



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA**

Increasing Impact on Youth: The Continuous Improvement Cycle

*A proposal to improve and sustain the Boys & Girls Club Experience
through an investment in high-quality operations and programming*

Winter **2020**

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Executive Summary

Boys & Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Delta believes that every child deserves a great future. Unfortunately, today's youth face tremendous obstacles. Consider that about 1.7 million more kids live in low-income families now than during the Great Recession.ⁱ And despite significant gains in some aspects of well-being during recent years for children of all races and income levels, disparities remain deep and persistent.ⁱⁱ The Boys & Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Delta is currently facing a critical challenge and an unprecedented opportunity. Youth of the Delta experience unimaginable hurdles to break free of the cycle of poverty. Many of these youth participate in at-risk behaviors. It costs over \$400 per day to house incarcerated youth, with loss of future earnings, tax revenues. In 2016 there were 1,336 Youth Court Referrals in the seven counties we have Club sites. If each of these 1,336 youth were incarcerated for a year the cost is over \$200 million dollars. It costs \$850 a year to provide a quality Boys & Girls Club experience to one of those same young people.

Our organization is well positioned to support and prepare young people for 21st century success, and excels at reaching youth who need us most. For *17* years, we have positively changed the lives of over 50,000 youth in 9 (*nine*) cities in 7 (*7*) seven counties throughout the Mississippi Delta. The *Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta* is dedicated to making an even greater impact on youth.

A Boys & Girls Club positively impacts youth from the moment they enter the door. What happens for youth inside a Club – building relationships with staff, participating in fun and engaging programs, learning important skills, making new friends, developing their talents – is referred to as the *Club Experience*. This proposal details our plans **to increase the quality of the Club Experience by empowering staff and improving our operations and programming, with the ultimate goal of deepening the positive impact we make in Club members' lives.**

The Club Experience consists of five key elements. The first element, a *safe, positive environment*, sets the foundation for life-changing youth development work. The next key element, *fun and a sense of belonging*, keeps youth engaged. The last three elements – *supportive relationships, opportunities and expectations*, and *recognition* – help transform time spent at the Club into experiences that change young lives.

These key elements are the driving force behind Boys & Girls Clubs' research-informed theory of change, called the Formula for Impact. Our formula explains how Clubs help youth achieve critical outcomes. This connection between after-school programs and outcomes is well documented: high-quality after-school programs have strong positive effects on the academic, social and emotional lives of youth.ⁱⁱⁱ Recent research about Boys & Girls Clubs strongly affirms this core principle: *by implementing a high-quality Club Experience, Boys & Girls Clubs can increase positive impact on kids.* To sum up, the better the quality of an after-school program, the better the outcomes of youth participants.

We will improve the quality of our Club Experience by strengthening our staff and by implementing a Continuous Improvement Cycle. These key actions will help the *Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta* deepen and sustain our long-term impact on youth. This support will help those who need us most to graduate from high school on time with a plan for the future; demonstrate good character and citizenship; and live a healthy lifestyle.

Organizational Background

Since 2002, the *Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta* has strived to fulfill its mission of enabling all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. Our organization serves 5,500 youth through membership and community outreach, helping them grow into healthy, productive, successful young people prepared to achieve great futures.

Daily access to a broad range of programs drives positive outcomes for youth and reinforces necessary life skills. Local need, available resources and the interests of youth help determine the mix of youth development programs.

Our Formula for Impact

This variety of programs is part of our research-informed Formula for Impact, helping members achieve positive outcomes in three priority areas: Academic Success, Good Character and Citizenship, and Healthy Lifestyles. The formula is the vehicle that drives greater outcomes in the lives of youth served. This formula begins with youth who need us most. We add the Five Key Elements for Youth Development.

