

NOMINATION FORM
COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE LEARNING COMPETITION

Institution
Benedict College

Title of Project
Yes We C.A.R.E. (Constituents Aligned to Respond Effectively)

Project Director
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Contact Information for Project Director
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Establishment Date of Project
September 2012

Unit That Administers Project
Service-Learning and Leadership Development

Total Number of Students Involved
551

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NOMINATED PROJECT
(Insert your answer after each question.)

1. For purposes of this competition, the Commission on Higher Education defines service learning as college student learning at any level and in any situation that is *linked* in a direct, hands-on fashion to the resolution of a problem or concern in a target community outside the institution *and is related* to a college course with some type of reflection activity. How does your project meet the parameters of this definition?

The Yes We C.A.R.E. (Constituents Aligned to Respond Effectively) project meets the parameters of the Commission on Higher Education's service learning definition. Yes We C.A.R.E. is a Benedict College initiative which seeks to impact the needs of low-income residents in three communities outside of the College campus. Students from service-learning designated courses implement the project and engage in reflection and evaluation activities with course instructors.

Since its establishment in 1995, the Benedict College Service-Learning Program has made strides and received national recognition for its commitment to student learning through community engagement. Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities, committed to fulfilling the civic purposes of higher education noted that: "Benedict College does not shy away from a concrete understanding of the college as a staging ground for action. This commitment to service that includes direct assistance, combined with teaching that highlights public service and research that contributes to the creation of better public policies, set the Benedict Mission statement apart from the more typical generic expression of public purpose." The Yes We C.A.R.E. (Constituents Aligned to Respond Effectively) project continues the College's commitment.

Yes We C.A.R.E. is a comprehensive service approach in the form of a one stop shop which allows community participants the opportunity to visit a designated faith location to receive a variety of household supplies provided by constituent donors. Students directly interact with community participants to better understand their needs and determine how the College and its faith partners can utilize physical, human, and spiritual resources to be of assistance to neighbors in need. At Yes We C.A.R.E. events students distribute the collected goods and provide literature and other collected resources on a plethora of topics such as job readiness skill-building training opportunities, basic computer skills seminars, and others to help community residents in need.

2. Specifically, which segments of the college/university community does your project involve?

Service is intentionally woven throughout the fabric of Benedict College. Examples that document the service ethic of the institution include the College's mission statement which details Benedict's commitment to teaching research, and service; the College Catalog where the college-wide service-learning graduation requirement is outlined and detailed; and the development of an administrative division, Community Development, which works directly with residents and local officials to improve conditions that impact the community.

Yes We C.A.R.E. involves the collaborative efforts of faculty and/or staff in the following departments:

- Division of Academic Affairs - Academic Support Services and Special Projects
- Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program
- Social Work Department
- Social Sciences and Criminal Justice Department
- English Department
- Economics, Accounting, and Finance Department

- Office of Church Relations
- Benedict-Allen Community Development Corporation

3. How many students (specify degree levels to the extent possible) does the project affect?

A total of 551 students have participated in the Yes We C.A.R.E Project; 248 students in 2011-2012, 116 students in 2012-2013 and 187 in 2013-2014. Registration forms, attendance logs, and the service-learning database are utilized to track the service hours of students participating in this project. Student participants are from every classification level. Students participating through service-learning designated courses are involved in every aspect of project implementation. Volunteers not affiliated with service-learning courses are often utilized to assist with event set-up and logistics. The extent of a students' involvement is in large part based upon their status as a course or non-course participant.

4. Describe the target community or communities your project serves.

Benedict College Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program partnered with faith constituents in each of the targeted zip codes to jointly serve residents of the community. Faith partners included First Calvary Baptist Church, Progressive Believers Baptist Church, Masjid As-Salaam, Grace Christian Church, and Lexington Interfaith Community Services.

First Calvary Baptist Church (FCBC) is a service-learning partner site located in the downtown Columbia, 29204 area. College students serve as volunteers in the FCBC SAFARIS Program. SAFARIS increases students' understanding of educational concepts through the leadership of its coordinator, a retired public school teacher. The after school enrichment program services young members of the church as well as children living in the transitional home of St. Lawrence Place and the public housing community, Gonzales Gardens.

Progressive Believers Baptist Church (PBBC) is located in the Southeast, 29209 area of Columbia. The Pastor of PBBC has facilitated seminars and participated in a leadership capacity of various events designed to educate and empower students on the College campus. PBBC's motto is "go and make disciples," as such the church leadership looks forward to ongoing and intentional opportunities to further educate students as they learn and serve.

Masjid As-Salaam is also located in North Columbia, 29203, and reaches out to the Eau Claire community. Through community activities and events, the Mosque has become an instrumental community resource.

