



February 15, 2024

## Regional Challenge Grant Career Readiness

### Application Point of Contract:

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**Fiscal Agent:** Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound (BGCSPS)

### Partnership Name: TPU/UWT Husky Hangouts at the Clubs

Thank you for the opportunity to apply for a \$75,000 grant from the Washington Student Achievement Council for our Career Readiness Program at the Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound (BGCSPS), in partnership with the University of Washington Tacoma (Husky Hangouts) and Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU Academy). This program has been thoughtfully designed and strategically implemented to increase the state postsecondary attainment goal.

BGCSPS's mission is "To enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, and responsible citizens." We serve youth, ages 6 to 18, in Pierce, Kitsap and Mason Counties with after-school and summer focusing on three content areas: Academic Success, Character & Leadership, and Healthy Lifestyles.

In 2023, we served 5,152 youth which is more than double the youth served when compared to 2022 through, in part, our expansion of program sites to a total of 13. Further, we provided 12,905 hours of programming and provided 113,851 healthy snacks and meals. It's important to note that BGCSPS does not turn anyone away for inability to pay. Following our mission to serve those who need us most, 76% of our youth qualify for free and/or reduced school lunches. 52% live in single-parent households and 71% self-identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

It is through our Academic Success impact area that we seek support for our robust and engaging career readiness initiative in partnership with Tacoma Public Utilities (TPU) and University of Washington Tacoma (UWT). Together, we seek to prepare our youth, many without the same advantages of their more affluent peers, to discover their postsecondary and career pathways that are fulfilling disrupting the systemic barriers of poverty. We recognize the significance of serving teens and, for that reason, middle school youth pay \$15 per month and high school teens only pay \$5 per month for our programs and services (and this includes healthy snacks and meals); scholarships exist if families/caregivers are not able to afford our low-cost fees.

Thank you for reviewing our Letter of Inquiry to you for this remarkable grant opportunity. We are truly grateful.

A blue ink signature of Carrie Holden, President/CEO.

Carrie Holden, President/CEO

### PRESIDENT/CEO

Carrie Prudente Holden

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We have prepared the following answers in accordance with your grant guidance.

**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?**

Our two primary partner organizations are Tacoma Public Utilities through the TPU Academy, and UWT Husky Hangouts. TPU Academy.

The reason TPU is interested in partnering with the Clubs is that about one third of all STEM professionals are women and less than 10% are BIPOC (Equal Opportunity Commission and Pew Research Center). Making the TPU Academy available for our Club members enables them to see people who look like them doing work in careers that they may feel are unattainable, unrealistic or “not for people like me.” The TPU Academy reduces such barriers and help them, instead, to realize that they can achieve their dreams—because they have real-life examples right in front of them.

Similar reasons exist for our partners at UWT who have long held the belief that a postsecondary education exists for everyone. Their vision is stated as: The University of Washington Tacoma fosters a thriving and equitable society by educating diverse learners and expanding knowledge through partnership and collaboration with all our communities. Further, as an urban-serving university, their mission is stated as:

- Expand access to higher education in an environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed.
- Foster scholarship, research and creativity to address the challenging problems of our time and place.
- Partner and collaborate for common good.
- Catalyze the economic and social vitality of the region.

TPU Academy helps connect youth in TPU’s service territory to real world applications of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). TPU has shown commitment to the Boys & Girls Clubs STEM education through multiple STEM sponsorships in recent years. TPU Academy is the product of those engagements.

Science and mathematics achievement gaps along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines have widened substantially over the last 20 years. Less than 1 in 10 STEM professionals is a minority or a woman. Engaging children in STEM early in life will prepare them to be successful and create a positive impact in TPU’s workforce of tomorrow. Additionally, interacting with current TPU staff serving in STEM roles will provide a mentor relationship and a warm welcome to explore potential career futures with TPU.

Children fully enrolled in the Boys & Girls Clubs spend more time in Club programming than they do in their traditional school setting each year. The Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound works in partnership with the Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) to offer programming that supplements the traditional school environment. The Clubs also have the luxury of being unburdened by curriculum mandates. Club students are free to explore their interests, and TPU staff is able to deliver creative programming to help encourage TPU-specific STEM engagement and career development.

We seek, through this grant funding, to expand the middle and high school program to include more field trips, workforce speakers.



**2) How is or will the partnership be structured?**

BGCSPS's Workforce Readiness Framework includes: Career Exploration and Matching connects to First-Job Skills Development leading to Work-Based Learning Experiences ultimately so youth can plan for their future. A key objective is to implement a fully loaded Workforce Readiness (Teen Reengagement) Program that is aligned with our strategic plan for reinvigorating and revitalizing our teen and career exploration programming across all Clubs with the intent to expand into school-based programs in the future.

We will do this, in part, through a Teen Services Manager who will oversee the teen program and supporting staff, teen coordinators, general teen programming and workforce development. Additionally, they would oversee teen late nights at participating Clubs. This position will be at a Manager's level with deep experience in workforce development and teen program management.

Specifically, the TPU Academy is an 8-week program that facilitates mentorship relationships between TPU employees and our Club youth. The program syllabus encourages and engages Club members in STEM principles, concepts, and direct applications. Each session is 90 minutes and integrates hands-on experiences with the STEM-related work TPU employees perform daily. Sessions engage about 50 total youth in science and mathematics to bridge the achievement gaps typically present across race and socioeconomic indicators.

