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1. Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?

The choice of these specific organizations is grounded in a strategic and thoughtful approach, ensuring a comprehensive and effective implementation of our initiatives. Considerations for partners included:

Expertise and Specialization: Each partner organization brings unique skills, expertise, and resources to the partnership.

Comprehensive Coverage: Our collaboration includes key stakeholders that collectively cover various aspects of the educational ecosystem. From primary and secondary education to postsecondary institutions, we ensure a seamless transition and continuation of support through a student's education journey.

Community Connection: All partner organizations have a strong presence and deep roots within the community. This local embeddedness is crucial for understanding our region's unique challenges, cultural nuances, and specific needs. It facilitates better outreach, engagement, and acceptance within the community.

Collaborative History: The chosen partners have a history of successful collaboration, showcasing a strong working relationship. The established synergy will expedite the formalization of this partnership and lend to positive outcomes by leveraging existing connections and shared knowledge.

Diversity and Inclusivity: The identification of partners aimed to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the collaborative. This diversity ensures a well-rounded approach to addressing education attainment, considering the varied needs of our focal population.

Regional Impact: The partner organizations were chosen for their ability to make a significant impact on education outcomes in our region. Leveraging the collective strengths of these entities allows us to address systemic issues and create lasting positive change that benefits the entire community.

Commitment to Shared Mission: Each partner organization's mission is aligned and shares a commitment to improving educational attainment. This shared vision creates a cohesive team dedicated to achieving our goals and positively impacting the lives of learners in our region.

This partnership reflects a strategic and purposeful collaboration designed to comprehensively address educational attainment through a place-based approach in our region. Together, these organizations form a robust and synergistic alliance poised to make a lasting impact on the educational landscape of our community.

2. How is or will the partnership be structured?

The partnership for this initiative is structured to foster collaboration, transparency, and efficiency. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Benton and Franklin Counties will serve as the fiscal agent and lead in establishing a Steering Committee of representatives from partner organizations. This structure ensures effective coordination, resource management, and shared decision-making throughout the project.

The first initiative will be establishing the Steering Committee and formalizing the partnerships. During this process, roles and responsibilities will be established for each partner organization. This committee will ultimately serve as the central decision-making body, providing strategic direction, overseeing project milestones, and addressing challenges as they arise.

Once established, the Steering Committee will hold regular meetings to facilitate open communication, share updates, and address emerging issues. This consistent interaction will enhance collaboration, allowing partners to stay informed, aligned, and actively engaged in decision-making.

Further, the partnership structure will incorporate mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback. Regular assessments will be conducted to measure progress, identify areas for improvement, and celebrate successes. This feedback loop supports the adaptability of the partnership to evolving needs and circumstances. Protocols will be established within the Steering Committee to support conflict resolution and decision-making. Transparent processes for addressing differences of opinion or challenges will ensure that the partnership remains resilient and focused on achieving the shared goal of improving educational attainment in our region.

3. How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?

This partnership will be founded on a collective effort towards a shared vision for increasing educational attainment in our community. As such, partners are committed to fostering a dynamic learning environment, promoting continuous improvement through shared knowledge, and incorporating insights gained from each other and the communities served. The collaborative learning approach is a cornerstone of our strategy, ensuring that the partnership remains responsive to evolving needs and emerging best practices. We will take a multifaceted approach to attain this through regular knowledge-sharing sessions, community engagement and listening sessions, cross-organizational site visits, and data sharing and analysis. To incorporate the knowledge gained and lessons learned through these strategies, we will take an adaptive planning approach with maximum flexibility that allows us to integrate new insights and innovative solutions into our work plan, allowing our partnership to remain agile and responsive to the needs of our focal population.

Further, we recognize that as a partnership in its early stages of formation, it is essential to incorporate best practices as lessons are learned and successful practices emerge. This iterative process will ensure that the collaborative efforts are continuously refined and optimized for maximum impact on educational attainment in our region.

4. Who are the focal population(s) in your partnership's work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?

The focal population in our partnership's work is centered on those who are furthest from opportunity within our community. Our collaborative effort recognizes the importance of addressing educational disparities and working to achieve equitable access to educational resources and opportunities. Specifically, our focus extends to:

Underserved Communities: We prioritize reaching individuals residing in underserved communities where access to quality education and resources may be limited. We aim to reduce disparities and create more inclusive educational environments by directing our efforts towards these areas.

Low-Income Families: The partnership is committed to addressing the needs of low-income families, acknowledging the barriers they may face in accessing education opportunities. By tailoring programs and support services to the unique challenges of these families, we strive to uplift them and support them in breaking the cycle of generational poverty through education.

