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## **PROJECT NARRATIVE**

Project Title: **District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program: CFDA: 84.370A**

Organization: **Serving Our Children** 1660 L Street NW, Suite 1000, Washington DC 20036  
<http://servingourchildrenc.org/>

Contact: [REDACTED]

### **I. OVERVIEW:**

This Narrative first addresses the eligibility issues cited in the Notice inviting applications for the award to administer the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). Second, pursuant to the recommendations in the General Application Instructions, it is organized to address the selection criteria specifically outlined in the Notice. Finally, it speaks to the requirements delineated in Section 3005(b) of the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act and repeated in the Notice. While the General Application Instructions for this award refer to absolute and competitive preference priorities and an invitational priority, no such priorities were evident in the Notice (other than the scholarship award priorities required by the SOAR Act and addressed in Section IV(A) of this Narrative).

### **II. INTRODUCTION & ELIGIBILITY:**

*Serving Our Children* is a nonprofit organization established in the District of Columbia in 2005, and recently reconstituted with a new Board and Executive Director. Per section 3005(b)(L) of the SOAR Act, a majority of its voting board members are residents of the District of Columbia. More specifically, at this time, all of its current board members are residents of the District of Columbia. *Serving Our Children* intends to enlist additional board members, and at all times will ensure that the clear majority of board members reside in the District. *Serving Our Children*

is willing and well suited to work with the Federal and DC governments, as well as with other relevant organizations. All current Board members and staff have a long history of working with or for the Federal or District governments, and maintain excellent relationships therein. Furthermore, both *Serving Our Children's* Board and staff have been involved with the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) since its inception.

Regarding coordination with the current OSP administrator, *Serving Our Children* has an established relationship with the current grantee's Board and staff. In the event that *Serving Our Children* is awarded the grant to administer the OSP, we are confident that *Serving our Children* and the current grantee (the DC Children & Youth Investment Trust Corporation, or the Trust) will work together as appropriate to ensure a seamless and smooth transition for families and schools participating in the OSP. Furthermore, *Serving Our Children* intends to retain the most experienced and knowledgeable Trust staff members.

### **III. SELECTION CRITERIA:**

Pursuant to the Notice and General Application Instructions, this section addresses the four selection criteria referenced in the Notice, including specific factors to be considered for each criterion as identified in the Notice. As noted above, it appears that while the General Application Instructions refer to absolute and competitive preference priorities and an invitational priority, such priorities were not evident in the Notice. Taken together, this section of the Narrative illustrates that *Serving Our Children* has an aggressive proposal to: 1) upgrade technology systems, 2) improve management and data systems, 3) recruit and select larger numbers of eligible scholarship students, 4) identify, work with and supervise schools, and 5) significantly expand parental assistance and outreach efforts so that

interested families have the knowledge and support they need to successfully participate in the program.

**CRITERION A – QUALITY OF PROJECT SERVICES:**

The District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) was established by Congress in 2004 under the DC School Choice Incentive Act. It was reauthorized in 2011 under the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results Act (SOAR Act). In authorizing the OSP, Congress determined that more educational options are needed to ensure that all families in the District of Columbia have access to a quality education. The OSP specifically offers scholarships to District of Columbia families seeking the opportunity to send their children to a participating DC private school of their choice. The program is only available to low-income students, generally defined as students from households whose income does not exceed 185 percent of the poverty line, and it gives priority to students previously attending failing or low-performing schools in the District of Columbia. In this regard, the program is very specifically targeted only to student participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, and national origin. Currently, 97 percent of participating children are African-American and Hispanic, and the average income for participating families is less than \$22,000 per year. Further, if the program is oversubscribed, scholarships will be awarded through a random selection process, thus ensuring equal access and treatment for all groups, including with respect to gender, age or disability.

The OSP is currently administered by the D.C. Children & Youth Investment Trust Corporation (the Trust). In a November 2013 report, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that this organization, like its predecessor, has failed to implement effective systems to collect and manage data, and supervise participating schools. Some program

advocates also maintain that the Trust has not built relationships with the targeted beneficiaries to the greatest extent possible. The Omnibus Fiscal Year 2015 Appropriations bill passed by Congress included report language accompanying funding for the OSP which referred to weaknesses in the current management of the OSP program identified by GAO. Congress directed the Secretary of Education to ensure that any subsequent OSP administrator address GAO's recommendations to improve program administration and oversight, and improve outreach to communities so to increase awareness of and participation in the program.