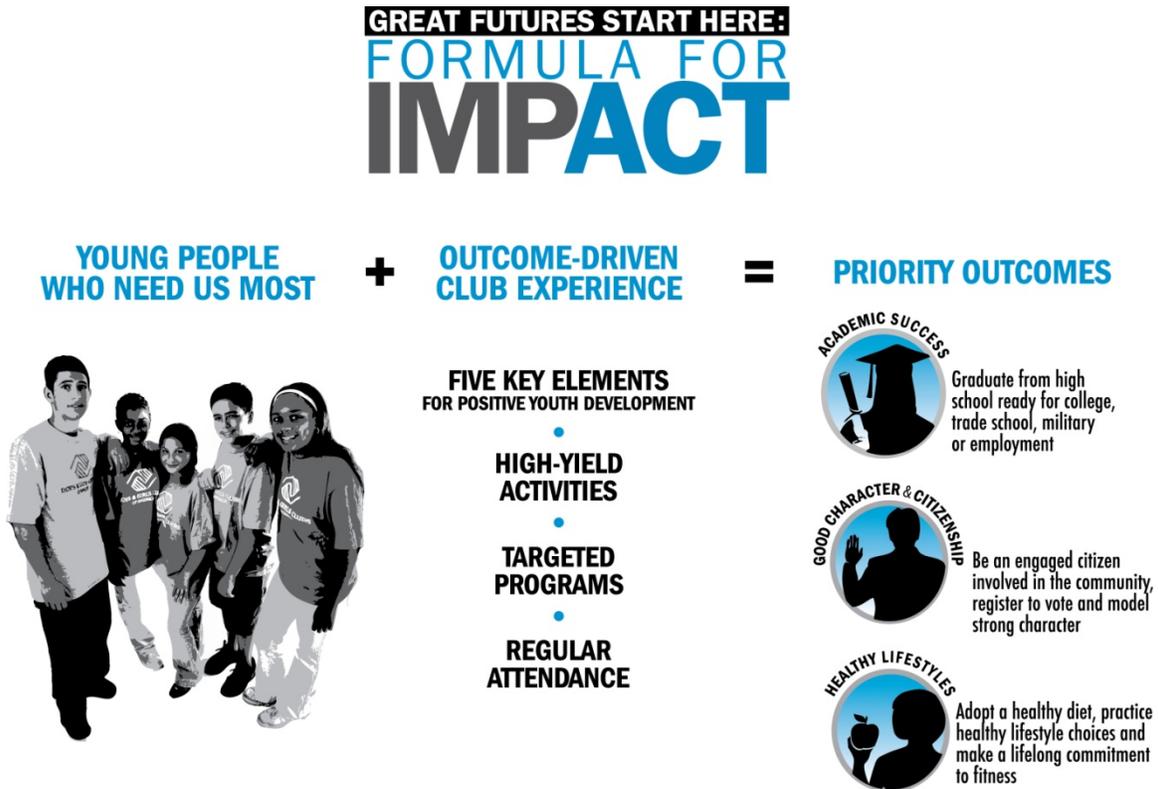
1. **A safe, positive environment** (connected to feelings of emotional and physical safety)
2. **Fun and a sense of belonging**
3. **Supportive relationships**, including positive adult connections
4. **Opportunities and expectations**, especially staff expectations of youth
5. **Recognition**

To this mix, we add high-yield learning activities, so called because they extend learning by providing opportunities to practice communication skills (reading, writing, speaking); problem-solving skills (math, science, technology); healthy living skills (being mindful of diet and exercise, avoiding risky behaviors); and character and citizenship skills (civics, volunteerism and civility). Then we mix in targeted programs to meet youth needs and interests.

The last ingredient of the Formula is attendance. Research shows that youth who attend the Club more frequently, especially those who attend 104 or more days per year (an average of twice per week), are more likely to achieve positive outcomes, such as avoiding risky behaviors, progressing to the next grade on time and exercising regularly. Therefore, we focus on increasing attendance, program participation and member retention.^{iv}



Our Formula for Impact



Measuring Youth Achievement

To determine our success at helping youth achieve these three priority outcomes, *Boys & Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Delta* participates in Boys & Girls Clubs of America's National Youth Outcomes Initiative (NYOI). The NYOI system measures the impact of Boys & Girls Clubs in a consistent manner using a common set of research-informed indicators. Through NYOI, we administer NYOI's National Outcomes Survey annually, which measures the degree to which Club members are achieving the outcomes of Academic Success, Good Character and Citizenship, and Healthy Lifestyles.

Some NYOI survey questions replicate language used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, allowing for comparisons of Club youth outcomes to state and national averages. The survey also asks members about their perceptions of the Club. Responses allow us to assess how effectively we are implementing the Formula for Impact and delivering an optimal Club Experience to support positive youth development. A sample of the NYOI survey is provided as an attachment to this proposal.

Statement of Need

The challenges facing youth today are greater than ever before. Consider the statistics:

- 46%-60% of children living in the Mississippi Delta under the age of 18 live in poverty.^v
- 1 in 5 youth do not graduate from high school on time.^{vi}
- Nearly two-thirds of fourth graders lack reading proficiency and more than half lack math proficiency.^{vii}

Mississippi has the highest adult **obesity rate** in the nation, and the highest **obesity rate** for **youth** ages 10 to 17. **Mississippi's** adult **obesity rate** is currently 39.5%, up from 23.7% in 2000 and from 15.0% in 1990. (stateofchildhoodobesity.org › states › ms)

Fortunately, more youth are participating in after-school programs, where there are opportunities and support to overcome these obstacles. According to the Afterschool Alliance 82,754 of Mississippi's k-12 students are enrolled in an after-school program. 217,663 are waiting for an opening or for an available after-school program, and 88,960 are left alone and unsupervised after-school (*See <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyStateMap.cfm> to find details about after-school attendance.*) After-school programs can play a significant role in supporting the development of young people, but it is critical that the programs are high quality.

Research indicates that a child's experience during a high-quality after-school program can have as much influence on their overall success as their experience during school time.^{viii} In addition, growing evidence links high-quality after-school programs with gains in standardized test scores and work habits, as well as with reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students.^{ix} The landmark compendium of research and best practices from the out-of-school time sector, *Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success*, demonstrates that quality after-school and summer learning programs make a positive difference for youth.^x Specifically, the publication describes the ability of out-of-school time programs to:

- Promote academic achievement and college readiness;
- Foster development of character, resilience and wellness;
- Forge partnerships to maximize resources and strengthen communities; and
- Engage families in meaningful ways.

After-school and summer programs present perhaps the greatest opportunity to close the education gap and help all kids succeed. Quality matters, though, as discovered in a 2015 study by Hanover Research, a global information services firm focused on providing customized and authoritative research.^{xi} The study, commissioned by Boys & Girls Clubs of America, found that high-quality out-of-school time programming drives even greater impact through a direct correlation between the quality of the Club Experience and positive youth outcomes. Hanover compared Club members who rated their Club Experience highly to those who did not rate it as highly. Findings show that an optimal Club Experience leads to statistically significant differences for all age groups.

The study found that youth (ages 9-12) who believe that Club staff have high expectations for them are **more likely to be on track to graduate high school**. Younger teens (ages 13-15) who rated **elements of their Club Experience** highly were **less likely to engage in physicals fights** and **less likely to have skipped school**. Very notably, among younger teen members who had an optimal Overall Club Experience, **42% were less likely to have consumed alcohol** in the past month. The study also noted benefits for older teen members (ages 16+). Older teens who rated elements of their Club Experience highly were **more likely to have volunteered** in the past year and to be **physically active more days per week**.

The research findings – that an optimal Club Experience reaps noteworthy positive benefits for youth – compel us to invest in improving our quality to drive greater impact on youth served. Simply offering extra time after the school day ends is not sufficient. For after-school programming to reach its potential as a catalyst for holistic and sustainable youth development, quality must be a priority. Our community is waiting, and **Boys & Girls Clubs of the Mississippi Delta** is determined to lead the way.