Minority and Marginalized Groups: Our partnership places a strong emphasis on serving minority and marginalized groups, recognizing the systemic challenges that these communities may encounter. By actively addressing cultural, linguistic, and social barriers, we aim to ensure that education opportunities are accessible and culturally responsive for all.

First-Generation College Students: Recognizing the unique challenges first-generation college students face, our partnership aims to provide targeted support to ensure their successful transition into and completion of higher education. This includes mentorship programs, resources for navigating the college application process, and ongoing assistance throughout their academic journey.

Multilingual Learners: We acknowledge the unique and specific needs of Multilingual Learners (MLs) and strive to create programs that support language acquisition and academic success. By addressing language barriers, we aim to provide a more inclusive education experience, fostering the engagement and achievement of MLs.

Learners and families in these focal populations bring a wealth of assets to their educational journeys, demonstrating resilience, determination, and unique strengths that contribute to the broader learning community. Recognizing and leveraging these assets is crucial for fostering a positive and inclusive educational environment. In addition to supporting educational attainment, these qualities will support a more diverse workforce. Key assets possessed by the focal populations include cultural diversity and rich perspectives, strong community networks, resilience and perseverance, multilingual skills, cultural competence and adaptability, innovative problem-solving skills, diverse talents and skills, and aspirations for a better future.

5. What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?

The focal populations to be served by this investment live in Benton and Franklin counties, located in southeastern Washington. Benton and Franklin counties are the primary locations where the education interventions and support services will be directed. The investment will support a plan tailored to Benton and Franklin counties' unique characteristics, demographics, and socio-economic factors, ultimately contributing to improving educational attainment and opportunities for individuals and families within the defined region.

6. What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?

The learners and families within our focal population in Benton and Franklin counties encounter systemic barriers that significantly affect their educational experiences. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is paramount to the success of our initiative. Some key barriers include:

Language Barriers: Many families within our focal population, particularly English Language Learners, face language barriers that hinder effective communication with educators and school administrators. Limited access to translation services and language support can create obstacles in understanding educational materials, engaging with teachers and administrators, and advocating for unique needs.

Access Barriers: Economic disparities contribute to access barriers for learners and families. Limited financial resources may impede access to essential educational resources ranging from technology to extracurricular activities and exposure to experiences that inspire interest in postsecondary education. Access barriers may be amplified for those living in rural areas where challenges related to transportation and proximity to educational opportunities may limit opportunities for participation in educational programs.

Lack of Empowerment in School: Learners and families within our focal population may need more empowerment within the school environment to reach their full potential as learners.

Lack of Cultural Responsiveness: The educational system has the opportunity to enhance cultural responsiveness within curriculum and teaching practices to better represent and acknowledge the diverse backgrounds within our focal populations. Lack of cultural responsiveness can lead to disengagement and alienation among learners and families.

Historical Oppression: Historical oppression, including systemic racism and discriminatory practices, has created enduring challenges for our focal populations. Disparities in educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes may be rooted in historical injustices that continue to impact the current generation. Acknowledging and addressing the historical context is essential for creating a more equitable educational environment.

Community Cultural Wealth: (Often seen as a deficit rather than asset) Learners and families in marginalized populations often face systemic barriers rooted in community cultural wealth. These barriers include limited access to resources, opportunities, and social networks primarily controlled by dominant cultural norms. Additionally, the devaluation or dismissal of diverse cultural knowledge, languages, and practices further exacerbates inequalities, hindering the ability of marginalized communities to fully engage and succeed within educational systems.

Lack of cultural brokers: The absence of cultural brokers poses a systemic barrier to learners and families in marginalized communities by limiting their access to essential information, resources, and support systems within educational institutions and other societal structures. Cultural brokers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between these communities and mainstream institutions by providing linguistic, cultural, and navigational assistance. Without such intermediaries, marginalized individuals may struggle to effectively navigate complex systems, advocate for their needs, and access opportunities, perpetuating cycles of exclusion and marginalization.

Our partnership emphasizes the importance of implementing targeted interventions to dismantle these systemic barriers. Our approach focuses on fostering cultural responsiveness, increasing language access, promoting empowerment within the school community, and

acknowledging historical contests to create a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for learners and families in Benton and Franklin counties.

7. What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?

The proposed work we plan to undertake during the granting period includes a comprehensive set of initiatives to address systemic barriers, foster inclusive educational attainment, provide impactful experiences, enhance knowledge of opportunities, and offer technical support. The work can be categorized into partnership formation and program implementation.