*Serving Our Children's* Management Plan fully addresses the concerns detailed in the GAO report and also responds to the specific concerns raised by Congress. The result will be that *Serving Our Children* will maximize federal taxpayer dollars by ensuring that opportunity scholarships are available to the greatest number of intended beneficiaries – low income students in the District of Columbia. As more fully explained in the Management Plan section of this narrative, *Serving Our Children* will procure significant technology upgrades so as to develop and implement a sophisticated program management system that will facilitate improved oversight, accurate data collection, and effective management of the program. One result will be the production of consistently reliable information to Congress and federal overseers. Further, as more fully described in the Management Plan, *Serving Our Children* will simplify, streamline and automate application, eligibility and scholarship award processes, thus making it easier and less intimidating for low income families to apply for scholarships. Implementation of a more sophisticated management system will also free up man hours and allow a motivated staff greater opportunity to focus on informing the community about the DC OSP, and on improving the program's quality and compliance policies.

*Serving Our Children* also has a comprehensive community outreach plan, which is detailed in this Narrative. In sum, *Serving Our Children* will upgrade technology systems and develop policies and procedures that will achieve greater compliance, more efficient management, and greater community awareness and support. These policies will ensure that program resources are available to eligible D.C. families to the greatest extent possible, ultimately achieving the goal of improving educational options and outcomes for disadvantaged children from low-income families in the District of Columbia.

**CRITERION B – QUALITY OF PROJECT PERSONNEL:**

*Serving Our Children's* Executive Director and Board Members have been intimately involved with, and committed to the effective management of the DC OSP program since its inception. Further, *Serving Our Children* has a relationship with Board and staff of the current grantee, the Trust, and anticipates offering employment to persons currently employed by the Trust who are exceptionally knowledgeable of, and dedicated to the effective administration of the OSP program. The current organizational plan presumes that forty percent of the organization's staff will be dedicated to family outreach and support. Recognizing that the program solely services low income and underrepresented students and families, *Serving Our Children* intends, at a minimum, that this staff will represent groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, and national origin. In general, *Serving Our Children* will encourage and welcome applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

Executive Director: [REDACTED] has over 25 years of experience in state, local and federal government. Her most recent post in the federal government was as Deputy Legislative Director to [REDACTED]. In that capacity, she was intimately involved with the drafting and Congressional passage of the SOAR Act which authorizes the DC OSP program.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] staff. She was also responsible for supervising and overseeing [REDACTED] legislative staff and legislative strategy. She has a B.A. from Brandeis University with a major in Political Science, and an M.P.A. from George Washington University with a major in Budget & Public Finance. Further, she has several years of experience working as a consultant to various nonprofit organizations.

Consultant: [REDACTED] is an independent consultant [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] She has nearly two decades of experience in education policy and administration, and specifically in the administration of school choice programs. [REDACTED] was the Executive

Director of the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice for [REDACTED]

[REDACTED], and administered [REDACTED] privately funded

school choice program. She also was involved in the DC OSP program as [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement.

[REDACTED] has a B.A. from Wake Forest University, with a major in Political Science, and an M.P.A from Syracuse University.







- Indiana Choice Scholarship Program
- Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship Program

**CRITERION C – ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES:** The Federal Register funding opportunity announcement for the DC OSP program states that a total of \$13.2 million will be awarded, of which \$12 million will be available for scholarships, and a total of \$1.2 million will be available for administrative expenses, parental assistance and student academic assistance. As outlined in our budget, *Serving Our Children* anticipates that the projected federal award sufficiently covers the administration of the program and scholarship funding. In addition, *Serving Our Children* has been notified that it will be the recipient of a first-year [REDACTED] private grant from a major education foundation, awarded for the sole purposes of facilitating technology upgrades and startup expenses associated with the administration of the DC OSP program by a new entity. *Serving Our Children* intends that approximately [REDACTED] private award will largely be dedicated to upgrading technology data and processing systems, as further described in the Management Plan section of this narrative. The remaining private award amount will be dedicated to startup costs and enhanced community outreach and family assistance efforts.

**CRITERION D – QUALITY OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN:** *Serving Our Children's* Management Plan includes technology upgrades to provide more accurate, efficient and effective program and data management, improved school oversight and coordination, enhanced community outreach and family assistance, a simplified and streamlined application process, and upgraded financial planning, record-keeping and transparency processes.

**i. Innovative Technology Upgrades:**

Congress created the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program ten years ago, and the program's administrators only sought minimal advancements to the technology and processes used to run

the program over the last decade. Newer programs and even large urban districts are moving away from heavy paper-processing and manual data-entering for application and program management processes. To ensure the program is run as efficiently as possible, *Serving Our Children* will implement the most current and innovative technology and processes.

Specifically, *Serving Our Children* has received a proposal, and intends to contract with [REDACTED] or a similar entity to develop and deploy [REDACTED], a school performance management and instructional improvement program which has been used by a consortium of DC Public Charter schools, among others. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The platform can be customized to serve the DC OSP. Working with [REDACTED] *Serving Our Children* will implement a [REDACTED] system that allows for simplified and improved application procedures, and enhanced data collection, verification and management. Among other things, the new system will have the capability to:

- Link to DC’s Department of Human Services, Economic Security Administration (ESA), for automatic notification of eligibility based on receipt of SNAP benefits. Many scholarship programs automate this process, which saves valuable staff time for the scholarship administrator. According to the DC Trust’s website, in 2013, “78 percent of new awardees come from households receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.” With automation of the process, far fewer staff resources are needed to confirm eligibility for SNAP recipients, or process income and residency eligibility documentation. The automated application process is easier for most parents as well.
- Link to the DCPS school enrollment system to automatically confirm prior public school enrollment for new program applicants in kindergarten and older. A link

to the DCPS system can facilitate identification of applicants attending schools in need of improvement, corrective action, or restructuring – one of the scholarship award priorities.

- Enable applicants and participants to easily upload proof of income and residency eligibility. Schools can help parents by providing computer, fax and scanner access. Documents can be uploaded at application events and at participating schools.
- Allow schools to monitor their participating families' program renewal status. Schools will be able to monitor and actively encourage families to submit required documentation in timely manner.
- Encourage parents to create or have a valid email address to create an account. Future communication with participating parents will be easier if participants can receive email or text reminders of deadlines and program responsibilities.
- If parents finish a stage of the online application, but do not complete their application, the database will email them their status. Parents will also get auto-dialer phone and text messages to remind them to complete the application and school enrollment. The Trust reports that 29% of 2011 new applicants and 38% in 2012 did not use their scholarship because they did not finish the application or enroll in a school.
- Send electronic scholarship award letters, with follow-up as necessary. Some large scholarship programs no longer mail letters to save on postage costs.
- Automate key steps, including data verification. When an applying parent enters student's information, for example, the database will check if the student has already been entered.
- Allow online data input from schools. Schools can complete school participation data collection, school confirmation forms and exit confirmation forms online. The system will ensure that scholarships will be calculated to the day for transferring students. It will allow schools to verify scholarship payment

information online, rather than printing, signing and faxing payment reports before each payment.

- The new system can create a detailed searchable online school directory similar to My School DC. The online directory will allow families to search by: school name, address proximity or “narrow the search” filters (grade, special programs, Ward).

Among other things, implementing a sophisticated, highly automated system will enable *Serving Our Children* staff to allocate more time to school oversight and parental outreach and support. *Serving Our Children* will be able to shift the program administrator’s focus from processing paperwork and entering data to actively serving DC families. The 2013 GAO Report stated that, “The weaknesses in the database’s structure also affect key activities for the Trust, such as determining the priority groups of applications for the OSP lottery.” [REDACTED] can customize the system to ensure that priority categories mandated by law are clearly recognized.

[REDACTED] estimates the system will take 12 weeks to develop with an additional 4 weeks of active programmer support as the system is implemented. They historically meet deadlines if the project specifications do not change drastically during the development stage.

