

**New York City Department of Youth and Community Development**

**Horizon Program Concept Paper**

**EPIN: 26019I0002**

**October 5, 2018**

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| ***Our Mission****:*  *The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) invests in a network of community-based organizations and programs to alleviate the effects of poverty and provide opportunities for New Yorkers and communities to flourish.*  ***Our Vision:***  *DYCD strives to improve the quality of life of New Yorkers by collaborating with local organizations and investing in the talents and assets of communities to help them, develop, grow and thrive.* |

**I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

This concept paper is the precursor to a Request for Proposals (RFP) to be released by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) through which a contract will be awarded to a qualified nonprofit organization to provide year round services for youth ages 16-21 who are detained in the Horizon facility. The concept paper is informed by internal analysis and review of prior DYCD-funded programs for justice-involved youth and feedback from stakeholders.

On April 10, 2017, with the passage of the “Raise the Age” law, New York raised the presumptive age of juvenile accountability for 16 year olds effective October 1, 2018 and for 17 year olds effective October 1, 2019.[[1]](#footnote-1) These youth will be sent to the Horizon secure juvenile detention facility located in Mott Haven, Bronx (Horizon), which is under the jurisdiction of the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) at the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS).

The purpose of the Horizon program will be to provide high quality, engaging activities and supportive relationships that foster social and emotional well-being, build life skills, and to offer opportunities for youth to explore career options that build on their strengths and reflect their interests. Based on DYCD’s experience and evidence from research studies on programming for justice-involved youth, it is anticipated that activities and supports provided through the program will yield a variety of benefits, especially for participants who remain in detention for a period of thirty (30) days or more but also for others who are detained for much shorter periods.

Like all adolescents and young adults, youth in detention can benefit in multiple ways from nurturing relationships and good role models. It is well-established that relationships and lasting connections with caring adults are critical to personal growth and development.[[2]](#footnote-2) A variety of research studies also suggest that participation in stimulating activities­–from the arts, creative writing, drama, dance, and music to STEM,[[3]](#footnote-3) yoga, and other areas–yield many kinds of benefits including improved psychological health and resiliency.[[4]](#footnote-4) In addition, as youth get older, they benefit from programs that focus on employment and career pathways which enable them to consider qualifications and skills they will need to pursue their goals.[[5]](#footnote-5) Since it is well-established that many justice-involved youth have histories of trauma, opportunities to participate in a range of enrichment activities are important. A literature review by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) on arts-based programming highlighted that participation in certain activities is therapeutic and connected to improved social and emotional well-being.[[6]](#footnote-6) Whether awaiting disposition of their case or serving out their sentence, youth in secure detention, can benefit from well-designed activities that build knowledge, skills and confidence and instill a sense of achievement and hope. Empathetic, culturally competent staff can help participants discover and develop their talents and express thoughts and ideas, and enable them to better cope with negative emotions, such as anger, depression, and anxiety.

**II. FUNDING**

Total anticipated annual funding for the Horizon program is $595,000. It is anticipated that 712 unduplicated youth will be served by the program on an annual basis, with an average of 85 youth participating each day services are offered.

**III. PROGRAM GOALS AND APPROACH**

*Goals*

Program activities would support the following goals:

1. Foster social and emotional wellbeing in a safe and nurturing environment.
2. Help participants discover their talents and strengths.
3. Expose youth to employment options and career pathways that reflect their interests.
4. Foster life skills that will support future success.
5. Cultivate leadership skills and involvement in community.
6. Engage family members, wherever possible, to support the above goals.

*Approach*

DYCD expects the programs it funds to adopt strengths-based approaches that emphasize Positive Youth Development (PYD), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and Youth Leadership. PYD is an assets-based approach that fosters healthy development and resilience. SEL involves intentional development of key skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationships, and responsible decision-making. Youth Leadership builds on SEL competencies by adding a focus on *action* (i.e., using skills learned to effect change) and *reflection* (reinforcing lessons learned, building confidence, responding to new challenges).[[7]](#footnote-7) Other components of DYCD’s overall approach include a welcoming environment that is consistently friendly, safe and supportive so that all participants feel valued and respected; and wherever possible, adoption of family engagement strategies to maximize the impact of program efforts.[[8]](#footnote-8) Programming infused with the principles and practices of PYD, SEL, and Youth Leadership can support the efforts of youth in juvenile detention to turn their lives around.

