

Alignment of REAL Essentials with Systems Thinking for Optimal Health

The goal of the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) is to have a significant impact on improving the optimal health of adolescents and reducing teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) through saturation of communities with the greatest needs and disparities using a systems thinking approach to replicate effective programs with fidelity.

Below is a helpful guide in determining how The Center for Relationship Education REAL Essentials Curriculum aligns with the requirements of the goal and the areas that must be demonstrated to write a successful grant application.

Systems Thinking

REAL Essentials Alignment

a. Ensures areas of greatest need are targeted in an effort to promote equity and in reaching optimal health and preventing teen pregnancy and STIs.

The Center for Relationship Education's (CRE) REAL Essentials curriculum promotes positive youth development utilizing the 5 "Cs" of adolescent development (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) through fun interactive engaging activities where they have the opportunity to obtain skills, practice skills, experience success, build relationships and be cared for in a safe inclusive environment that fosters learning and growth. CRE works with the highest need and most vulnerable population group to ensure equity in reaching optimal health and opportunities for life success for all youth.

b. Utilizes a systems thinking approach to identify multiple leverage points to maximize impact on promoting optimal health and preventing teen pregnancy and STIs

The Center for Relationship Education utilizes a train the trainer model of service delivery with multiple partners in the community so at every touch point adolescents are receiving similar messages regarding optimal health in multiple domains of their young lives (physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and financial). By training facilitators including coaches, parents, teachers, youth leaders, community leaders, social workers, case managers, medical professionals, HHS directors, etc. to create a community saturation wrap-around approach with multiple leverage points towards primary prevention and holistic health, CRE builds a systems approach to community implementation and sustainability of programming beyond grant funding with the goal of changing social norms regarding optimal health and primary prevention, rather than risk reduction.

c. Replicates with fidelity effective programs and supportive services that are culturally appropriate, age appropriate, medically accurate, and trauma informed.

Because CRE trains and certifies facilitators in the REAL Essentials curricula which is age- appropriate, medically accurate (see appendices), culturally and linguistically sensitive, inclusive and trauma informed (utilizing "A Checklist for Integrating a Trauma-Informed Approach into Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs,"), we can ensure fidelity to programming. CRE has protocols in place for implementation best practices, scope and sequence fidelity, attendance records, time outputs (8-10 hours of programming), program monitoring, continuous quality improvement, and overcoming obstacles. The professional team at CRE continues serving those certified with professional development opportunities, program monitoring assistance, webinars, phone calls and website support. For the purposes of this grant the Program Director will be responsible for ensuring program fidelity.

Effective programming is outlined in the summative data research pages located in the appendices.

Systems Thinking

REAL Essentials Alignment

d. Applies the power of youth and community voice to ensure the project is of the highest quality and best fit for the community(ies) and population(s) to be served.

The way the REAL Essentials curriculum was developed over the years (starting in 1991) was by utilizing focus groups of adolescents to hear what they wanted to know, what was currently happening in their world regarding sex and relationships, how they learned and retained information, and what their goals were. The developer of the curricula spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars employing professional focus group facilitators to ensure that the adolescents resonated with the subject matter and were captivated and engaged with the activities in the program. Adolescents are surveyed about the quality of the programming, asking if they would recommend this to their friends. They also rate the competence of the facilitator delivering the programming. Additionally, they are asked to write a story of impact which is informative and touches the heart of the facilitator. What we see in the field is 90-100% participation rates and attendance when the facilitator is presenting REAL Essentials demonstrating a youth voice for relevance, high quality and best fit regarding the program content and activities for the population served.

e. Has systems and processes in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the project, using key performance measures to document the project.

CRE has systems and processes in place for program implementation, program monitoring, an outlined, a continuous program improvement plan, attendance records, time outputs (8-10 hours of programming) reach, communities served, number of participants in programming, dosage and intensity of programming utilizing key performance measures to document the project. CRE always works alongside a contracted professional researcher from a major university who assists the Program Director regarding reaching all performance measures of the project.

f. Communicate and disseminate information, successes, lessons learned, and knowledge gained.

Because CRE works alongside contracted professional researchers at the University of Denver, communicating and disseminating information, successes, lessons learned, and knowledge gained is a priority. CRE utilizes a customized data collection system which enables the professional team to easily monitor program progress and generate reports that can be used for evaluation and monitoring, continuous program improvement, lessons learned, and knowledge gained. To disseminate information CRE has a robust website with facilitator videos and resources, program updates, professional development opportunities in the form of one- on-one phone calls or conference calls. CRE has the capacity to host national webinars to ensure professional development and disseminate best practices and new information in the field. CRE has a national newsletter that is distributed periodically, a team of professionals who present at national conferences, write articles in newspapers, serve on national boards in the field of relationship and marriage education and primary prevention, are frequent subject matter experts in the field, are resident experts and guests on radio shows. CRE team members are speakers at local, state and national service clubs such as Rotary and Lions Clubs. We are speakers at Parent Information Networks (PIN) and PTA groups. The researchers we utilize publish papers and briefs about the field and include the work we do in their publications. CRE exhibits at national health conferences and trade shows. Stories of impact and success are disseminated regularly.