Responding to the Need

Findings from the Hanover Research study indicate that **the quality of the Club Experience is influenced by certain staff practices**, and in turn, **member outcomes are driven by the quality of the Club Experience**. This research offers a prime opportunity to increase our efforts and dive deeper into our data to create the best possible Club Experience for our kids. Details about the study may be found in Boys & Girls Clubs of America's *From Indicators to Impact: 2014 National Outcomes Report*, included as an attachment to this proposal.

Through proposed efforts outlined in this proposal, we aim to create a better, consistently high-quality Club Experience through a data-informed, two-pronged approach:

1. Empower Club Staff: Build our staff members' ability to identify and improve quality of both operations and programming.
2. Institute a Continuous Improvement Cycle: Ensure data informs and drives a positive cycle of change for sustained high quality at organizational and Club-site levels.

Empower Club Staff

To improve the services provided for young people, we must increase Club staff members' ability to recognize and implement quality operations and programming. We will do this through skills-building opportunities and competency-focused trainings. Data will ultimately determine to what extent we have increased our quality and impacted youth. Therefore, staff must be able to collect and review data as well as be able to analyze and use data to inform needed changes.

A combination of training workshops, supervision, experiential learning, one-on-one coaching and technical assistance will build the skills, abilities and competencies of staff. This mix will be based on the well-known 70/20/10 learning and development model. This learning framework is based on research that has shown that to effectively develop employees, 70 percent of their learning should come from on-the-job application and practice, 20 percent from individualized coaching and

mentoring, and 10 percent from formal classroom training or online courses.^{xii}

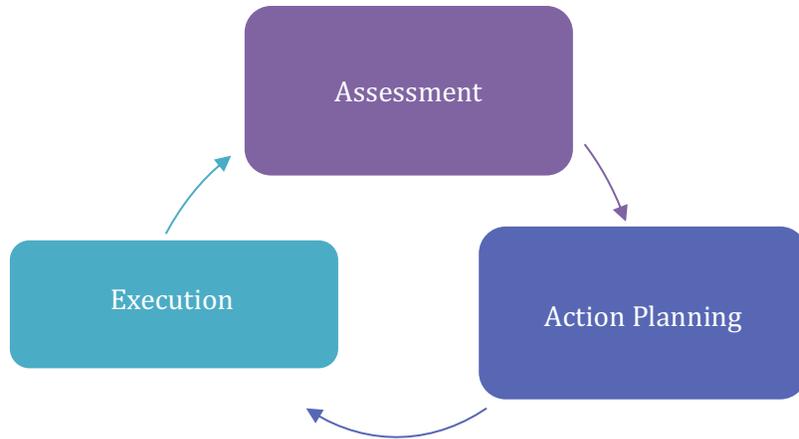
Club staff members are the cornerstone of the Club Experience. Whether they are creating fun activities, empowering youth leaders or setting high expectations, our staff bring the key elements to life. This proposal will enable these dedicated professionals to make an even greater impact in young people's lives. Broad efforts will develop key skills, such as data collection and analysis, action plan development and execution, teamwork and collaboration, informed decision making and critical thinking. Details of these efforts follow.

- **Training.** Key staff members will complete the training module, Using Data to Improve Your Club Experience, offered through Boys & Girls Clubs of America's Learning Coaches' Initiative. This training lays the foundation for becoming data driven, as it teaches participants how to use National Youth Outcome Survey data in a continuous improvement process to improve the Club Experience. Training participants also create an action plan outlining how they will contribute to the improvement of a specific area of the Club Experience, which will set the stage for successful grant execution.
- **Coaching.** We will invest in coaching for our staff to help develop individual staff and team strength. Coaching will focus on consistent implementation of the Five Key Elements of Youth Development, Inclusion Programming, Social & Emotional Learning, and STEM/Technology based programming.
- **Technical Assistance.** Helping youth and adolescents develop into responsible, caring, productive citizens is a complex process. We will seek technical expertise to improve *overall safety efforts, character development programs, teen recruitment and retention ideas, increasing ADA, organic inclusion, recognizing and responding to adverse childhood trauma, equipping our youth development professionals with skills necessary to help youth with intellectual disabilities, and substance abuse avoidance.*