**IV. KEY PROGRAM FEATURES**

1. Activity designs take account of high participant turnover. Stays in juvenile detention vary greatly. Accordingly, activities would be well-structured with interconnected, self-contained modules designed to deliver benefits even if youth are only able to participate for a limited time.
2. Social and emotional growth a central focus*.* The program would be explicitly designed to improve social and emotional well-being, helping youth see a brighter future beyond their present situation.
3. Exposure to employment/career options. The program would reflect interests and strengths of the participants, offering activities that encourage a focus on the future, and, in particular, on career pathways and employment options.
4. Multiple activity options. The selection, structure and organization of activities would be flexible and offer a range of options to take account of the diverse interests of participants and ensure that all youth can benefit from participation, whatever their background and aspirations.
5. Culturally competent expert staff*.* All activities would be delivered by culturally competent staff with the necessary expertise and empathy to work successfully with justice-involved youth.
6. Subcontractors/specialist consultants. To ensure high quality, specialized programming beyond the capacity of a non-specialist organization, the contractor would allocate between 35 and 50 percent of the budget to hire specialist subcontractors and/or consultants.
7. Collaboration**.** The contractor would work in collaboration with all staff at Horizon. In particular, it would work closely with ACS staff to maximize the benefits the program is able to deliver.
8. Transition services. The program would include services that enable youth to connect with relevant community-based services after they exit detention.

**V. Program Design**

Target Population

The program would serve youth detained at Horizon. Participants may include youth previously in the custody of the Department of Correction (DOC) at Rikers Island and those serving sentences (under one year) following adjudication of their cases by the court.

Youth reside in and receive all services, including education, at the facility for the duration of their detention.  The majority of youth served by the program would be aged 16 to 21 years. It is anticipated that 85 youth, on average, would be available to participate each day activities are offered.

Hours of Operation

The program would operate year-round over a minimum of 43 weeks for a total of 645 hours annually, including activities offered on weekends and during the summer. During the school year, the program will operate on at least three (3) afternoons each week (Monday to Friday) to provide a minimum of nine (9) hours of activities. On weekends, the program will provide a minimum of six (6) hours of activities, and during the summer, a minimum of 105 hours of activities over seven (7) weeks. Subject to DYCD approval, scheduling (but not the annual total number of hours) may be adjusted.

Activity structure and focus.

1. *Activity structure/scheduling*

* The contractor would design the program to take account of participant turnover and differing lengths of stay. Designs would include multiple entry points into the activities, with standalone workshops that allow participants to build skills, contribute to a final “product,” and benefit from the program even if they are only able to attend one or two sessions.
* Several activity options would be offered simultaneously in different spaces at Horizon during program operating hours to ensure all available youth have the chance to participate.
* Some activities would be hall-based (i.e., delivered in one of 10 separate halls where Horizon youth are housed) while other activities would be offered in multi-purpose areas that have been designated for learning and interaction.
* The activity schedule and design of activities would be sufficiently flexible to allow the contractor to effectively deliver services in the spaces available on a given day.
* The contractor would be allowed to offer the same activities on multiple days each week to give more youth the chance to participate in popular activities.
* The contactor would have capacity to serve all available youth, in up to 10 groups, every day the program operates, with separate activities provided for youth previously held at Riker’s Island and other youth at Horizon. Subject to factors such as age, safety and availability of suitable space, the contractor, with the agreement of the facility staff, may be able to serve youth residing in separate halls as a single group.

1. *Focus on social and emotional growth*. Activities would be designed to help youth acquire knowledge and skills that foster positive feelings (e.g., self-worth, confidence, optimism, sense of competence and accomplishment) and cultivate habits of mind (e.g., grit, persistence, and determination) that support success and resilience. To reinforce the participants’ sense of achievement and success, the contractor would take every opportunity to showcase end products of their efforts. DYCD’s experience and evidence in the research literature suggest that hands-on activities with innovative content foster supportive relationships and leadership skills that build resilience.

