

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL**

**REQUEST FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST
PROMISE COMMUNITIES STRATEGIC PLANNING
PILOT PROJECT**

Proposal Deadline: November 30th, 2009

Overview

As part of New Jersey's Prevention Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods (Prevention Strategy), the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General (OAG), through the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC), is seeking proposals from community-based nonprofit organizations that are interested in developing a strategic plan for the creation of at least two "Promise Communities". Building upon core principles of the Harlem Children's Zone, the New Jersey Promise Communities Initiative seeks to offer support for the development of at least two strategic planning efforts that address concentrated intergenerational poverty and its disparate impact on poor children at the neighborhood level. Significantly, this initiative is premised, in part, on the anticipated federal "Promise Neighborhoods" initiative. Similarly, this effort also draws directly upon the work of the Harlem Children's Zone and its evidenced-based model for serving children and transforming communities.

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is a nationally-recognized nonprofit organization that seeks to diminish disparate outcomes for children growing up in areas of concentrated poverty through a set of strategies focused on education and block-by-block neighborhood organizing.¹ The State of New Jersey, through the OAG, is working with HCZ to provide strategic technical assistance in neighborhood-level strategic planning work by the organizations selected through this process. A successful applicant will be a community-based nonprofit organization committed to leading a strategic planning process that focuses on a specific community and that, when successful, positively transforms that community through disciplined implementation of the strategic plan. Ultimately, an increase in protective factors, a decrease in risk factors, with both resulting in an overall reduction in crime and violence, is a central goal of this initiative.

The guiding principles and core strategies evident in New Jersey's Prevention Strategy are consistent with, and in many cases draw from, the principles found in the HCZ model. The OAG is leading the Prevention Strategy in close coordination with more than a dozen New Jersey departments and agencies. As part of this work, the State is interested in supporting an initiative that can, in a

¹ For more information go to www.hcz.org

deliberate and meaningful manner, bring the benefit of HCZ's experience and expertise to at least two communities in New Jersey. This pilot effort is focusing on potential communities in the cities of Newark and Camden, with the expectation that success with this initial pilot can lead to expansion and replication in other communities and cities as well. Moreover, this initiative not only builds upon concrete action steps identified in New Jersey's Prevention Strategy, but also offers an opportunity for a community to align itself with respect to anticipated priority initiatives as part of President Obama's urban poverty agenda. For example, as noted, the President's Administration has signaled an intention to launch a federally-funded "Promise Neighborhoods" Initiative as a tool for meaningfully addressing issues of urban poverty.²

As part of New Jersey's Promise Communities Initiative, interested community-based nonprofit organizations will be required to engage in an intensive strategic planning process which, among other things, should lead to identification of a clear set of goals and/or an organizing principle that can drive action and programming for the designated community. While the selected organizations will be required to lead the strategic planning process, they will have the opportunity to work closely with HCZ. The planning process and resulting strategic plan will be unique to, and reflect the needs and opportunities of, the designated community. However, it is expected that the process be informed by HCZ planning principles. In this way, HCZ will provide strategic technical assistance and other related support to ensure that planning unfolds in a manner consistent with its principles as well as those of anticipated federal initiatives.

The Harlem Children's Zone model has evolved as a direct result of the intensive strategic planning process that it has undertaken. Through its process, HCZ has identified an end goal/organizing principle which, in essence, states that every child in its Zone will attend and graduate from college. The organization's resulting work aimed at achieving this end goal is based on several core strategies that HCZ has identified and developed. Examples of some of the foundational pillars at the heart of HCZ's work (and which should be contemplated in any proposed strategic planning process) include:

- **Community Organizing and Mobilization.** An intensive focus on block-by-block organizing and mobilization that ensures that no children in the neighborhood are "falling through the cracks" by not taking advantage of available opportunities and services.
- **Continuum of Best Practices.** The development and implementation of a continuum of evidence-based best practices and programs that create a seamless system of opportunities serving children and families from conception through college and beyond. Each program along this continuum should address the needs identified as a barrier to achieving the ultimate goal of college graduation. These programs naturally focus

² For more information go to http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/urban_policy.

on strategies related to education, health and social services, youth development, family resources, etc.

