

LIAISON REPORT for CAMP FIRE

AGENCY: CAMP FIRE LIAISONS: Seth Carter (ISU) and Mary Beth Golemo (City of Ames)

1. Need for Program. Describe who the target population is and whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing. Indicate the source of this information. Also, indicate how the program/service is different and how it is similar to others and what would happen if the program/service ceased to exist. List the priorities established by ASSET Funders, which the programming addresses.

Camp Fire's target population is school age youth (1st – 9th grade) in Story County. Most participants ("campers") come from Ames, Gilbert and Nevada. All youth are invited to participate regardless of socio-economic background though scholarships are given to those in need. An 8:1 staff to camper ratio determines the number of maximum campers. The number of registered campers is increasing due, in part, to collaboration with the Ames Community School District who provided Camp Fire with students' home addresses for a direct mail campaign. Plans are to increase the staff size so more campers can participate.

Camp Fire is most similar to the Boys & Girls Club. However, Camp Fire is more nature-based and is not a club-based program. Camp Fire activities are offered when youth and their families, i.e. summer and school breaks, need them. Camp Fire also has a higher staff to student ratio than the Boys & Girls Club.

Camp Fire and the Boys & Girls Club programs are full thus showing a need for both programs. Camp Fire collaborates with the Boys & Girls Club so their participants can enjoy the nature-based camp experience.

If funding ceased to exist, Camp Fire Heart of Iowa would continue, but the camps in Ames and Boone may not.

2. Program Strengths. Pick two to four factors that contribute most importantly to the program/service outcomes. Do not list everything that is satisfactory. We will assume that things not mentioned are okay. For each strength describe some supporting evidence.

Strengths include:

- Staff to camper ratio
- Mobility
- Collaborative efforts

Camp Fire's 8:1 staff to student ratio is an important strength as it adds to the "take away" experienced by the campers. Camp Fire's mobility (busses) allows them to do a varied program including field trips, use of the Ames Aquatic Center and more. Another bus in Ames is needed. Camp Fire's ability to tap into resources at Iowa State University is an exciting strength especially as Camp Fire's program includes STEM curriculum. Camp Fire does add the "Arts" to their curriculum thus offering a "STEAM" program. Camp Fire's collaboration with other programs (Boys & Girls Club, Prairie Flowers Children's Center, City of Ames, Iowa State University, etc.) is smart, efficient and a "win-win" for all involved, especially the campers.

3. Program Weaknesses. Select factors that detract most from the program/service achieving its outcomes. Present details as described above. Recommendations for reducing these weaknesses should follow the discussion of each weakness.

Weaknesses or challenges include:

- Recruiting and retaining quality staff
- Promotion and communication with families and campers

- Special needs campers

Finding quality staff has become challenging and presents an even greater concern since more staff is desired. Camp Fire will continue to work with the three Regents institutions (Iowa State, UNI and Iowa) in the recruitment of staff. Raising current pay rates to make the positions more attractive, as well as retain current quality staff, must be a priority.

Promoting Camp Fire's program is also critical. A grant obtained from Cargill is allowing Camp Fire to work with the organization Flynn Wright on a how to enhance communication with families about their program.

Camp Fire has worked successfully with special needs campers. For example, some autistic campers have successfully participated in Camp Fire activities but some have not. This is a serious need for families with autistic children.

4. Financial Outlook. Current funding concerns should be described. In addition, the assessment of the program's plan to cope with shrinking resources should be given.

A threat to funding always exists but presently, Camp Fire is in good financial shape. Several years ago funding from one source was decreased due to a focus on literacy issues. Camp Fire adapted its curriculum to include this new focus. Thus, flexibility is important. Likewise, staff is always looking for grant opportunities and Camp Fire has a successful grant history. Shrinking resources would be cause to raise participation fees. Sixty percent of the current Camp Fire budget comes from earned income.

5. Internal Management Practices. Summarize your assessment of the management of the agency, and the role of the Board. If there are deficiencies, details should be provided. Conclude with recommendations when appropriate.

The Executive Director is experienced with over 10 years in his current position. Other Camp Fire programs often request his advice. He is conservative budget-wise and with goal setting; the current Board is more risk taking and wants to set higher goals. When questioned about this, the Executive Director thinks this is a good mix especially since the Board has proven itself in obtaining the higher goals it has set.

The current Board has 16 members with low turnover. However, most Board members are from the Des Moines area; representation is needed from Boone and Ames. The Board only meets six times a year but special meetings can be called if needed. Committees meet quarterly. The Executive Committee meets eleven times a year so most direction must come from this group.

Prior planning on events as well as how to incorporate the Flynn Wright research data seemed to be an issue at the Board meeting we attended. A focus on timelines and better advance planning should be reviewed.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments. Make note of any suggestions, comments or questions agencies may have with regard to the ASSET process, budget forms and or anything else that relates to the process.

As shared in the past, Camp Fire's fiscal year (September 1 – August 31) does not blend well with the ASSET process and timelines. Due to summer camp, not all actual expenses are known. It was also suggested that ASSET funding include performance measures.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT: