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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  
Sarah Lawrence College

**Date:** January 31, 2017

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 1926, Sarah Lawrence College (“Sarah Lawrence”) is a private, not-for-profit<sup>1</sup> coeducational liberal arts college located on 44 acres of land in Yonkers, New York, near the village of Bronxville.<sup>2</sup> Our review of Sarah Lawrence reveals that sufficient financial controls were in place to ensure that the three Year-40 Block Grants were used properly and in accordance with the agreements between the City of Yonkers and Sarah Lawrence College.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, nces.ed.gov, the site of the National Center for Educational Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> See, www.sarahlawrence.edu

<sup>3</sup> 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**

Sarah Lawrence, located at One Mead Way, Yonkers, New York 10708, is a private and not-for-profit liberal arts college offering bachelor and master degrees with a total enrollment of more than 1600 students.<sup>4</sup> Sarah Lawrence is authorized by the New York State Board of Regents, which is responsible for the general supervision of all educational activities within the State<sup>5</sup>, to operate as a college and confer degrees on its students. Moreover, Sarah Lawrence College is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, a voluntary, non-governmental, regional membership association whose mission it is to ensure institutional accountability through rigorous application standards.<sup>6</sup>

A part of the Sarah Lawrence curriculum includes an alliance with the Hudson River Environmental Educational Institute (“HRVEEI”), also known as the Sarah Lawrence Center for the Urban River at Beczak (“CURB”), a domestic not-for-profit corporation located at 35 Alexander St., Yonkers, NY. The mission of the HRVEEI is to educate people about the ecology, culture, and history of the Hudson River, the Saw Mill River, and the Bronx River through a variety of educational experiences with the purpose of increasing awareness of the rivers and related ecosystems, as well as promoting informed and effective stewardship of those natural resources.<sup>7</sup>

In or about June, 2013, Sarah Lawrence College executed a Memorandum of Understanding with HRVEEI for unrestricted use of the Alexander Street facility to conduct environmental, educational, and research programs including delivery of a curriculum concerning the three rivers mentioned above through CURB. Additional programs include water quality research and monitoring and green infrastructure planning wherein the Sarah Lawrence Center partnered with the City of Yonkers and launched a comprehensive plan to reduce storm water impacts on the combined sewer system by utilizing green technology.<sup>8</sup>

## **Grant Summary**

### **1. CURB Center**

In 2015, one such educational program was the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Program, consisting of ten free summer sessions with each session involving approximately 25 students ranging from 4 to 16 years of age. Classes within the STEM program included, Catch of the Day Seining (fishing with a net), Water Pollution Clean-up, and River Exploration. Overseeing CURB’s daily operations is the Director, Ryan Palmer, who is in charge of administering all aspects of the Program and described the Program as providing a unique and fantastic opportunity to educate Yonkers youth on the environment. Moreover, in connection with the administration of

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<sup>4</sup> See, [nces.ed.gov](http://nces.ed.gov)

<sup>5</sup> See, [www.regents.nysed.gov](http://www.regents.nysed.gov)

<sup>6</sup> See, [www.msche.org](http://www.msche.org), the site for the Middle States Commission on Higher Education

<sup>7</sup> See, Memorandum of Understanding between Sarah Lawrence and HVREEI, dated June, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See, [sarahlawrence.edu](http://sarahlawrence.edu)

the CDBG, this office contacted Sarah Lawrence's finance department and spoke to Brent K. Parker, Associate Vice President, Finance/Controller who stated that all financial matters pertaining to Sarah Lawrence College, including the administration of the CDBG that was applied to the STEM Program are handled and processed by his finance department.

Among the community organizations that took part in the STEM Program were community organizations located in Yonkers, each one a recipient of a CDBG issued by the City of Yonkers within the last few years. The organizations participated in the STEM Program by selecting youths to attend during the summer included:<sup>9</sup>

1. Nepperhan Community Center
2. St. Peter's Summer Camp
3. San Andres Center (Iglesia Memorial de San Andres)
4. Yonkers YMCA
5. Lanza Learning Center
6. Greyston Learning Center

This office contacted the Yonkers YMCA, the Greyston Learning Center, and the Nepperhan Community Center to discuss its involvement in the STEM program and the number and ages of youths participating.