- **Accountability.** Data-driven accountability and decision-making should be the backbone of matters regarding programming and personnel. It is an essential component in efforts to successfully achieve the end goal for all children in the Zone. Aspects of the collected data should also be shared with a broad range of community and national stakeholders as well as potential funding sources.
- **Resources.** Clearly, resources are required to effectively implement programs and strategies identified in the planning process. Nevertheless, it is also critical to understand that funding should *follow* the identified end goal/organizing principle and programming needs articulated in the strategic plan. Too often, community-based nonprofit providers are forced to plan for a set amount of funding driven by the criteria of a particular grant; not necessarily addressing the real needs of the community. The traditional funding process often limits a community-based nonprofit provider's ability to focus its efforts on its ultimate goal and organizing principle. Thus, it is often difficult to ascertain the true impact of an organization's effort in a given neighborhood or community.

Through this Initiative, it is expected that two community-based nonprofit organizations will be selected for participation. Applicants must be from - and propose to carry out their strategic planning in a specific community/neighborhood in - Newark or Camden. It is important to point out that this initiative and application does not necessarily provide direct funding to the selected organizations. Rather, the main intent of this opportunity is to connect selected organizations with strategic technical assistance from the Harlem Children's Zone. Nevertheless, selected organizations may be eligible to apply for additional grant funding and/or support in implementing their strategic community reform plans.

Methodology

In responding to this Request of Letters of Interest, interested community-based nonprofit organizations should first identify a specific community, or portion of a community, which will serve as the proposed concentration site for the initial strategic planning work. The applicant should also identify partners and stakeholders in its community that have demonstrated the capacity and commitment to engage in and/or otherwise support the applicant in this type of strategic planning and implementation process. Examples of important partners and stakeholders may include, but are not limited to, the following: city government, schools and school districts, community residents, community leaders, area businesses and business leaders, health and social service providers, community and faith-based organizations, and philanthropic entities.

Applicant organizations are required to demonstrate its capacity and track record in several important ways. For example, the strength of its Board of Directors, along with its Board's willingness and commitment to support participation in this process, will be an important factor in determining whether the organization is ready for participation in an intensive strategic planning process of this nature. Likewise, the quality and capacity of organizational leadership, both individually and collectively, will also be a crucial factor in this application process.

Selected organizations, including selected key stakeholders, will participate in training and technical assistance directly from the Harlem Children's Zone, through its Practitioner's Institute. This training and technical assistance will be customized and will be made available through the New Jersey OAG as the cornerstone of this planning and implementation process. There is no direct cost to the selected organization for this particular service and resulting opportunities.

Selected organizations, however, will be strongly encouraged to engage a planning consultant to assist in the development of the organization's strategic plan. This strategic plan will serve as the blueprint for initial and ongoing outcomes-based work. Engagement of the planning consultant will take place during the first two months of this initiative, once the organization has had an opportunity to develop a strong sense of planning expectations through its initial work with HCZ.

The strategic planning and implementation process should be conducted through the lens of HCZ and, where possible, federal Promise Neighborhood foundational principles. Thus, organizations that have engaged in prior strategic planning processes should understand and be prepared to participate in a renewed and/or enhanced strategic planning process that places emphasis on these principles. Successful applicants will be expected to demonstrate their commitment to this initiative by pledging a minimum of \$25,000 in funding for the purpose of engaging its strategic planning consultant. One of the objectives of this initiative is to strategically leverage resources for the purpose of this planning. Organizations are encouraged to use existing resources and/or pursue new funding opportunities through the support of partners and stakeholders interested in investing in this work. The Harlem Children's Zone will continue to provide strategic technical assistance to the organization and its key stakeholders throughout this process, at no cost to the organization.