**Project Estimate** [REDACTED]

**Verbally-Provided Cost Estimate**

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

**Duration**

- 12 weeks of build activities (start to finish) plus 4 weeks of hands-on support for bug fixes/enhancements/to support user buy-in = 16 weeks total

## Scope

- Requirements gathering and design
- 8 weeks of development time for configuration of existing features/new development
- Additional user experience/design development time for parent facing site
- User Acceptance Testing
- Testing of all features (end to end testing)
- Training of System Administrator and Central Users
- School user training
- Training materials
- System documentation
- Launch and post-launch support

## Items included in the current system that [REDACTED] can repurpose (configuration/customization)

- Application data entry
- Parent portal
- Sibling verification
- Data validations & duplicate student detection
- Upload docs/collect applicant eligibility info
- Email confirmations
- System documentation & training
- Reporting
- Archiving of data
- Data exports for algorithm
- Multiple levels of access

## New build

- Collect school directory information to turn into a directory page in parent-facing portal with links to additional information on each school. Scholarship invoice management.

## ii. School Oversight:

*Serving Our Children* will publish a manual clearly delineating compliance requirements for participating schools and will conduct school training webinars at least twice a year to ensure that schools understand the DC OSP database and program participation responsibilities. We also will create a simple online database training module for new school staff. Further, *Serving Our Children* will regularly review, update and distribute the manual that details the participating schools' responsibilities and the payment process.

The SOAR Act does not require a particular number of site visits, but does limit the administrator to not more than one site visit to a particular school per year. *Serving Our Children* commits to site visits to all participating schools. Our staff will place a priority on visiting schools with rapidly growing DC OSP populations and schools new to the program.

The GAO expressed concern that, “the Trust’s policies and procedures do not include a process for verifying eligibility information that schools self-report.” *Serving Our Children* will create clear site visit policies and procedures, and will seek to benefit from other models, including the Florida Department of Education’s Site Visit Procedure Manual. Site visits will verify information self-reported annually by participating schools. Areas of focus will include verification of tuition & fees, proof of certificate of occupancy, baccalaureate degrees or equivalent held by core teachers and accreditation, as required by the SOAR Act.

*Serving our Children* will send a school notification letter to schools selected for site visits and complete school site visit forms while on site. We will submit a site visit report identifying deficiencies and deadlines for proposed corrective action, if any. Staff will issue a notice of noncompliance letter with deadlines to schools missing documentation, or which are otherwise noncompliant. The notice will itemize the areas of non-compliance and required actions, and will warn the school that failure to submit the required documentation within the allotted timeframe will result in the school’s suspension or revocation from the scholarship program. *Serving Our Children* will consider continuing to hold scholarship payments if schools remain noncompliant.

Under the SOAR Act, a participating private school that has been operating for 5 years or less must submit to the administrator “proof of adequate financial resources reflecting the financial sustainability of the school and the school’s ability to be in operation through the

school year.” In addition, the SOAR Act requires the administrator to “ensure that participating schools are financially responsible.” The 2013 GAO Report indicated that financial risk factors were not considered when determining if a participating school was financially stable. *Serving Our Children* will develop policies similar to Florida’s financial stability verification model. In Florida, new private schools that want to participate in the scholarship program(s) have to show proof of financial stability by keeping an active surety bond or letter of credit in the amount of one-quarter of their scholarship funds received. *Serving Our Children* will work actively with participating private schools and private school groups to ensure that the policies and procedures appropriately align with the SOAR Act’s provisions.

**iii. Private School Coordination and Cooperation:**

*Serving Our Children* will meet regularly with private school leaders. We have been advised that many of the current participating schools believe there should be greater consultation and cooperation between the administering entity and the participating schools than currently exists. Among other things, *Serving Our Children* will work the schools to devise appropriate methods of tutoring and academic assistance pursuant to section 3007(d), which states that up to 1 percent of funds should be used for these purposes. Schools have reported that funds have not been available for these purposes. *Serving Our Children* will also work with the private schools to ensure that the DC OSP application processes and deadlines do not preclude DC OSP students from attending their schools.

*Serving Our Children*’s executive director and board members will actively recruit additional private schools to participate in the program and encourage selective private schools to accept more DC OSP students. To encourage DC private schools to actively participate, *Serving Our*

*Children* will regularly educate private schools' board members and school leaders on the simplicity of the program and reasonable participation requirements. Reportedly, the most notable reason why schools chose not to participate is the perception that participating in the program would require accepting federal funds, with the result being unnecessary and burdensome government oversight requirements. *Serving our Children* will prepare a document, subject to review by the U.S. Department of Education's [Office of Non-Public Education](#), explaining the protections the non-public schools have from certain federal government requirements.