Continuous Improvement Cycle

The process of implementing a quality Club Experience is a year-round, ongoing effort. We must collect and analyze data to inform needed changes so that quality is consistent across our operations and programming as well as from Club site to Club site. To focus our efforts and build a better Club Experience, we will utilize a Continuous Improvement Cycle.

A Continuous Improvement Cycle is an ongoing feedback loop that includes gathering information, making decisions, implementing strategies, assessing how well they work, and then adjusting or trying new strategies based on the results. The cycle is a team-based process with significant opportunities for all Club staff to actively participate and contribute input. The cycle contains three steps: 1) *assessment*, 2) *action planning* and 3) *execution*.



Assessment

Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta will conduct a thorough assessment of operations and programs to determine the effectiveness of the Club Experience it offers youth. This assessment will include both staff input and member feedback to produce a comprehensive record of how well our organization implements the Five Key Elements of Youth Development. The assessment will also help us determine gaps in program and activity offerings to help us serve more youth more often. The assessment phase will include:

Establish Baseline Data - Staff and Club members have completed five years of NYOI data specific to the National Outcomes Survey. These responses allow us to track our effectiveness in comparison to other Clubs within our organization, the state, regional and nationally. Responses are tracked so trend data is readily available to measure effectiveness from year to year.

- **Data Review and Comparisons.** Appropriate staff members will review and analyze staff input and member feedback for each site and the organization as a whole. Staff will make comparisons to state and/or national data as needed to benchmark our success at implementing the Club Experience.
- **Identification of Key Improvement Areas.** The staff team will conduct a data review to determine the strengths and weaknesses for our organization and each Club site. We will then collaboratively select specific areas to focus improvement efforts.
- **Selection of Staff Practices to Influence the Club Experience.** Hanover Research found that certain staff practices positively influence the Club Experience. To improve our quality, we will select several staff practices for intensive focus.
 - *Staff Building Relationships with Members.* Staff members’ empowering youth by knowing their names, acknowledging their contributions, maintaining open lines of communication and actively showing they care boosts the Club Experience.
 - *Staff Actively Engaging Parents.* Using pick-up and drop-off times, as well as technology to communicate both accomplishments and concerns with parents builds trusts and strengthens youth support networks.
 - *Staff Using Positive Reinforcement for Behavior Management.* Setting clear expectations and boundaries to help new and existing members navigate the Club Experience is paramount for staff and member success.

- *Staff Working Well Together.* Good teamwork lays the groundwork for a consistently positive Club Experience. The camaraderie between staff and the stability of the Club routine further builds positive relationships between members and staff.
- *Staff Offering Planned Activities and Programs.* Offering a thoughtful mix of interest- and needs-based activities and programs makes the Club Experience better; ensuring members have fun is also key for success.
- *Staff Receiving Adequate Program Planning Training.* Members report a better Club Experience when staff have received adequate program training.

The relationships kids build with staff members is an important portion of the Club Experience and can significantly impact how well they do. National data indicates that increasing Club member perceptions of staff expectations can increase the likelihood that a youth or young teen member is on track to graduate by 13 to 15 percent, depending on their age.

Action Planning

The staff team will create an Action Plan to improve the operations and programming at our organization with the goal of increasing quality across sites.

Set Priorities and Determine Strategies. For each selected staff practice, the staff team will collaborate and review site-level data to determine the best strategies for implementation. In addition, we will make immediate low-effort changes to kick start the improvement process.

Action Planning Meeting. To ensure a high-level of understanding and input, we host quarterly planning meetings for all Club staff. These meetings are hosted at the various Club locations and ***address different focus areas (determined by the NYOI survey results)*** will help us shape the improvement of our Club Experience.