Timeline

This initiative provides a one year commitment of support through the partnership with HCZ. The following is the anticipated timeline for action:

Months 1-3: Upon selection, the first three months will require that the organization and its partners work intensively with the Harlem Children's Zone and its Practitioner's Institute. HCZ will facilitate a detailed exploration of its core principles and strategies that led to the current Harlem Children's Zone model. Examples of training topics will include: in-depth introduction to the HCZ Model; continuums of evidence and research based programs and evaluation; community engagement and collaboration strategies; data-driven decision making; strategic alignment and performance management strategies; determining the beginning scale and scope of proposed projects; governance and board development; resource development; and recruitment, training and retaining staff.

Months 4-7: The organization and its partners will work with its selected strategic planning consultant in the actual development of a strategic plan. This is expected to be a very intensive working period. The completed strategic plan will be the blueprint for action and implementation moving forward. The Harlem Children's Zone team will be available for monthly site specific T/A conference calls. The HCZ team will also lead quarterly multi-site T/A meetings to share cross-site information, HCZ experience and expertise in working out strategic planning and implementation issues.

Months 7-12: The organization and its partners will begin implementation of the strategic plan. The Harlem Children's Zone will continue to provide support in the form of monthly site specific calls and quarterly cross-site meetings during the initial phases of strategic plan implementation.

Role of the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General

As the lead agency for New Jersey's Prevention Strategy for Safe Streets and Neighborhoods, the OAG is committed to achieving positive results - including reductions in crime and violence - for youth throughout New Jersey. Recognizing the increased risks present in certain communities, the OAG, through this initiative, is also committed to supporting and replicating HCZ's core principles. Accordingly, OAG is committing the resources required to engage and partner with HCZ to support strategic planning processes for at least two organizations and their respective communities. Thus, as a designated pilot site, the selected community-based nonprofit organizations will receive technical assistance directly from the Harlem Children's Zone. Selection may also entitle organizations to compete for additional state funding designed to support the local work, especially as may be made available through the OAG's work as lead

convener of New Jersey's Prevention Coordinating Council, which was created and designed to more effectively coordinate services and resources for at-risk youth throughout the state.

How to Apply

The State, through the OAG and a subcommittee of its Prevention Coordinating Council, will review letters of interest and determine the level of readiness for each applicant. It is expected that two nonprofit organizations will be selected for participation. Applicants should bring together key stakeholders within the county, city and at the block level to discuss and answer the readiness questions below. The readiness group, where possible, should include representation from city government, the school district, the business community and at least one philanthropic organization. In addition, the applicant must minimally provide a letter of support from its Board of Directors in support of this application. Additional letters of support from other local key stakeholders (e.g. the mayor, superintendent, community organizations, county government, philanthropic foundations, etc.) are encouraged and will further strengthen the organization's letter of interest.

Readiness Assessment Questionnaire

Please address the following questions in the letter of interest, keeping in mind that the intent is to gauge the applicant organization's capacity and willingness to plan for and implement a Promise Communities approach. The expectation is not that organizations and communities have all of the principles in place, but more importantly that there is an interest, willingness, and readiness to organize, access, develop, and implement a Promise Communities approach.

1. What does your organization hope to achieve through the strategic planning and implementation process?
2. Describe your current organization and its programs in terms of target population(s) and program components.
3. Using relevant data³ what are the objective community/neighborhood conditions that stimulate interest in a Promise Communities approach? Describe the community or neighborhood you are interested having designated as a Promise Community.
4. Describe your organization's history in serving children and families in the city and, if possible, in the anticipated community. If available, provide

³ For example: square blocks, demographics, housing, schools, key statistics and data regarding crime, delinquency, dropout rate, unemployment, etc.