We also spoke to Donald Golding, Youth Director for the YMCA. Mr. Golding confirmed that a youth group from the YMCA participated in the STEM program for one day during the summer, as part of an overall eight week summer day camp. These youths were from 13 to 16 years of age and all were Yonkers Public School students. Records submitted by the STEM Program indicate that there were 23 participants.

As for the Greyston Learning Center, this office spoke to Carol Robinson, Education Director. Ms. Robinson stated that two groups comprised of pre-schoolers and school age children, ranging from 6 to 12 years of age participated in the STEM program and each group attended the STEM program one day during the summer. Records submitted by the STEM Program indicate that there were 30 participants.

Finally, this office contacted and spoke to Ms. Peacola Umana of the Nepperhan Community Center, the Camp Counselor in charge of the Community Center's participation with the STEM program. Ms. Umana stated that children ranging in ages from 6 to 12 years participated in the program for one day during the summer. Ms. Umana added that she found the program to be very educational. Records submitted by the STEM Program indicate that there were 33 participants.

A CDBG in the amount of \$30,000 was approved as reimbursement for the remodeling of the CURB center to provide enclosed classroom space for the purpose of allowing CURB to serve additional school groups at the same time and creating new lab and field station space to allow CURB to provide advanced STEM programming to local middle and high school students. This remodeling project included the purchase of

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<sup>9</sup> According to the Yonkers Department of Planning, each of the listed community organizations had received CDBG's at some point in the past.

furnishings and equipment to complete the space, including cabinets, a drying oven, a lab refrigerator and freezer.

Our review of the documentation provided by the College and the Yonkers Department of Planning and Development indicates that by letter dated October 30, 2015, the College requested a drawdown of the CDBG in the amount of \$30,000 as reimbursement which was approved by the City of Yonkers on November 2, 2015. This documentation included receipts that indicate that the aforementioned grants were applied to the purchase of a refrigerator and freezer, an oven, a spectrophotometer, cabinets, and furnishings. Pursuant to the contract between Sarah Lawrence College and the City of Yonkers, the College, as recipient of the Yr 40 CDBG, submitted a progress report referencing the remodeling project in response to the \$30,000 grant received.

A second CDBG in the amount of \$8,000 was approved as reimbursement for the STEM Program to provide ten free summer sessions for Yonkers youths as described above. Our review of the documentation provided by the College and the Yonkers Department of Planning indicates that by letter dated October 30, 2015, the College requested a drawdown of the CDBG in the amount of \$8,000 which was approved by the City of Yonkers on November 2, 2015. The documentation produced shows that the full amount was applied to salaries and fringe benefits as indicated below:

\$2,433.00	Salary for Executive Director
\$1,667.00	Salary for Education Director
\$1,266.67	Salary for Outreach Coordinator
\$ 851.67	Fringe Benefits for Executive Director
\$ 583.33	Fringe Benefits for Education Director
\$ 443.33	Fringe Benefits for Outreach Coordinator
\$ <u>755.00</u>	Administrative Fees
Total	\$8,000.00

## **2. Summer Science Research Collaboration Program**

Since 2009, the Summer Science Research Collaboration Program (“Collaboration Program”) paired Sarah Lawrence undergraduate students serving as mentors to approximately ten Yonkers School District high school students for a free and intensive week of college level research and hands-on laboratory learning under the guidance of Sarah Lawrence science department faculty in the college’s science center. In this collaboration, Yonkers students are able to gain skill of critical judgment, resourcefulness, creativity and independent thinking. In the summer of 2015, ten students from the eight Yonkers Public high schools participated in the Collaboration Program.

Overseeing the Collaboration Program is Fred Baumgarten, the College’s Director of Foundation, Government, and Corporate Relations Office of Advancement. Mr. Baumgarten described the program as intensive, culminating with a high quality presentation of each of the projects. However, just as in the CURB program, all financial matters pertaining to Sarah Lawrence College, including the administration of

the CDBG applied to the Collaboration Program, are handled and processed by its finance department.

A third CDBG in the amount of \$5000 was approved as reimbursement for the Collaboration Program to provide a free week long program of college level research during the summer for ten Yonkers School District students under the guidance of Sarah Lawrence science department faculty in the College's science center. Our review of the documentation provided by the College and the Yonkers Department of Planning indicates that by letter dated June 11, 2015, the College requested a drawdown in the amount of \$5,000 which was approved by the City of Yonkers on June 18, 2015. The documentation shows that the CDBG was used for the purchase of supplies consistent with the mission of the Program.

### **Site Visit**

On September 29, 2016, this office met with Mr. Palmer, CURB's Director, at the Alexander St. location in Yonkers. Mr. Palmer described the educational value of the program and stated that its free summer sessions were well attended by enthusiastic students. Mr. Palmer, lauding the cooperation between the College and the City of Yonkers, continued that the renovations made possible by the CDBG helped to provide an even better experience for children and staff.

On October 2, 2016, this office met with Mr. Baumgarten, the College's Director of Foundation, Government, and Corporate Relations Office of Advancement, at the College's main campus in Yonkers, where the Collaboration Program took place. Mr. Baumgarten described the Program, in which the entire cost was approximately \$100,000, where Yonkers public high school students work alongside Sarah Lawrence College students, as intense and rewarding.

### **Program Participants**

Under applicable HUD regulations, "Basically CDBG", a publication from the HUD Office of Block Grant Assistance, dated November 2007, programs that receive funding must document that at least 51% of the program recipients are of low to moderate income.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, in 2012, 68% of the students of the Yonkers Public Schools were eligible for free lunches and another 7% of the students were entitled to reduced lunches.<sup>11</sup> According to the Yonkers Department of Planning, those students participating in the free or reduced lunch programs were considered to come from families that are of low to moderate incomes.<sup>12</sup>

Pursuant to the Sarah Lawrence's three contracts with the City of Yonkers, the College as recipient of the Year 40 CDBGs, submitted progress reports for each project. These progress reports attested to the College's expenditures and the level of participation in each of the STEM Program and the Collaborations Program. Those

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<sup>10</sup> See also, <https://www.hudexchange.info/manage-a-program/acs-low-mod-summary-data/>

<sup>11</sup> See, Profile, Yonkers City School District, and July 31, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See also, [www.naviance.com](http://www.naviance.com) in which a study concluded that a majority of students attending the Yonkers Public Schools come from low to moderate income families.

participants in the STEM Program were comprised of youths from organizations within the City of Yonkers.

As for selection criteria for Yonkers high school students to participate in the Collaboration Program, this office spoke to Lisa Perry, Director of Intellectual Technology for the Yonkers School District. Ms. Perry stated that the student participants in the Collaboration Program were selected from the eight Yonkers public high schools. As part of the rigorous selection process, each high school was instructed to submit three applications for two positions in each of the five available areas of study for a total of ten students. Ms. Perry added that the high school/faculty recommendations did not only consider the grades of the students, but work ethic and the ability to work independently.

### **Internal Controls**

This office found that the College and the Yonkers Department of Planning provided the appropriate documentation in support of the three Community Development Block Grants. Moreover, our review indicates that there were sufficient internal controls in place to ensure that each of the grants were spent for their intended uses and in accordance with each of the agreements between the College and the City of Yonkers. According to Mr. Palmer, the CURB's Director all funding is submitted to the College and that each grant check is entered into a restricted account from which payments were made.

This office contacted Brent K. Parker, the College's Associate Vice President of Finance/Controller. Mr. Parker stated that two signatures are required before submission of a bill to accounts payable, consisting of one signature from the person requesting payment be made and a second signature from his/her supervisor. The bills are then sent to the accounts payable manager who inputs the bill into the college's financial system for a check to be generated. It is the manager of accounts payable who is responsible for making all payments. All checks bear the signature of the College's vice president for administration. For those checks over \$10,000, a second signature is required either from the college's president, dean of the College, or the vice president of finance.

### **Conclusion**

Our review indicated that both the CURB program and the Collaboration Program serve important functions within the Yonkers community, with particular regard to Yonkers youth. Moreover, our review of both programs finds that each of the three grants was used appropriately and in accordance with the College's agreements with the City of Yonkers. In addition, our review indicates that sufficient internal financial controls are in place to ensure proper usage for the funds. Finally, this office suggests that to further enhance the overall effectiveness of the Collaboration Program, Sarah Lawrence should consider following the academic careers of the participating students as a means toward determining the impact of the Program, the extent to which these students pursue further education in science, and the level to which participation in the Program may have had in the students' selections.