity

Intended Recipient of Funds

After School Matters
66 East Randolph
Chicago, IL 60601

Explanation of the request:

For more than a decade, there has been a crisis looming for the nation's high school population. Dropout rates are alarmingly high; gangs and drugs lure teens down a road that leads to addiction, jail, or death; guns and violence on urban streets threaten young people who just want the tools, knowledge, and safe environments to grow so that they may become thriving adults who contribute to society. Schools cannot meet these challenges alone. Investment in programs that have demonstrated the ability to engage teens as they learn is crucial to keeping them committed to graduating from high school and preparing them for college or the workforce.

Teens spend less time in school in Illinois than they do in other states. In Chicago, for example, high school hours total 1,001, while the national average is 1,116. However, extending the school day or the school year is prohibitively expensive for most state governments. After School Matters apprenticeships expand learning and skill development for each teen participant by an additional 90 hours each semester and approximately 135 hours during the summer at a much lower cost than traditional schooling.

Several external researchers have evaluated After School Matters programs. Their findings have been used to enhance and strengthen the organization's work. The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago completed one of the most compelling studies in 2006. Researchers followed a group of 3,411 students in 12 Chicago high schools for four years and discovered a positive relationship between student participation in After School Matters programs and high school graduation: "Teens who participate in After School Matters programs have higher graduation rates and lower drop-out rates than teens who do not participate." Teens in After School Matters programs have higher school attendance than teens who do not participate.

"Teens in After School Matters programs have fewer course failures than teens who do not participate. Statistics on the graduating class of 2006 from the Chicago Public School Department of Career and College Preparation demonstrate that: "After School Matters participants with a GPA of 3.0-3.4 enrolled in college at a higher rate: 71.9% compared to 63.5% for the district. These participants were also more likely to attend a 4-year college and to attend school full time than their district counterparts." Latino students who participated in the After School Matters program had higher college enrollment rates compared to their district counterparts: 50% versus 38.9% for the district.

Beyond the impact on the teen participants, an investment in After School Matters programs enriches the communities where they take place by making the streets safer and prompting the creation of products "such as murals, renovated computers, and public gardens" that can then be enjoyed by the public. Many of these communities have neither the necessary programs nor the private or non-profit facilities available in which to host them. After School Matters leverages safe havens such as parks and libraries to help address this need. By anchoring out-of-school opportunities around high schools, parks, and libraries in under-served areas around the city, After School Matters invigorates these neighborhoods. It also maximizes the use of the existing public infrastructure, allowing state and local funds to be used for other priorities.

The apprenticeship structure also brings much-needed job opportunities to these areas. After School Matters engages hundreds of independent instructors with real world experience to develop teens' skills and to guide them as they explore careers they might never have considered. Additionally, After School Matters contracts with over 100 community organizations to run programming, which directly integrates it into communities and empowers local agencies to add capacity. This potential growth then creates even more opportunities for adults and teens alike.

In this manner, After School Matters not only impacts high school teens, but every Chicago resident, providing work, promoting growth, and producing products that can

be enjoyed by all. As After School Matters teens move forward, they take with them the lessons they've learned, the skills they've developed, and the respect they've gained from the caring adults who took the time to help them find their futures. It is this spark of inspiration that they will take with them as they chart the course of their own lives, influence the lives of their neighbors, and give back to their communities as happy, healthy, and productive members of the workforce of Chicago.