Under the category of partnership formation, we propose the following:

Formalizing partnership with informal partners: The organizations we seek to partner with in this work have long-time collaborators; however, we have yet to formalize partnerships in this way. This component of our work plan will be critical in establishing the long-term success of the collaboration through a strong foundation and establishing partnership roles and responsibilities.

Establishing a Steering Committee: This committee will serve as the central decision-making body, providing strategic direction, overseeing project milestones, and addressing challenges as they arise. As additional partners join this collaboration, they will participate in the Steering Committee through regular meetings, assessments, and feedback. This successful structuring of the Steering Committee will support achieving the most significant impact possible.

Established partnerships for this initiative include Boys & Girls Clubs of Benton and Franklin Counties (Fiscal Sponsor) and Educational Service District 123, with established informal partnerships we seek to formalize, including Columbia Basin College, Washington State University Tri-Cities Campus, local school districts, and Tri-Tech Skills Center.

Under the category of program implementation, initial conversations with partners have included work in the following areas:

Healthcare Immersion Week at Columbia Basin College: This opportunity would allow high school students to have a hands-on, immersive experience learning about postsecondary educational opportunities in the healthcare field available through Columbia Basin College.

Micro-credential cohorts: Hosted at ESD 123, the initial cohorts will offer participants opportunities to explore new fields and learn new skills. The micro-credential cohorts aim to unlock potential interest in areas individuals may need access to learn about and explore. Focused on in-demand skills and competencies, ensuring alignment with industry standards and youth interests. Utilizing a combination of online modules and hands-on workshops, participants will engage in interactive learning experiences designed to build practical skills and knowledge.

College tours: Visiting local college campuses gives access to experiences that allow learners to visualize themselves as students and explore educational interests.

Career Launch Summit: Development of a full-day summit aimed to create a memorable, inspiring experience that opens the door to curiosity about postsecondary education attainment. The summit will be an interactive experience that includes breakout sessions covering topics such as financial literacy, resume creation, and exposure to various areas of study. Additionally, it will consist of keynote speakers, networking opportunities, and exposure to different career opportunities. The goal of the summit will be to expose learners to various opportunities and ignite their interest in pursuing postsecondary education.

Skill-Based Virtual Reality (VR) Programming: VR is emerging as a revolutionizing workforce readiness tool, allowing participants hands-on virtual experiences in a multitude of job fields. Additionally, VR provides an innovative solution for developing soft skills such as conflict resolution and leadership through immersive role-playing experiences. Making this technology available to those who would not otherwise have an opportunity to have this experience sparks curiosity and interest that can lead to a desire to pursue various career paths.

The Steering Committee will develop additional programming through a collaborative process to attain the highest level of impact in supporting learners on their journey of educational attainment.

The Boys & Girls Clubs of Benton and Franklin Counties are uniquely positioned to support the program implementation aspects of this work plan as we serve nearly 1000 youth ages 12-18 in Benton

and Franklin Counties. Of these youth, 89% qualify for free lunches, and 76% identify as persons of color. Having a captive audience that has strong relationships with trusted adults allows us to implement new initiatives on a smaller scale with the intent to learn from the experiences and scale the aspects that work well to larger audiences. One example of this is skill-based virtual reality (VR) programming. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Benton and Franklin Counties trialed skill-based virtual reality programming (VR) in 2023. Because of this programming, teens have reported discovering they are interested in working in a specific field and are actively seeking programs and next steps following high school graduation.

We recognize that no one organization can be the solution to increasing postsecondary education attainment; however, together, we can make a significant impact in removing barriers, creating opportunities, and supporting learners in achieving their full potential.

8. How will this proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?

The proposed work is strategically designed to make a substantial and lasting impact on increasing educational attainment for the focal populations in Benton and Franklin counties. Through a multifaceted approach, our initiative aims to provide impactful experiences, enhance knowledge of opportunities, increase the ability to make informed decisions and offer critical support for technical aspects of achieving their goals, such as navigating the application and financial aid processes.

We aim to create situations in which our focal populations gain access to experiences that allow them to see the vast array of possibilities available to them and empower them to gain the confidence they need to seek such opportunities.

By integrating these components, the proposed work aims to create a supportive and empowering educational ecosystem in Benton and Franklin counties. By addressing systemic barriers, fostering a culture of educational attainment, and providing tailored support services, we aim to increase postsecondary education attainment for the focal populations, which will ultimately contribute to the growth, success, and well-being of individuals and the community at large.