Grace Christian Church (GCC) is located in North Columbia, 29203, and reaches out to the Eau Claire community through its worship services as well as by providing a number of outreach and community-based services through the various ministries offered through GCC, Grace Christian Ministries, a non-profit 501 (c) 3, and the Greater Columbia Foundation. GCC has a long-standing relationship with the service-learning program and is proud of its partnership with the program. Students have served alongside GCC members as they provide spiritual and economic impact on the local community. Service efforts have included serving the homeless, volunteering at children's homes, and helping women at the community's pregnancy center.

Lexington Interfaith Community Services (LICS) is comprised of a group of ministers, laypersons, and community organizations seeking to help neighbors in crisis, specifically those struggling to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter and household needs. Though the actual facility site is not located in one of the targeted communities, LICS and BC-SLLD became "fast friends." LICS staff and BC-SLLD staff were both attending a neighbors helping neighbors event at Grace Christian

Church. While there, through conversation and a joint discussion of both group's goals and desired, partnership was the next natural next step.

5. Describe your project's effectiveness in helping to solve the problems or concerns in the target community.

Benedict College faculty, staff, students and community partners contributed human and financial resources to educate the campus and local community through Yes We C.A.R.E. interfaith efforts. Community residents in the targeted zip-codes, 29204, 29203, and 29209, were provided with the opportunity to be the direct recipients of goods and services without the added stress and frustration often associated with the "red tape" of more formalized providers of goods and services. The project allowed participants the opportunity to visit a designated location in one of the College or faith partner facilities and receive resources at no cost. Students and faith partner volunteers sorted, stored, and transported donations received at their organizations to the designated sites. Partners also provided input for workshops and seminars focused on meeting community needs as well as information on individual services to be offered.

What we already know from research sources that include the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, SC Information Highway, and zipatlas.com is that South Carolina has a poverty rate of 15%, the ninth highest poverty rate in the United States, tied with Tennessee. While the per capita income in Columbia, SC is greater than the South Carolina average; it still remains 6% less than the national average. The median household income in Columbia is, however, 2% less than the South Carolina average and 27% less than the national average. While the numbers vary, the unemployment rate remains around 8%; higher than the national average of 7%. Based upon formal and informal data sources, we ascertained that household goods are the most needed tangible resources among the targeted population. Families indicated that items such as curtains and rugs are often seldom, if ever, purchased. The targeted audience indicated their limited funds are directed toward food and basic living expenses.

Donations and community resident participation are documented and tracked for data collection purposes. During the first year of implementation, 2012-2013, 762 community members received \$71, 609 in donated items through 6 events. In the 2013- 2014, through six events, 818 community members from low-income families received an estimated \$51,820 worth of household items at no cost. Beneficiaries of the services often stopped volunteers to share their gratitude and personal stories of appreciation.

6. Describe the degree to which your project enhances student learning while providing specific examples of the service learning activities the college students engage in. Also explain how the service learning activities reinforce or apply what the students learn in the classroom.

Yes We C.A.R.E. is coordinated through the Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program and implemented by select faculty from the academic schools as a service-learning course project. Yes We C.A.R.E. allows college students the opportunity to provide low-income community residents with goods and services, in three of Columbia, South Carolina's zip codes with significant amounts of residents living below the poverty level. The Service-Learning and Leadership Development Director and Faculty Coordinator work directly with faculty participants to ensure participation in Yes We C.A.R.E. events addresses learning outcomes specific to the faculty and the participating course. Students' involvement is tailored to the learning outcomes for the course. For example, business majors assisted with donation collection, and value assessment. Social Work majors developed brochures that compiled contact information for local social service agencies and organizations. English majors assisted in the selection of books and read to children attending Yes We C.A.R.E. events with their parents. Students from religion courses developed the questions for the Yes We C.A.R.E. panel discussion which allows faith partners to come to our campus and

provide more insight into their religious beliefs and community values in an open forum. Students from the participating courses, under the direction and supervision of their course instructor, were engaged in the service-learning framework components: investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration throughout project implementation. Through Yes We C.A.R.E. faculty and students have used service-learning as an opportunity to make the entire community a classroom where both the service providers and service recipients benefit equally.

While poverty is not a predictor of poor academic performance, it does impact the level of exposure to various opportunities that can increase learning. Yes We C.A.R.E. alone cannot reverse the cycle of poverty, but through the utilization of College resources, the service-learning component can supply family members, adults and children, in the surrounding target area with proven transformational tools that may help families step outside of the poverty cycle.

7. Is there academic credit associated with the project (not necessary for submission)? If so, please explain the particulars.

