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Community Outreach Worker Program

Summary Overview

February 2015

Background

There is great change coming to Downtown Ithaca, including the complete rebuilding of the Ithaca Commons. With much anticipation, we look forward to the finishing touches of what has been a long and thoughtful redesign process. In an effort to create a downtown space where every person feels welcome and where businesses and services thrive, much attention has been paid to understanding the needs, concerns, and wishes expressed by the public for the future of the Commons and its impact on the larger community.

In order to more effectively serve the needs of the various downtown stakeholders (e.g., merchants, shoppers, tourists, visitors, eateries, service providers, lenders, landlords, tenants, etc.), a working group was tasked with looking into ways to promote continually positive and inclusive experiences for those living, working, and visiting Ithaca's downtown area. This work has resulted in the development of a proposed Community Outreach Worker Program (COWP).

This Summary Overview — put forth by a joint working group of City, County, Downtown Ithaca Alliance (DIA), and Family and Children's Service (F&CS) representatives — serves to recommend the launch of the COWP in Ithaca. It is the intent of the partners of the working group to design a program that promotes a welcoming, inclusive, accessible, and tolerant downtown atmosphere enjoyable to everyone.

Our Program Goals

1. To provide a continually safe and positive environment for all downtown stakeholders by holding individual stakeholders to a standard of conduct that allows for mutually enjoyable and unencumbered movement throughout the targeted downtown area;
2. To develop and promote a universally-applied standard of conduct for individuals in the targeted downtown that is both inclusive and encourages tolerance on the part of all stakeholders;
3. To implement effective rules of engagement in an effort to address and eliminate breaches of conduct, conflict, and intolerance.

4. To develop a communication network among stakeholders, public/private service providers, and the larger community for the purpose of providing referrals, service, education/outreach, accessibility issues, and conflict resolution.

Target Area

The State Street/MLK corridor (the Ithaca Downtown Business Improvement District plus the West State Street corridor of West State/MLK from downtown to Meadow Street). Primary attention will be paid to the Commons, Cayuga Street between the Library and including DeWitt Park, and West State/MLK Street to Meadow Street.

Host Agency

The working group has identified Family and Children's Service (F&CS) as the preferred host agency for the project. The outreach worker will be employed with F&CS and receive their paycheck from F&CS. F&CS will provide space, day to day supervision, a computer/work station, and an overall administrative framework for the program. An MOU will be prepared between F&CS and Steering Committee members. F&CS has agreed to serve in this role.

Funding

Funding for this program is coming from several different sources and the total funding amount may not be equal to the real expense associated with running the program. However, F&CS is prepared to assume the cost of administrative expenses that are in excess of the total funded amount. A fund will be created for this program and F&CS will be reimbursed for payroll or other budgeted expenses from this fund.

Steering Committee

General oversight and policy for the program would be delegated to a steering committee comprised of representatives from the funding entities, including F&CS. This Steering Committee shall meet at least quarterly to review progress and metrics, monitor the budget, and resolve policy related issues or concerns. F&CS shall take the lead in organizing Steering Committee meetings. Membership of the Steering Committee shall consist of the following: representatives from all financial partners to this project plus the host agency. Currently, this would include representatives from the City of Ithaca, Tompkins County, the Downtown Ithaca Alliance, and Family and Children's Services. The Steering Committee will be charged with policy decisions pertaining to the program and fiscal oversight of the program (within the bounds of F&CS procedures).

Advisory Committee

A separate advisory committee would be created from representatives of all affected agencies and organizations. This advisory committee would meet 2-4 times a year and will provide the outreach worker and Steering Committee with advice and input based on the perspectives of each organization. This Advisory Committee will also provide liaison assistance and entry to the numerous programs and projects that may be possible resources. The membership of this Advisory Committee may vary over

time but should include membership that can provide: technical assistance and resources on common programmatic areas, mutual referrals to and from the program, and interest in developing the sustainability and positive impact of the program.

Staffing

The initial start-up staffing for this program will consist of one full-time person:

- 40 hours per week
- Benefits to be based on F&CS practice
- Hours to be determined based predominantly on IPD incident report data plus input from IPD, City representatives, DIA, County agencies, and F&CS.
- Hours/days may flex based on seasonality, and special circumstances

Qualifications for Outreach Worker

A draft job description is included with this summary document. Candidates should have the following qualifications and expertise:

- Social service background is preferred but not essential;
- Demonstrated ability to work with diverse populations, including homeless and transient groups and individuals, youth and teens, and persons with substance abuse dependencies;
- Understanding of social service, mental health support, and accessibility assistance programs and services;
- Demonstrated ability to work with and relate to all downtown stakeholder groups;
- Excellent interpersonal skills;
- Record keeping and reporting ability;
- Ability to work with multiple groups and organizations

Key job duties will include:

- Outreach to all downtown stakeholder groups, including individuals who may seek out or need referrals to public/private service agencies;
- Assessment, referral and linkage of resource needs of individuals who in engage in services
- Coordination, consultation and education with area service providers and businesses to foster supportive downtown environment for all, and to meet the needs of individuals engaged in services
- Documentation of all activities to facilitate a baseline assessment of needs of individuals located in the service area, and documentation of complaints, if any, received regarding this program, for review by Steering Committee (See Progress Tracking and Evaluation, below).

Relationships with other Organizations

The outreach worker will be housed within F&CS however he/she will be expected to maintain close working relationships with other organizations, particularly the Ithaca Police Department, the County Departments of Mental Health and Social Services, and the Downtown Ithaca Alliance. It is also important that this position remain independent of the chain of command of the Ithaca Police Department (IPD). IPD has offered to provide the outreach worker with daily briefings on conditions

and street issues. It is possible that the outreach worker will likewise make arrangements with County Mental Health and Social Services to both receive and share information, with full consideration of confidentiality laws and best practices concerning informed consent. In addition, the outreach worker would also check in regularly with the Downtown Ithaca Alliance regarding problems or conditions identified by DIA ambassador staff.

Time Line

Proposed start date: 2nd Quarter 2015

Progress Tracking and Evaluation

As this is a pilot program, year one of the pilot will be focused on establishing baseline data while assessing the need and focus of the program in the downtown corridor. The program will begin working with the downtown partners and service providers to implement tracking of additional indicator information. The program will be evaluated via the Results Based Accountability Framework and evaluated by the Steering Committee on an annual basis, also accounting for complaints received regarding the program.