Required Program Content Areas

The Horizon program would offer a range of engaging activities that reflect the goals and key features outlined above and include the following three content areas:

1. *Enrichment.* The program would offer multiple opportunities for participants to engage in creative activities, such as drama, music, musical theater, dance, story-telling, poetry, arts and crafts including comic book creation/animation and videography. Enrichment activities may also embrace STEM programming (for example, offering options in gardening or robotics) if appropriate space and resources are available. Enrichment activities would reflect the interests of participants, and develop teamwork and problem-solving skills. Enjoyable activities that support academic progress (e.g., by expanding vocabulary, improving reading and writing skills) are encouraged.
2. *Life skills/leadership development.* It is vital for youth in detention to gain basic life skills and cultivate leadership skills that support successful reintegration into the community on their exit from detention. Activities would be designed to help youth understand the meaning of social responsibility and encourage their interest in community, for example, through service learning projects. They would help participants develop a wide range of relevant skills (including, e.g., communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and informed decision-making) and make them familiar with key characteristics and qualities that employers look for in an employee.
3. *Career Pathways.* It is especially important for youth in detention (especially those aged 16 years and older) to focus on what they will do when they return to the community. Accordingly, the program would introduce participants to a variety of career pathways. Wherever possible, activities would include opportunities for participants to acquire practical, job-related skills and create pathways to certifications that reflect their interests (e.g., barbering, cosmetology). Programming would be designed to provide a bridge to internships and employment options that participants can pursue when they exit detention. It might include presentations by or workshops with guest speakers who can inspire youth to look at career possibilities they had not previously considered, including entrepreneurship opportunities.

Transition services

Program staff would work with ACS and other staff at Horizon to promote a smooth transition when youth exit detention and return to their communities. Program staff would offer concrete suggestions and specific information about community-based services that reflect the activities the youth enjoyed at Horizon. Wherever possible, staff would identify opportunities that individual youth might be able to pursue on exit, including suitable internships. Staff would also make every effort to engage family members to support youth on their exit from detention.

Staffing

1. *High quality, expert staff.* The contractor would be expected to hire experienced, well-qualified teaching artists and activity specialists and partner with specialist subcontractors.
2. *Culturally competent staff with strong communication skills*. The contractor would ensure that all program staff members are empathetic and culturally competent with strong communication skills, and the ability to quickly engage and develop relationships with vulnerable youth.
3. *Specialist subcontractors and consultants*. The staffing pattern would include multiple subcontractors or consultants with appropriate expertise to deliver the high quality activities in the required content areas described above.
4. *Ability to adopt trauma-informed approaches and help youth develop resiliency skills*. Psychological factors may affect interactions with youth who have been taken away from their families, friends, and neighborhoods and often have histories of trauma and other mental health issues. Since many participants would not remain in detention for long (stays vary from a few days to six months or more) there would be a limited window in which to build trust. Program success would depend critically on the presence of expert staff who help youth address emotions such as anxiety, anger and depression, diverting youth and offering them hope for the future.
5. *Credible messengers*. Staff would include credible messengers who, given their backgrounds and life experience, can serve as powerful role models and offer youth transformative personal relationships.
6. *Ability to work collaboratively with Horizon staff*. To help youth gain lasting benefit from program participation, staff must be familiar with the day-to-day realities of juvenile detention and be able to work productively with ACS and other staff at Horizon to ensure effective service delivery.
7. *Required staff positions*.

* Program Director*.* The person appointed to this position would have a Master’s Degree and a minimum of five (5) years of experience working with at risk or justice-involved youth. Based on DYCD’s experience, these qualifications are necessary to ensure effective service delivery and coordinate multiple subcontractors and specialist consultants. The Program Director must not only be an efficient manager who is aware of and can adopt best practices for serving justice-involved youth, but also be able to quickly forge relationships with participants, work within the constraints of the detention center, and collaborate in meaningful ways with Horizon staff.
* Assistant Program Director.  The person in this position would have at least a Bachelor’s degree and three (3) years of experience working with justice-involved youth. This position would support the Program Director and help ensure smooth operation of program services, including managing a continually changing census of participants, liaising with the specialist subcontractors and consultants and the array of Horizon staff who oversee youth in the detention center. The Assistant Program Director would assume whole or partial responsibility for data collection and reporting, including enrolling participants and reporting required information to DYCD, if this role is not undertaken by the Program Director.

**VI. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

The contractor would be expected to have a minimum of three (3) community partnerships with separate organizations. All partnerships would be designed to enhance program services for youth at Horizon, but proposers may select their community partners based on the specifics of their proposed program. Community partners may include expert subcontractors hired by the contractor to ensure the program offers high quality activities that quickly engage youth. Community partners could also include organizations to which the contractor can refer participants as part of the transition services it offers.