**iv. Community Outreach/Eligible Applicant Recruitment:**

*Serving Our Children* will pursue an aggressive outreach campaign targeted to eligible families. Outreach and program education will occur year-round with increased activities during the application season. Tactics will include:

- Highly visible notification of application availability and deadlines through texting, social media, direct mail, telemarketing, and bus, billboard, internet, TV and radio ads. The campaign will acquire lists of families who meet income requirements to enable them to receive information mailers. Spanish-language materials will be created and distributed as well. Enrollment campaign data will be actively monitored and tactics adjusted accordingly.
- Creation of a call center staffed by highly-trained temporary workers during the peak application period to provide program information and direct parents to the online application.

- Active involvement of participating schools, including encouragement to the schools with fewer DC OSP students to inform the families at their schools and neighboring community about the program.
- Creation of visually compelling application information posted at community centers, Economic Security Administration service centers (5 in DC), libraries, pools, drug stores and shopping centers.
- Encouraging participating DC OSP parents to actively promote community awareness of the program. Notification of parents through emailed parent newsletters that will also list parent meetings, application event information and renewal deadlines. A parent newsletter also will be included in each packet of checks sent to schools and schools will be asked to reproduce and share with parents when they sign their check.
- Informational meetings about the program throughout the year to increase awareness. Meetings could include speakers on topics relevant to the community, snacks and children's entertainment.
- Targeted investment in Wards 7 and 8 (43% of DC OSP participants were from Wards 7 and 8 in 2011-12) and Wards 4 and 5 (35%). Wards 5, 7 and 8 have the fewest high quality educational seats and greatest need for options.
- Focused outreach in areas where the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has closed schools. *Serving Our Children's* family and community affairs manager will regularly schedule meetings and events in the affected neighborhoods to build relationships with parents and community leaders.

- Recognition of importance of bringing in young students (25% of new enrollments were PK- 1<sup>st</sup> grade in 2011-12). Target Head Start centers and preschools.
- Partnering with DC agencies and community based organizations about the program, so they can inform their communities about the program
- Partnering with supportive organizations, including DC CAPE, FOCUS, and faith-based and non-faith based entities that run schools. Create an active, positive partnership with the community outreach staff of other entities, including data sharing that adheres to appropriate privacy standards. Assist with the identification of “community ambassadors” and parent advocates who can educate DC communities about the program.
- Partnering with the DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB) to promote the program. Seek to include program information in [My School DC](#), the website for DCPS and participating DC public charter schools’ common application and common lottery.
- Visible and active participation in the annual Education Festival with DC traditional public schools and charter schools.
- Alignment of outreach strategy with My School DC events held prior to the DC Common Application deadline so the DC OSP is visible at relevant events.
- Creation of YouTube videos with family testimonials and application deadlines. Share with non-profits, post on Facebook page, etc. Ensure that DC OSP

Facebook page focuses on DC OSP application deadlines during application season to avoid confusion.

**v. Application Process:**

*Serving Our Children* will encourage families to apply online, but provide a streamlined written application for families without internet access. An online application simplifies the process for parents, as they are only asked questions pertaining to their circumstances (based on answers to previous questions). Moving towards mostly online applications will reduce the staff's application processing time.

Although the Trust shortened the DC OSP application to 12 pages (longer if applicant is applying for more than one child), it will be simplified and shortened further to avoid intimidating English as a Second Language and low-literacy parents. Scholarship programs typically require or encourage parents to apply online, but those that create a printable option use significantly shorter applications. Specifically, *Serving Our Children* will follow this model, and anticipates both the written and online application will be shortened. Participating school staff, DC OSP staff members, and seasonal call center staff will be trained to assist families with their online application.

To facilitate online applications, the application system will ensure that applications can be completed from smartphones. The system will be easily accessible at remote application outreach events. Program staff will take laptops to outreach locations so parents can apply online at the event. The online application will also be available in Spanish, and *Serving our Children* will recruit volunteers and staff fluent in other languages commonly spoken in the District to better assist eligible families. According to DC Public Schools' (DCPS) website, the

five languages other than English spoken most often are: Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, Amharic and French. Further, *Serving Our Children* will train schools so they can help parents apply online when visiting the school. Training will be provided annually in person and at least twice a year via recorded webinar.

Finally, between enrollment periods, parents interested in DC OSP scholarships will be able to submit their contact information online for notification when applications are available. While out in the community, *Serving Our Children* parent engagement staff will encourage parents to submit such information on available laptops or devices.

