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2010 Innovations Awards Application

Deadline: March 1, 2010

ID # (assigned by CSG): **10-E-07MA**

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Massachusetts

Assign Program Category (applicant): Public Safety/Corrections (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name: **Bridging the Opportunity Gap Job Readiness and Employability Initiative**
2. Administering Agency: **Massachusetts Department of Youth Services**
3. Contact Person (Name and Title): **Christine Kenney, Director of Educational Services**
4. Address **27 Wormwood Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA 02210**
5. Telephone Number: **617-727-7575**
6. FAX Number: **617-727-0696**
7. E-mail Address: Christine.kenney@state.ma.us
8. Web site Address: www.mass.gov/dys
9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.
 - **The Bridging the Opportunity Gap (BOG) Job Readiness and Employability Initiative provides a variety of employment-related services to clients of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services with a special focus on those returning to their home communities following residential treatment. In fiscal year 2009, the BOG initiative funded 15 programs that offered comprehensive employability services including career readiness, vocational and entrepreneurship training, workforce certifications and subsidized employment experience.**
10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2010 to be considered.
 - **BOG began operating in October of 2007.**
11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

- **Teen employment and attachment to the labor market is at its lowest point in 60 years. As cited by Andy Sum, Labor Market economist at Northeast University, in August of 2009, the U.S. teenage unemployment rate - that is, the percentage of teenagers who wanted jobs but could not find any - was 25.5 percent, its highest level since the government began keeping track of such statistics in 1948. Likewise, the percentage of teenagers overall who were working was at its lowest level in recorded history. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order. Youth in the juvenile justice system face multiple barriers to employment beyond the slim labor market options. Our youth experience negative stereotyping due to their experience with the juvenile justice system and they are often inadequately prepared (both skill-wise and from a social networking perspective) to access opportunities and experiences to succeed in entry level jobs.**
- **The Department of Youth Services is working to develop a juvenile justice system that builds on a framework of positive youth development by helping DYS committed youth form healthy relationships, connecting them with education and employment opportunities and fostering pro-social and civic engagement. Providing services with these clearly articulated goals in mind helps to reduce youth violence and make our communities safer. The BOG initiative is an integral part of the DYS rehabilitative strategy for committed youth.**

12. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

- **DYS sought to collaborate with Commonwealth Corporation, a statewide workforce development agency, to develop the BOG program. CommCorp has access to the state's sixteen workforce investment boards and career centers, serves as the technical assistance provider to the Workforce Investment Act for federal youth programming and has a range of state funded training programs as well as relationships with community and faith based organizations throughout the state. In our collaboration with CommCorp, we have jointly designed the BOG initiative to access these resources, we have added our own agency's state funding and we now have more than 15 BOG programs located in the cities and towns with the highest numbers of DYS committed youth.**

13. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

- **In the first year of the BOG initiative DYS only provided funding for one pilot site, as we were testing the efficacy of the model. In fiscal year 2008, DYS provided \$60,000 of Title 1 federal funds to launch the pilot. This provided funding for one BOG site (an after school vocational program at a vocational technical high school in Springfield, Massachusetts) at \$75,000. CommCorp provided "in-kind" staff time to administer and evaluate the program at a cost of \$20,000.**

14. What are the program's annual operational costs?

- **The BOG initiative costs \$1,185,000 annually to operate. Of these funds \$1,060,000 is directed to services for youth (through contracts with local community based agencies and non-profit organizations). The remaining \$125,000 covers the cost for two full time staff members who administer the program and provide technical assistance. These staff positions are supported by DYS's Education and Employability funds through a three year direct service contract with Commcorp as part of a range of community reentry programming, including BOG.**

15. How is the program funded?

- **DYS allocates \$1,025,000 in state funds and \$160,000 of federal Title 1 funds to support the BOG program.**

16. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

- **No legislation was required to establish the BOG program, although an initial state budget appropriation was received by DYS to begin program operations in 2007.**

17. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

- **No specific equipment was required for this program, as all vocational services are provided through public vocational technical high schools.**
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- 18. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.
 - **The program did originate in Massachusetts through the efforts of Christine Kenney, Director of Educational Services for DYS (27 Wormwood Street, Suite 400, Boston, MA, 617-727-7575; Christine.kenney@state.ma.us and Janet Daisley, Senior Program Manager, Commonwealth Corporation (4 Bay Road, Hadley, Ma 01035, 413-584-3627, x. 107; jdaisley@commcorp.org).**
- 19. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?
 - **There are no other vocational and employability programs operated in Massachusetts that directly target the skill gain and attachment to the labor force specifically for a juvenile justice population. Other programs exist (Youth Build, My Turn, Jobs for Bay State Graduates) that might attract former clients of DYS but they are not designed to specifically support the unique needs of a juvenile justice population (with case management from DYS, eligibility requirements that accommodate the existence of a juvenile record, funding that allows youth multiple opportunities to succeed at employment).**
- 20. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?
 - **The program will not be fully implemented until all 1,600 DYS clients annually have access to this programming. Currently 25% of DYS clients participate in BOG programming and our limitations are funding and access to community based agencies and non-profit organizations that are willing to design and implement BOG programming.**
- 21. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.
 - **Pros: The BOG program is designed to a) provide youth with 20 hours of career readiness training; b) support an 8-week internship that is supported by an hourly stipend and c) result in unsubsidized employment for participating youth. The number of participant enrollments has increased each year for the BOG program. In FY2009, the Bridging the Opportunity Gap initiative served 395 youth, an increase from 354 in 2007-2008 and 255 in 2006-2007. In fiscal year 2010, the percentage of those enrolling in career readiness who completed the program has held steady at approximately 80%. Work placements were similar to 2008-2009: 35% of participants received subsidized work placements, and 27% found unsubsidized work by the end of the program.**
 - **Cons: The greatest barrier to meeting the unsubsidized goal is the faltering economy. As previously mentioned, youth employment is at its lowest point in more than 60 years and this makes it especially difficult for youth with a history of involvement with the courts and juvenile justice system to access employment. Another "con" for DYS is that the agency's budget continues to be reduced to address shortfalls in state revenues thereby creating the potential for decreased funding for this essential job readiness program for youth.**
- 22. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?
 - **The BOG program has grown from one (1) pilot site with twelve youth from the city of Springfield in 2006 to fifteen (15) fully functioning year-long programs that provide a range of vocational, employability and entrepreneurship services to almost 400 DYS clients in eleven of the largest cities in Massachusetts.**
- 23. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

- **States could expect to face funding obstacles – the cost to implement the BOG program is in excess of \$1,000,000 per year. In addition, the program requires a commitment to support staff with program management experience in youth development and youth employment for successful implementation.**

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