Students participating in Yes We C.A.R.E. through service-learning designated courses receive academic credit. Students not directly affiliated with a participating course, such as departmental organizations, student clubs, sororities/fraternities are also allowed to participate in Yes We C.A.R.E. events, under the management of program staff alongside peers who are service-learning course participants with familiarity and understanding of project goals and outcomes. Non course participants must still take part in project orientation and evaluation activities with the Faculty Coordinator and designated Benedict College Service-Learning and Leadership Development (BC-SLLD) Staff members as appropriate. While students in this category do not receive service-learning, they do earn community service credit for their volunteer efforts.

8. If funding is required, how is the project funded and what is the approximate annual budget for the project?

In order to implement a large scale project such as Yes We C.A.R.E., funding is required. The approximate annual cost for Yes We C.A.R.E. project implementation is \$15,000. The project received external funding to help offset costs in one year of its implementation. There is no external funding currently used. The project is funded by Benedict College through the budget for Service-Learning and Leadership Development and College Work-Study funds. Additional funding for project implementation is provided through resources from the Faith Partners.

Students who serve as Service-Learning Ambassadors are paid through the College's Work-Study program for their leadership and coordination efforts. Working alongside BC-SLLD Program staff and faith partners, Service-Learning Ambassadors coordinate events, train volunteers, and work directly with overall project development and implementation. Prior to project implementation, a faith-based leadership and training conference was provided for all Service-Learning Ambassadors and other student volunteers in collaboration with our faith partner, Grace Christian Church. Consumable office supplies such as paper, pens, notebooks and other related items for project implementation were provided by the BC-SLLD budget and faith partners when possible. Travel funds which allowed for vehicle rental costs to ensure staff, student volunteers and donated goods are transported to and from community sites for Yes We C.A.R.E. events were provided by the College through the BC-SLLD budget. Faith partners with organization vehicles also assisted to help off-set costs when possible. Funds needed for promotional materials, community incentives, event refreshments, as well as printing and duplication were jointly covered by the budgets of both BC-SLLD and the faith partners.

9. Add any other comments you may have about your project.

Yes We C.A.R.E. was implemented as part of *The President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge* Advancing Interfaith Cooperation and Community Service in Higher Education, sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Of the now three years that the project has been implemented, only one of those years was funded through external sources. The College with support from partners assumes the cost of project implementation. In large part this is because Yes We C.A.R.E. is a sustainable component of the Benedict College Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program. Strategic Direction 3 (SD3) in the Benedict College Strategic Plan speaks to the College's desire to develop sustainable programming on the College campus and as such, serves as a launching point that ensures sustainability of project efforts. SD3 is specifically dedicated to providing and strengthening research and service programs to achieve the College's mission. SD3 reads in part: "This direction encourages faculty, staff, and students to engage in scholarly activities which advance knowledge or understanding in their disciplines and/or improve their personal skill, knowledge, or understanding of their disciplines" (Benedict College Strategic Plan 2012). SD3 clearly provides guidance to College faculty/staff as they address the needs of disadvantaged individuals and engage in scholarly and service activities, both of which are directly accomplished through the Yes We C.A.R.E. Project.

The achievements of the Yes We C.A.R.E. project will be extended through specific programming implemented in various College departments. For example, Social Work majors will continue to provide information on community agencies and services available to address the various needs of the Yes We C.A.R.E. targeted populations. Enhanced partnerships may result in opportunities for practicum and internships with local agencies serving residents of identified neighborhoods. The Benedict-Allen Community Development Corporation (BA-CDC), the College's nonprofit entity specifically developed to promote community revitalization, operates under the auspices of the School of Business and Economics. Based upon survey results and other findings from the Yes We C.A.R.E. project, the BA-CDC staff will be solicited to provide life skills sessions, including, workshops on finance, home-buying, among others specific to the needs of the identified groups. These are only two examples of the kind of sustainability efforts the Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program is seeking for long-term continuation of Yes We C.A.R.E. project efforts.

Administrative support for program efforts is evidenced through the words and action of the Vice President for Academic Affairs who has established service-learning as a priority action item in the Division's Annual Strategic Plan and the President of the College, who serves as a staunch supporter of the College's Service-Learning and Leadership Development Program. In the words of President Swinton: "Teaching our students about the responsibility to serve others has always been one of our top priorities. We are proud of the social engagement of our students through service-learning and their commitment to improving our world through their personal efforts." The President's remarks succinctly capture the spirit of the faculty, staff, and students of Benedict College.

You may also include supplemental information about the project (such as brochures, pictures, etc.).

Please return this form via e-mail by **February 27, 2015**, to:

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