Creation of a Data-driven Action Plan. The organization's action plan will include broad strategies and site-level actions with the goal of achieving consistent quality throughout the organization. This collaborative document will not only address areas of improvement, but also maximize the use of staff time, Club space and other resources.

Execution

Our success building a better Club Experience will depend on our ability to monitor the effectiveness of selected strategies. We will routinely re-assess how well our improvement strategies and tactics are working and adjust accordingly. The execution phase will include the following key components:

Program Quality Assessment Process and Monitoring Plan. In addition to ensuring staff competency to run programs, we will assess the overall quality of program content. We will monitor the quality of program implementation using ***survey results, Club member input and interests, youth driven community service plans, community partner/collaborative opportunities, parental feedback, additional capacity driven initiatives.***

Technology Purchases/Upgrades. The proposed level of data collection, review and analysis will require our organization to obtain ***up to date computing and mobile technologies including iPads, tablets, laptops, printers, digital photography, apps and software that are related to Club member interests, i.e. animation, music production, graphic design/photography, video editing, layout, etc.***

- New Staff Positions. It is our goal to develop a new data management position to ensure ongoing data review and analysis informs all stages of our Continuous Improvement Cycle. This staff member will provide data-informed suggestions for changes using input from staff, parents and members. More importantly, this new administrative team member will educate other staff members, helping increase data literacy among staff.
- Facility Changes/Upgrades. To better serve targeted youth, our organization will develop a revitalization plan for each Club. These revitalization efforts will include clearer division of “centers” with each Club, dedicated teen space, dining space, more coordinated outdoor space, outdoor raised bed gardening areas, fitness stations, all with an express leaning towards safety for all of our Club members in a bright, well organized, and inviting environment that encourages self expression and creativity
- New Program Resources. In addition to what will be determined during the assessment and planning phases, we plan to improve the Club Experience we offer youth by ***organizing “learning centers” and dedicated teen space within each Club, the addition of outdoor gardens and expanded fitness areas (fitness stations, Unified Sports teams in partnership with Special Olympics Mississippi – and statewide Unified Games.***
- Creation of Success Metrics. Several grant metrics have been identified in the *Evaluation* section of this proposal. However, we understand that additional metrics may be needed to accurately gauge the progress of our Improvement Plan. These metrics will be established, measured and re-evaluated as needed.

Project Leadership

A dedicated team of staff will ensure the success of efforts detailed in this grant. ***David Dallas (Chief Executive Officer), Pennie Griffin (Director of Operations), June Crow (Chief Finance Officer)*** will provide senior leadership to the staff directly implementing and monitoring each step of the cycle, including:

- *Unit Directors, Program Coordinators, and Youth Development Professionals responsible for program implementation and delivery at each Club location.*

Evaluation

Determining the value of our programs and ultimate impact on young people is of critical importance to ***Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta***. The following metrics have been selected to evaluate success at providing higher quality Club Experiences that result in greater outcomes for the youth we serve.

Grant Outputs

- Creation of data-driven action plan
- Participation in Learning Coaches training
- Documentation of regular progress monitoring
- Creation of a Quality Improvement Team

Short-term Metrics (Increases)

- Online safety assessment rating
- ADA (Average Daily Attendance) of youth
- Frequency of attendance
- Specific program attendance
- Diversity of program offerings (e.g., teen-focused programs)
- Hours of operation

Long-term Metrics (Improvements)

- Overall Club Experience (measured by NYOI)
- Measurements related to the Key Elements for Positive Youth Development
- Overall membership/total youth served, especially for targeted subgroups
- Comparison to baseline data
- Change in effectiveness and/or quality as shown in a pre-/post-assessment