- outcome data that shows impact of your program(s) on children and families in the city and, if possible, in the anticipated community.
5. Describe your organizational capacity and structure. How might capacity need to grow or governance need to change in support of this work? Describe the leadership style of your agency's executive management team. If possible, provide an example or experience which illustrates your Organization's and Executive Director's leadership style and impact.
 6. If selected, will your organization be able to designate at least one full-time senior staff member to serve as point person? Who will it be?
 7. Describe the organization's current partnership and connections within the city and, if possible, within the anticipated community to be served. Please provide notable examples of community organization/mobilization efforts and innovative ways in which your organization has created strategic partnerships and connections within the city and, if possible, within the proposed community.
 8. Has your organization secured the minimum \$25,000 in funding necessary to support a strategic planning firm to work with your organization and the Harlem Children's Zone to develop the Strategic Plan? If so, please identify your source(s) of funding. If not, please describe the organization's plan for securing these funds.
 9. Please provide relevant examples indicative of your organization's interest and capacity to implement a Promise Communities approach. Please offer examples indicative of the community's capacity to support the implementation of a Promise Community approach. To what degree do you think these conditions exist, both within the organization and within the potential community?
 10. To what extent are accurate data currently available, accessible, and used by the applicant organization as the basis for planning, management and program/outcome evaluation?

Application Requirements and Selection Criteria

- Zone Designations: One zone designation in Camden City and/or one zone designation in Newark;
- Nonprofit organization with a strong track record in serving children and families;

- Organization must demonstrate a strong desire and willingness to engage in an intensive strategic planning process by demonstrating Board buy-in, executive staff buy-in, and other key stakeholder buy-in;
- Organization must show a demonstrated commitment of time and resources necessary for engaging in an intensive strategic planning process;
- Evidence of strong, energetic/charismatic, visionary leadership;
- Evidence of strong organizational capacity track-record and governance;
- Evidence of operating strong community-based programs and a history of achieving outcomes and success for participants;
- Evidence of strong partnership engagement history with neighborhood residents and other community stakeholders, and demonstrated ability to foster strategic partnerships and collaborations;
- Demonstrate, through letters of support, a commitment by applicant organization's Board President, and other key stakeholders (e.g. mayor, superintendent, local businesses and institutions, etc.) to support and participate in these efforts;
- Demonstrate a financial commitment by securing of seed funding to support the initial strategic planning process (minimum of \$25,000), including appropriate letters of support evidencing this commitment (i.e., letter from supporting foundation or business).
- Required Attachments include: IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter for applicant organization; current Table of Organization for applicant organization; resume of applicant organization's executive director/chief executive officer, board president and organizational point person (if not the executive director/chief executive officer); listing of applicant organization's board members; copy of organization's most recent 990 form; and any letters of support or commitment as identified above.
- Optional Attachments include: a map of proposed Promise Community Zone; list of committed stakeholders/partners to serve on readiness group in support of this effort.

Letters of Interest must be submitted by 4:00 pm on November 30Th, 2009 to:

New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety
Office of the Attorney General
Justice Complex- PO Box 080
Trenton, NJ 08625-0080
Attention: Lisa Macaluso – Prevention Office

Applicants should submit **5 copies** of all material to be considered.

The letter of interest should, at a minimum, address the questions in the Readiness Assessment Questionnaire. Additional information that will assist in gauging readiness is also welcomed and encouraged. Letters of Interest will be evaluated based on the ability of the applicant organization to convene a comprehensive readiness group, its responses to the Assessment questions and its required attachments.

A Mandatory Applicant's Conference will be held at 11:00 am on October 30, 2009 to provide more information and respond to questions by potential applicants. The location will be:

New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety
Office of the Attorney General
RJ Hughes Justice Complex
8th Floor
Trenton, NJ 08625-0080]

Letters of Interest should be on standard 8 ½ X 11 inch paper, one-sided, double-spaced, with one inch margins, in twelve point font. The total narrative portion of the letter must not exceed fifteen (15) pages, excluding attachments such as letters, resumes, etc.

For Further Information

Please contact Lisa Macaluso, Deputy Director, Prevention Strategy
Telephone: 609-984-4537 E-mail: lisa.macaluso@lps.state.nj.us