**vi. Application Deadlines:**

*Serving Our Children* will seek to partner with DC Public Charter Schools to align the program's application deadlines with the DC charter lottery deadlines. If DC school choice marketing and deadlines are aligned, parents will have greater awareness of all their options, including DC OSP, and are less likely to miss application deadlines. The My School DC charter application allows families to apply during a second application round if students are not placed in the first round. *Serving Our Children* will seek avenues to align and coordinate with this process to better place students seeking school choice, but not placed by the initial charter lottery. *Serving Our Children* will seek to develop a relationship with the charter schools whereby *Serving Our Children* could access the charter waiting list data so as to advise families in the underserved areas of the city about the program. According to [media reports](#), during the initial 2015 My School DC common application round, more than 8,500 students were on the charter school waiting list and an additional 7,000 students were on traditional public school waiting lists. Clearly many D.C. families are eager for alternative educational opportunities.

**vii. Family Assistance:**

*Serving Our Children* will ensure that the application and enrollment timeline provides sufficient time for families to find and enroll their students in participating private schools. If scholarship applications are processed promptly after the application deadline, families can quickly move to the school enrollment stage.

To serve families well, *Serving Our Children* will provide a detailed searchable online school directory. The online directory will allow families to search by: school name, address proximity or “narrow the search” filters (grade, special programs, Ward). The website design will ensure that parents can easily find the participating school map online.

Updated school information, printed from the program database, will be available when parents are selecting schools in the winter and spring for the following school year. Parents will be encouraged to use the online database as much as possible. Staff will bring laptops with access to the online directory *and* participating school lists in a variety of formats to application outreach events to easily and quickly respond to parents’ questions about participating schools. Training manuals for seasonal call center staff will contain the lists. Lists will be formatted: by Ward; by zip code; with maps; color-coded to indicate faith-based or not; featuring schools serving high school grades, etc. *Serving Our Children* will create a simple New Parent Orientation online training module to educate parents on program responsibilities and deadlines.

Traditionally, the DC OSP holds an annual school information fair for parents to “meet and greet” school officials. *Serving Our Children* will analyze the design and effectiveness of this event to ensure it facilitates enrollments. Parents and their transitioning students will be invited to the annual school information & application workshop for OSP students who are transitioning

into high school the following school year. Event partners typically include the Latino Student Fund, Capital Partners for Education, and participants from the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS).

*Serving Our Children* will hold the annual holiday party and the late summer program participation information & school supplies event and reinstitute the spring graduation party to build goodwill and community. Board members will donate to and attend these events and invite DC community leaders to participate.

**viii. Financial and Data Management:**

Financial planning, management, transparency, and integrity are core values of *Serving of Children*. Procedures will be implemented to ensure the effective and efficient use of funds.

The 2013 GAO report claims that the Trust did not submit its mandatory financial reports to the U.S. Department of Education on time. Our processes will include:

- An annual budgeting process that covers all programs and line items for all major categories of expenditures spread across the entire year by month, and definitive reporting deadlines to comply with federal requirements.
- A quarterly forecasting review where each program and major line item are evaluated for the prior quarter's results, and the remainder of year is evaluated to understand where variances may exist to the official budget. This process will be led by the Project Director and Manager of Finance and Operations, with guidance from the Executive Director.
- The Trust has been criticized for reporting inconsistent and confusing data. The Trust only publishes annual program statistics on the website and generates program data

responses to requests made by the Administration and congressional staff during the rest of the year. *Serving Our Children* will publish program statistics quarterly. The quarterly reports will be carefully designed to answer the most frequently asked data questions. This new administrator will reference the most recent quarterly statistics until the new quarter report is published to ensure consistent responses. *Serving Our Children* will publish annual reports with more detailed statistics at the end of each school year.

- The hiring of an independent auditor to regularly review our financial condition, and to fulfill the requirements of the Single Audit Act Amendments of 1996 and the revised OMB circular A-133.

#### **ix. Timelines and Feedback**

A critical part of our Management Plan is to implement sophisticated technology upgrades. *Serving Our Children* has received a proposal from [REDACTED] [REDACTED] system will take approximately 12 weeks to develop. If awarded the grant, *Serving Our Children* would use private funds to immediately contract to build the [REDACTED] system or a comparable system. In addition, during the initial 3 month period, *Serving Our Children* will update the school manual, establish updated school oversight and site visit policies, streamline the application process, and embark on our ambitious community outreach and parental assistance activities. *Serving Our Children* will also immediately start the process of updating financial management policies and of publishing statistical reports both quarterly and annually.