Budget and Plan for Sustainability

The **Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta** runs a very lean organization from an Administrative level to each individual Club site. Club site annual costs can vary considerably depending on the type of physical location (do we own the facility, square footage, liability insurance, whether or not utilities are included in the facility/donated by local public service companies/energy efficiency of the facility, existence of year round and summer USDA feeding programs, number of registered members who attend each day and the staff required to safely and responsibly deliver effective programming to these youth, transportation to the Club, community outreach numbers, and other variables that impact Club Operational Overhead) At a bare minimum it costs **approximately \$10,000 per month** in locations where space is donated to as much as \$15,000 per month in locations where we own the facility and/or are responsible for its costs and maintenance. The more support we are able to raise locally the greater the impact on youth in **that specific county**. Increased funding will ensure even higher-quality operations and programming. The following budget outlines some of the basic Club expenses common at each location:

Estimated Annual Program Cost Per Club

Unit Director & Youth Development Staff -	\$75,000
Program Materials Supplies -	\$20,000
Special Programs & Field Trips -	\$25,000
Staff Training -	\$5,000
Building Overhead & Utilities -	\$15,000
Feeding Program Costs -	\$10,000
Estimated Total per Club -	\$150,000

Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta aspires to increase its impact on area youth by becoming a data-driven organization focused on providing consistent, high-quality services for youth, serving more youth more frequently, expanding teen programming, and increasing community outreach activities to youth beyond our walls. To fulfill this noble aspiration, **Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta** is working with **local industry and business, schools, municipalities, parks and recreation departments, churches, as well as securing donations from individuals and fundraisers and through deliberate grant seeking practices** to improve the Club Experience and build strong, sustainable Clubs that create impact for kids for decades to come.

We operate several annual direct donation appeals (Sponsor A GREAT Summer, Year-End Campaign, Recurring Monthly Donation) Annual Fundraising Events (An Evening of Blues, Clays for Kids, Sip & Savor, Golf Tournaments, Dove Hunt, Moonlight & Mistletoe, Farm to Table, and locally driven galas and events designed to raise awareness and funds at the local level). We seek Federal, Regional, and State Government Grants. Grant seeking efforts also include responding to various Requests for Proposals issued by Private Foundations, Corporate Foundations, and Community Relations/Development efforts at the local/regional level, and through partnerships with other nonprofit programs and peers to deepen the impact of all those involved and provided economies of scale many funders seek in today's granting environment.

Closing

By opening the door to a Boys & Girls Club, kids enter an extraordinary place where everyone believes in them, everyone supports their dreams and every adult is dedicated to helping them be their best. Whether by providing access to computers to engage with technology, teaching them how to play a new game that makes exercise fun, or empowering them to make their community better through a service project, every day at a Boys & Girls Club offers opportunities for youth to learn something new and achieve things that they might otherwise never have dreamed of.

Young people often have very different experiences when they are not at the Club. Many youth who attend a Club do not have champions: they lack caring adults who believe they can achieve academic success, make healthy choices and be leaders in the community. But every youth who enters the doors of a Club receives immediate support from advocates who believe they can achieve great things regardless of their circumstances. This belief in youth stems from experience: time and time again, Club staff have championed a young person who excels despite tremendous odds against them.

This phenomenon, what we call the Club Experience, has the power to change and save young lives. The quality of staff, operations and programming at an individual Boys & Girls Club dictates just how powerful the Club Experience can be.

Our proposed work will use data to determine staff needs and a Continuous Improvement Cycle will ensure positive change and forward momentum. ***Boys & Girls Club of the Mississippi Delta*** recognizes that the needs and wants of youth constantly shift, so striving for excellence must be an ongoing process. Proposed work will enable us to become a data-driven organization that ensures high-quality Club Experiences for youth now and into the future.

On behalf of the young people throughout the Mississippi Delta Region, thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request. With the support of your organization and others in your community, we will improve the Club Experience for the youth we serve to help them start great futures as productive, caring, responsible citizens.

Endnotes

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- ^{xii} Lombardo, M. and Eichinger, R. (1996). *The Career Architect Development Planner* (1st ed.). (Minneapolis: Lominger).