**VII. SERVICE OPTION/COMPETITIONS**

The RFP will comprise a single service option and competition.

**VIII. ENROLLMENT, ATTENDANCE, AND OUTCOMES TRACKING**

The contractor would be required to collect and maintain enrollment and attendance data, and to make these available to ACS and DYCD as requested. The contractor would serve all available youth on the days the program operates. In the case of youth who participate in program activities for 30 days or more, the contractor would report on two outcomes:

* Knowledge or skill gains in at least one activity content area
* Improvement in social and emotional well-being

Measures for these outcomes would be developed with the contractor.

**IX. ANTICIPATED CONTRACT PERIOD**

It is anticipated that the term of the contract awarded from the RFP will be from May 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022, with an option for DYCD to renew the contract for up to three additional years. The contractor would deliver services to youth starting July 1, 2019, allowing for a two-month start-up period during which the contractor would be expected to get to know staff at Horizon and become familiar with the facility’s operations.

**X. ANTICIPATED PAYMENT STRUCTURE**

Contracts would comprise line-item reimbursement in accordance with the budget approved by DYCD.

**XI. ELIGIBILITY AND BASIS FOR AWARD**

Eligible organizations must be incorporated as nonprofit organizations at the time of contract award. Proposals would be evaluated according to criteria that include the quality and quantity of successful relevant experience, and proposed approach and design of the program or services. The organization selected for award would have demonstrated successful experience providing similar services to justice-involved/at-risk youth.

**XII. HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ACCELERATOR SYSTEM**

To respond to the forthcoming RFP and all other client and community services (CCS) Requests for Proposals (RFPs), organizations seeking contract awards must first complete and submit an electronic prequalification application using the City’s Health and Human Services (HHS) Accelerator System. The HHS Accelerator System is a web-based system maintained by the City of New York for use by its human services agencies to manage procurement.  Only organizations with approved HHS Accelerator Business Application and Service Applications for one or more of the following will be eligible to propose.

* Academic support
* Alternative Justice Management
* Case management
* Child Care
* Community Engagement
* Conflict resolution/mediation
* Diploma/GED Training
* Discharge/Re-Entry
* Health education and support
* Language skills
* Life skills
* Literacy
* Mental health services
* Preventive services
* Recreational Services
* Secure Detention

**XIII. PROCUREMENT TIMELINE**

It is anticipated that DYCD will release the RFP approximately seven weeks after the release of this concept paper. The deadline for submitting proposals in response to the RFP will be approximately five weeks after the RFP release date.

**Comments**

Please email comments on the concept paper to DYCD at CP@dycd.nyc.gov no later than **October 24, 2018,** entering “Horizon Concept Paper” in the subject line.

1. See, e.g., <http://raisetheageny.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/rta.billsummary.final_June-2017.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See. e.g., Search Institute at <https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. STEM is the acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. For one view of important life skills that young people learn from engaging in STEM activities, see <https://phillipscharitable.org/5-important-life-skills-students-learn-stem/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, e.g., <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1479-5868-10-98>. For the benefits of yoga, see, e.g., <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3980104/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a review of research on career pathways, see MDRC Research on Career Pathways, Issue Brief, March 2016 at <https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/Career_Pathways_2016_Issue_Brief.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Studies have shown that program participation can increase empathy, sharing, and mood control. See, e.g., Arts-Based Programs and Arts Therapies for At-Risk, Justice-Involved, and Traumatized Youths (Last updated: May 2016 www.ojjdp.gov/mpg) OJJDP at <https://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/Arts-Based-Programs-for-Youth.pdf>; Program have also been shown to reduce negative emotions–see, e.g., WRITE ON, a *writing-based mental health intervention designed for youth in confinement. Implemented in partnership with the NYC Division of Youth and Family Justice* - see

   <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311394912_Expressive_writing_intervention_promotes_resilience_among_juvenile_justice-involved_youth> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For further information, see DYCD’s publication “Promote the Positive” at <https://www.flipsnack.com/NYCDYCD/dycd-promote-the-positive-flipbook-for-rfp.html>; for current research on developmental assess, see

   <https://www.search-institute.org/our-research/development-assets/current-research-developmental-assets/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, Circles of Support Toolkit at <http://dycd.jayharrymedia.com/communication/communication-tools-and-resources/circles-of-support-cards/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)