*Serving Our Children* intends to annually survey participating families to get feedback on parental satisfaction and program operations. Our staff will also specifically survey families

offered scholarships who did not register students in participating schools as to the reasons, and track their responses in the database. The Trust, for example, received 1,457 *new* student applications for the 2012-13 school year and only 258 *new* students used scholarships that year. Many eligible applicants were relegated by lottery to the evaluation's control group and, therefore, did not receive scholarships. Of the remaining families, the Trust determined that 38% of new scholarship applicants (who gave reasons to the Trust) did not enroll students in participating schools because the, "Parent did not complete renewal/application and school search." Finally, *Serving Our Children* will annually survey schools to get feedback on program operations from their perspective. In all cases, data will be collected and analyzed, and where indicated, *Serving Our Children* will adjust strategies to improve our services.

#### **IV. Requirements pursuant to SECTION 3005(b) of the SOAR ACT:**

Section 3005 of the SOAR Act states that an eligible entity seeking to administer the OSP shall submit an application pursuant to requirements specified by the Secretary of Education. The law further states that the Secretary must also require any successful application to include a detailed description of how it will address the following issues:

(A) *how the entity will address the priorities described in section 3006:*

Section 3006 of the SOAR Act asks that a successful grantee should, when awarding scholarships, give priority to 1) students from low performing schools, 2) students who have been awarded a scholarship in a preceding year but did not use their scholarship, and 3) students with a sibling already in the program. As previously noted, *Serving Our Children* intends to implement the most current and innovative technology and process. This technology will be customized to ensure that students eligible under any of the priority categories will easily be identified and given priority in the awarding of scholarships. Section 3006 further states that

resources should be targeted to students and families that lack financial resources, and that a grantee should provide families with the widest range of educational options. *Serving Our Children's* Management Plan specifically calls for targeting neighborhoods in the District of Columbia that include the lowest income students with the fewest educational options. The Management Plan also calls for significantly enhanced outreach and assistance to parents, including through neighborhood meetings, canvassing, digital marketing, mailings and peer-to-peer contact.

*(B) how the entity will ensure that if more eligible students seek admission in the program of the entity than the program can accommodate, eligible students are selected for admission through a random selection process which gives weight to the priorities described in section 3006;*

As previously noted, *Serving Our Children* will implement a state-of-the art technology system that will process incoming applications. In the event that more eligible students apply than the program can accommodate, awards will be made via a random selection process. The new technology system will have the capacity to identify priority students. *Serving Our Children* may also contract with an entity such as [REDACTED] which creates assignment algorithm software products that can randomly select or assign students.

*(C) how the entity will ensure that if more participating eligible students seek admission to a participating school than the school can accommodate, participating eligible students are selected for admission through a random selection process;*

*Serving Our Children* will require participating schools to specify, in their contracts with *Serving Our Children*, how they will accept students in a fair and unbiased manner, using a random process where necessary.

*(D) how the entity will notify parents of eligible students of the expanded choice opportunities in order to allow the parents to make informed decisions;*

As discussed in greater detail in the Management Plan, *Serving Our Children*, anticipates an aggressive outreach campaign targeted to eligible families. Outreach and program education will occur year-round with increased activities during the application season. Tactics will include: notification of application availability and deadlines through texting, social media, direct mail, telemarketing, and bus, billboard, internet, TV and radio ads; visually compelling information notices at community centers, Economic Security Administration service centers, libraries, pools, drug stores and shopping centers; notification of parents through emailed parent newsletters that will also list parent meetings, application event information and renewal deadlines. A parent newsletter also will be included in each packet of checks sent to schools and schools will be asked to reproduce and share with parents when they sign their check; informational meetings about the program throughout the year to keep up awareness; visible and active participation in the DC Education Festival with DC traditional public schools and charter schools; alignment of outreach strategy with My School DC events prior to the DC Common Application deadline so the DC OSP is visible at each location and event; creation of YouTube videos with family testimonials and application deadlines; ensuring that DC OSP Facebook page focuses on DC OSP application deadlines during application season; and the creation of a call center staffed by highly-trained temporary workers during the peak application period to provide program information and direct parents to the online application.