Regarding our partnership with UWT Husky Hangouts Program, funding will support transportation for campus takeovers, materials for activities, workshops around First Generation student panels, financial aid workshops including FAFSA and preparation for SAT standardized tests, applying to postsecondary educational institutions and connections to UWT personnel and faculty in order to build relationships with the youth, many of whom do not have lived experiences in their families of origin surrounding college readiness and preparation. It is astonishing to realize, when asked, the majority of the teens served at the Boys & Girls Clubs have never stepped onto a college campus. We seek to demystify the experience creating a sense of belonging and that they have the opportunity and right to attend a college of their choice. With the deep commitment by our UWT partners for working with BGCSPS, tuition (and associated living expenses) is made affordable by their scholarship and grant opportunities which is much more likely to occur when relationships exist.

A critical element of this work is our use of TransfrVR, an innovative hands-on Career Exploration platform that showcases different career paths that allow the youth to understand their career options, experience the work in different careers, and ultimately get on a path to a well-paying and rewarding career. Examples include Manufacturing, Skilled Trades, Warehousing & Storage, Public Safety, Hospitality and Automotive to name a handful of options. Someone may choose to learn more about Robotics through this program including paint shop robotics or maintenance and quality assurance work through the use of robotics. The opportunities are almost endless and create a fun, engaging and even "cool" platform to explore the countless options. BGCPS will be hiring the Teen Services Manager in early 2024 in order to expand the use of this technology integrating it into the core programming at all of our locations that serve teens.

**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?**

We will meet regularly with our respective partners to discern operating in such a way that is mutually beneficial, impactful and trust based building in understandings of full transparency. We envision sharing



best practices, survey results and anecdotal moments of learning. Further, program feedback will be “point in time” allowing quick and immediate shifts, if deemed to be in order, allowing lessons learned at the Eastside Branch to be incorporated into the same experiential learning opportunities that might happen next at our North Mason Teen Center.

**4) Who are the focal populations in your partnership’s work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journey’s?**

At a point in time in late 2023, we are able to report the following demographics of youth served: 1% (4) American Indian or Alaskan Native, 3% (11) Asian, 48% (168) Black or African American, 8% (28) Hispanic or Latinx, 1% (4) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 27% (9%) Two or More Races, 12% (42) White.

Our Club members and their families bring forth social capital of resiliency that is lifted up through our many programs and curricula specifically designed to capture their full potential.

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

The geographic region where our teens reside includes Pierce, Kitsap and Mason Counties through eight strategically located Club sites in neighborhoods who lack resources.

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

According to the Washington State Office of Public Instruction, only 53.4% of Tacoma’s children entering school in the 2022-23 school year met developmental benchmarks for kindergarten. Based on the 2022-23 school year, there were 28,443 students enrolled in Tacoma Public Schools. Only 43.5% of students met the English Language Arts standard, 27.9% met math standards, and 34% met science standards. Using 2022-23 data, 90% graduated in 4 years, 2,100 were reported being homeless.

The pandemic has had significant impacts on young people’s development, education, and mental well-being across the nation. After the on-and-off social isolation of the pandemic, as well as the ubiquitous presence of social media, young people are struggling with soft skills like collaboration and teamwork. This will be a challenge for youth and employers alike, as McKinsey & Company reports more than half of U.S. employers say the biggest obstacle to growth is the lack of qualified candidates with soft skills. Meanwhile, research shows that quality after-school programs can narrow the learning gaps and support student gains in areas such as improved school attendance, positive social behaviors, integrity, and leadership.

Further, a 2020 report from the U.S. Department of Education found that “students considered economically disadvantaged were almost one to one and a half times likely to not graduate high school. This same study reports that 49% of households with children have consistently more difficulty in paying usual expenses, food insecurity and lower confidence in making house payments or rent.

This research validates the need for Boys & Girls Clubs to serve youth, especially lower income youth, with safe, quality, high impact out-of-school time mentoring and care. Our Clubs track several indicators that allows us to better understand the critical role our youth development professionals play in the healthy growth of the youth in our community. For example, 62% of Boys & Girls Clubs teens reported feeling a sense of belonging at their Club which is higher than the average of Washington state Clubs at 45%. Further, according to the article "*Why a sense of belonging at school matters for K-12 students,*"



Qualtrics (August 2, 2022), only 51% of high school students feel like they belong at school. Why this matters, the article goes on to state is because “high school students who feel that they belong in high school graduate at higher rates than their peers who do not feel a sense of belonging (93% compared to 84%).

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

If this work is funded, we envision collectively designing a calendar to ensure a flow of strong content and timing for such content that is practical and aligns not only with each other but also with the schools our youth attend. For example, we might wish to focus on an aspect of a program such as engineering when our youth will be participating in a field trip to learn more about engineering.

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

A hallmark of our work involves Academic Success. Youth arrive at the Clubs after school Monday through Friday. They enjoy a bit of downtime where our youth development professionals, using Social and Emotional Learning techniques, touches base to ensure the youth are in a healthy place and, if they are not, the Clubs has the resources to help youth through a trauma-informed approach. Youth are then provided a healthy snack before breaking off into smaller groups for homework time. All youth are expected to complete their homework before participating in other fun and engaging activities. At the Clubs, our activities are designed to be educational even if the Club member doesn't feel that they are being taught something specific.

In 2023, 94% of our Club members plan to graduate high school and pursue a career through education whether that be vocational training, post-secondary education or apprenticeships.

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