

**Agenda Item 2**
March 4, 2015

DATE: February 17, 2015

TO: Children and Families Commission of Orange County

FROM: Christina Altmayer, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Capacity Building Programs Update 

ACTION: Receive Update on the Capacity Building Programs.

SUMMARY:

The Children and Families Commission's strategic plan includes the goal category of Capacity Building which is focused on promoting an effective and quality delivery system for young children and their families. The Capacity Building programs include AmeriCorps and VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) programs, Capacity Building Grants, Fund Leveraging and Sustainability, and Evaluation. This staff report provides updates on both the VISTA program and Capacity Building Grant making program.

DISCUSSION:**VISTA Program Update**

The Children and Families Commission has participated in VISTA programs for 14 years. The Commission serves as the lead for the statewide First 5 Service Corps collaborative, which includes five other county commissions. Through this program, the Commission receives an allocation of 19 VISTA positions that are distributed within the five participating county Commissions, with Orange County receiving eight VISTA members. The eight Orange County VISTA members are placed with Commission grantees and community partners to provide capacity building support. This program is partially federally funded, which provides benefits, living stipends, and educational awards for individuals that complete a year of service in low income communities.

On February 5, 2015 the Commission received official notification, from the Program Officer, that the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) would not be renewing the program and that the grant will terminate on April 30, 2016. The letter referenced the length of the First 5 Service Corps program as a factor in the decision to not renew the program. Staff has notified the other participating county commissions of the termination. Per the letter received from CNCS, the VISTA program will end once all of the active members have completed their term of service and exited the program. All members will be provided the opportunity to complete their term of service and receive all local and federally funded benefits for which they are eligible. Staff anticipates all members will have exited the program by April 30, 2016 and that all reporting requirements will be completed by May 31, 2016. During this time, Prevent Child Abuse California will continue to serve as the Commission's administrative partner and continue to process member living stipends; provide technical assistance to VISTA members, counties and host agencies; and, compile the quarterly and final reports.

The Commission's net annual cost for the VISTA program is just over \$300,000. With the termination of the CNCS agreement the Commission will have an estimated \$150,000 in Fiscal Year 2015/16 and an additional \$150,000 in Fiscal Year 2016/17 to support other Commission priorities. Staff will review potential options for these funds, which could include the expansion of the Commission's AmeriCorps program, expanding program technical assistance opportunities to Commission grantees focused on evaluation, or supporting additional catalytic projects. A request for direction will be included in the April Commission meeting.

Capacity Building Grant Program Update

The Commission's February 2015 meeting included a summary of the work done by The Olin Group to identify opportunities to support Commission grantees capacity to scale up services, document outcomes, compete for national and federal funding, and implement Commission direction from the June 2014 planning session. Based on the preliminary survey data and focus group findings to date, Commission funded grantees are achieving positive results, collaborating to expand programs, and are achieving a regional impact. However, there is a need to further develop competencies in the following areas to increase their competitiveness for national, federal or other discretionary grant competitions:

- Developing a deeper understanding of service coordination and collaboration as they relate to collective impact
- Implementing and effectively utilizing evaluation systems
- Preparing federal grants and understanding grant application procedures
- Initiating fund development strategies

To support the development of these competencies, The Olin Group has developed potential strategies in which the Commission could invest to address specific agency needs and build the capacity of the region to successfully attract federal, state, and national funders such as:

- Support federal and national grant readiness assessments for individual grantees
- Provide individual grantees technical assistance to support evaluation and outcomes reporting
- Provide long-term, customized capacity building support for each cohort that includes:
 - training on best practices and successful regional collective impact systems
 - providing information on funding opportunities in pursuit of research, evaluation and system-enhancing grants on behalf of regional projects
 - technical assistance in support of developing regional theories of change and shared measurement approaches
 - strengthening regional approaches to address community needs
- Explore using some of the Commission available Catalytic Funding as match that could be used by cohorts

As recommended by the Commission at the February meeting, The Olin Group will solicit grantee input on these recommendations prior to finalizing them. The Olin Group will continue to conduct focus groups interviews in February and March. The input received will be incorporated in the recommendations for Commission investments in capacity building programs. Staff will return in April with Capacity Building program design options for consideration and action.

STRATEGIC PLAN & FISCAL SUMMARY

This item has been reviewed in relation to the Commission's Strategic Plan and annual budget. No fiscal actions are proposed at this time.

PRIOR COMMISSION ACTIONS:

- February 2015 - Received Capacity Building Program Update
- May 2014 - Renewed funding approved for AmeriCorps program and VISTA program update
- March 2014 - Received Capacity Building Goal Area update
- September 2013 - Renewed funding approved for CNCS agreement PHFE, and participating county commissions
- September 2012 - Renewed funding approved for CNCS agreement, PHFE and participating county commissions

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Receive Capacity Building Program Update

ATTACHMENT:

None

Contact: Kim Goll