*(E) the activities that the entity will carry out to provide parents of eligible students with expanded choice opportunities through the awarding of scholarships under section 3007(a);*

As detailed in our Management Plan and also referenced above (IV(D)), *Serving Our Children* has an aggressive and comprehensive strategy to reach out to eligible families to make

them aware of the expanded choice opportunities offered by the DC OSP program, and to offer application assistance and services and otherwise facilitate their access to the program.

*(F) how the entity will determine the amount that will be provided to parents under section 3007(a)(2) for the payment of tuition, fees, and transportation expenses, if any;*

*Serving Our Children* will offer scholarships to parents to cover tuition, fees and transportation expenses up to the maximum scholarship amount as determined by the SOAR Act.

*Serving Our Children* will request documentation and verification of tuition, fees and transportation.

*(G) how the entity will seek out private elementary schools and secondary schools in the District of Columbia to participate in the program;*

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program currently has 51 schools participating in the program. *Serving Our Children* will continue to maintain relationships with all participating schools, and will seek to broaden school participation within the District of Columbia. To this end, *Serving Our Children* intends to actively enlist its Board and senior staff to reach out to nonparticipating private DC schools. In addition, it will enlist its Board and senior staff to encourage the more selective schools to accept larger numbers of students.

*(H) how the entity will ensure that each participating school will meet the reporting and other program requirements under this division;*

As more specifically detailed in our Management Plan, *Serving Our Children* has a comprehensive school oversight plan, including publishing a manual delineating school compliance requirements, conducting school training webinars, updating the technology and data base to more easily track schools, committing to regular site visits to inspect schools for

compliance, creating clear site visit policies and procedures, and taking meaningful actions in the case of noncompliance, including withholding scholarship payments.

*(I) how the entity will ensure that participating schools submit to site visits by the entity as determined to be necessary by the entity, except that a participating school may not be required to submit to more than 1 site visit per school year;*

*Serving Our Children* will require that schools agree to site visits, as determined to be necessary by *Serving Our Children*, as part of the terms of participation. As described in our Management Plan, *Serving Our Children* has a comprehensive oversight and school inspection proposal.

*(J) how the entity will ensure that participating schools are financially responsible and will use the funds received under section 3007 effectively;*

*Serving Our Children* will collect and review participating school audits to determine fiscal solvency. Further, we will consider policies similar to Florida's financial stability verification model whereby schools deciding to participate must show proof of financial stability by keeping an active surety bond or letter of credit in the amount of one-quarter of their scholarship funds received. *Serving our Children* will work with participating private schools to ensure that the policies and procedures align with the SOAR Act's provisions.

*(K) how the entity will address the renewal of scholarships to participating eligible students, including continued eligibility; and*

The technology updates referenced in the Management Plan will easily track the renewal status of families in the program, and can facilitate *Serving Our Children's* ability to send regular reminders to current families of the upcoming cycle, and their responsibilities with respect to renewal of scholarships. Technology updates will also enable participating schools to monitor

renewal statuses of families, and offer reminders and assistance to families with respect to renewals. Further, the new technology will be able to track current families to make sure they stay within the eligibility limits, including with respect to income and residency.

*(L) how the entity will ensure that a majority of its voting board members or governing organization are residents of the District of Columbia;*

All of the current Board Members of *Serving Our Children* are residents of the District of Columbia. In the event that new Board Members are enlisted, *Serving Our Children* commits to ensuring that the majority of board members are residents of the District of Columbia.

**Assurances:** Per the requirements of the SOAR Act, *Serving Our Children* commits to complying with all requests regarding any evaluation carried out under section 3009(a) of the SOAR Act.

## **V. SUMMARY**

*Serving Our Children* is an entity whose staff and Board have long been committed to the Opportunity Scholarship Program. We believe that all children should have the opportunity to receive a quality education, regardless of income or socioeconomic status. The DC OSP is a crucial link to ensure that low-income parents have the same opportunities as more affluent families to choose the best schools for their children, whether they are traditional public, public charter, or quality private schools. We will be singularly committed to the effective and efficient operation of the DC OSP so that low income families are served to the greatest extent possible. Our proposal represents a significant improvement to the current administration of the program

in terms of technology systems, financial and data management policies, school oversight, application processes, community outreach and family support and assistance.