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CITY OF YONKERS
DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

**PERIODIC REPORT OF GRANT FUNDING FOR
COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

To: Mayor Mike Spano
Liam McLaughlin, City Council President
Members of the Yonkers City Council
Vincent Spano, Yonkers City Clerk

From: Brendan J. McGrath, Inspector General 

Re: Grant Inspection and Review Report for
Yonkers Partners in Education

Date: June 4, 2015

This report is issued in response to City Council Resolution No. 52-2008 which directs the Inspector General to “develop an ongoing oversight program to monitor Community Based Organizations and other entities that receive grant funding from the City of Yonkers” and Resolution No. 94-2008 which directs the Inspector General to “move forward” with the plan that was submitted.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Founded in 2007, Yonkers Partners in Education (“YPIE”) is a not-for-profit organization that works in partnership with the Yonkers Public Schools to increase the number of students who graduate and complete a post- secondary degree program, either college or a vocational school. Our review of YPIE reveals that adequate financial controls and oversight are in place to ensure that the Yr 39 Community Development Block Grant¹ was used appropriately and in accordance with the agreement between YPIE and the City of Yonkers.

¹ Funding sources for Community Development Block Grants are received from the United States Government under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 and administered by the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Organizational Overview

Founded in 2007, YPIE is a domestic and not for profit corporation existing in accordance with §501(c)(3) of the IRS Code, located at 86 Main St., Suite 301, Yonkers, New York 10701. Working in partnership with the Yonkers Public Schools, the focus of YPIE is to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and complete a post- secondary degree, whether with a college or a vocational program. YPIE assists over 5,000 students per year. Students participate in the YPIE program both on a voluntary basis, or on a referral basis, however the YPIE program is open to any student. One such program which is the focus of our review is the YPIE Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program. This is a program designed to provide college and career access information to the City's Latino high school students and their families.

To achieve its goal of preparing students for college, YPIE uses a data system designed that assists in creating individual college and career planning strategies by linking academic achievement with post- secondary goals, which is linked to a national data base. As such, the percentage of students that graduate from Yonkers high schools and continue to colleges or vocational programs can be tracked and future strategies adjusted accordingly.

Grant Summary

According to documentation provided by YPIE to the City of Yonkers, as of June 2013, YPIE received public and private grants in the amount of \$691,000.00, of which a Year 39 Community Development Block Grant (February 1, 2013 to January 31, 2014) in the amount of \$15,000 came from the City of Yonkers to be used for the Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program. Additional income came from private contributions and fundraising events.

For Year 39 of the CDBG Program, the City of Yonkers, through the Yonkers Department of Planning and Development, approved a grant in the amount of \$15,000 as reimbursement for expenses associated with the Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program. These expenditures included the reimbursement of the salary of YPIE's Manager of Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program and a school training course.

Our review indicates that by letter dated September 11, 2014, YPIE requested a drawdown of the CDBG in the amount of \$15,000. Further review indicates that in or about October 2014, YPIE received the full amount of the CDBG. Documentation submitted by YPIE indicates that the grant was applied to the following expenditures:

\$10,000	Salary for the Manager of Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program
<u>\$ 5,000</u>	School training course.
Total	\$15,000

Site Visit

On February 4, 2015, this office met with Wendy Nadel, Executive Director, Ellen Cutler Levy, Associate Director, and Kristine Crotty, Director of Administration. Ms. Levy explained that YPIE starts its focus with middle school students in the 7th and 8th grades by preparing them for high school and exposing them to college and career opportunities. Ms. Levy stated further that YPIE, in direct response to the low counselor to student ratio in Yonkers Public Schools, saw the need to act in a supportive role to increase the level and quality of services to students. In each of Yonkers seven high schools, YPIE operates a college and career center. These centers offer one-on-one communication with students, providing services that include preparation for the Scholastic Aptitude Test and essay preparation, assistance with college and financial aid applications, and college campus bus tours for students and their parents. Students may continue to participate in the YPIE sponsored programs once in college.

Ms. Levy stated further that YPIE, aside from its full-time staff, has approximately 125 volunteers who serve as high school coaches and student advocates and provide programs including mentoring programs. Each volunteer meets with 1 to 3 students every week and makes a four year commitment to the students and assist in preparation for college.

YPIE estimates more than half of students attending the Yonkers Public Schools are Hispanic/Latino. YPIE further estimates that a majority of students attending the Yonkers Public Schools is from low income families.

The Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program is in response to this percentage Latino students and recognizes that majority of Latino parents seek a college education for their children, but many are not aware of the surest means of meeting that goal. The Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program is designed to target all Latino families of middle and high school students who attend the Yonkers Public Schools to provide college access information with the aim of increasing post-secondary access to Yonkers Latino students. This is accomplished by activities which include involving students and their families with college campus bus trips and monthly workshops.

Among the methods of recruiting families to participate in the program, YPIE recruits from Latino churches and community centers, as well as, by phone messages delivered in Spanish with the assistance of the Yonkers Public Schools.

Program Participants

Pursuant to the contract with the City of Yonkers, YPIE, as the recipient of a CDBG, submitted a progress report to the City of Yonkers that addresses the Yr 39 CDBG. Of the more than 1200 Latino students who participated in the program, all were described as coming from families with low to moderate incomes. Under applicable HUD regulations, "Basically CDBG", dated November 2007, a publication from HUD's office of Office of Block Grant Assistance, programs that receive funding must document at least 51% of the program participants are from families with low to moderate incomes.

Internal Controls

This office found that YPIE and the Yonkers Department of Planning and Development provided the appropriate documentation in support of the CDBG funding. Our review indicates that there were sufficient internal controls in place to ensure that the grant was spent for its intended use and in accordance with YPIE's agreement with the City of Yonkers. YPIE also has written policies and procedures in place that are updated periodically

Ms. Crotty indicated that any one of three persons is authorized to sign checks. The three authorized to sign checks consist of YPIE's executive director and two designated members of the Board of Directors. However, checks that are over \$10,000 require two signatures. All financial statements are submitted to the YPIE Board of Directors which meets five times per year.

Conclusions

YPIE appears to be a vital part of the Yonkers Community by exposing thousands of Yonkers students to college and vocational programs, and then encouraging them to go. Our review of the Latino College Success/El Camino Al Exito program has revealed that the CDBG was used appropriately in accordance with YPIE's agreement with the City of Yonkers.