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Mississippi Delta GEAR UP Project 2021-2028

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Invitational Priority 1 and 2 Learning and Social Supports as a result of COVID

The Mississippi Delta GEAR UP (MS Delta GU) Partnership plans a two-prong approach for understanding and minimizing the adverse effects on student learning caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. This approach includes 1) a robust suite of direct services by remote learning and the software to support the remote learning environment and 2) the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies within the context of the MS Delta GU Partnership, which in turn will positively impact student outcomes including academic success, postsecondary enrollment and persistence. The MS Delta GU Partnership will meet the challenges posed to educating students during a pandemic to ensure students from underserved communities get the education they need to build a better future.

The priority for programming and service delivery in response to the pandemic will be an integrated and fully virtual suite of services aimed at supporting student academic preparedness, career and college awareness, and mentoring. These services will not be dependent on face-to-face interaction and can be delivered to students who are not attending school in person. Though many schools have returned to in person learning there is much uncertainty about what this fall and next year will hold for school-based instruction.

The academic homework support and tutoring will take place virtually using 24-7 homework help and support in middle school subjects including Pre-Algebra, Algebra, and English and Language Arts. Specifically support for math and is crucial in meeting the projects goals for increased proficiency in Algebra for cohort students.

Career and college awareness activities will be offered though virtual presentations to students and their families delivered by GEAR UP staff. These presentations will highlight the opportunities available to students for career training, technical certification, and dual credit

opportunities along regional two- and four-year college programs. These virtual services are aligned with the aspiration development of the middle school students and the needs of students.

Students will also have access to online, telephone and text based comprehensive mentoring. The Txt 4 Success program, described in the narrative, is a two-way communication platform which has been re-tooled as a virtual student support services program to make sure students can set goals, share challenges, and get advice from adults during uncertain times. This program will match students with a mentor who will reach out and connect with students over the course of the school year filling the role of mentor and trusted resource for social and emotional learning. Accessing student support services is crucial during times of stress and uncertainty and especially the current environment caused by the pandemic.

The second aspect of the two-pronged strategy proposed by the MS Delta GU Partnership focuses on understanding which students experienced learning loss and in what subjects. With so much disruption in the traditional school day caused by the impacts of the pandemic, students have missed out on crucial instruction time. Add to this the persistent and historic struggles of students from low-income backgrounds, the negative effects of the pandemic can be devastating.

The MS Delta GU Partnership will address student learning loss by using historic academic performance data to gain insights on the subjects and students who need the most support. Student end of grade tests from 2019 will be compared to end of grade tests from 2021. Using supervised prediction modeling techniques, the MS Delta GU Partnership will be able to identify students whose performance has declined along with the associated subject. Math will be a primary focus of the analysis given the importance to the GU project outcomes and its significance as an indicator of future academic success. Once students and classes are identified using data interventions will be offered to students to close the achievement gap exacerbated by the pandemic. These interventions will include additional instructional support, tutoring, summer

camps and afterschool programs to address the findings and identified students and subject needs.

Invitational Priority 3 Service to Rural Areas

The Mississippi Delta GEAR UP (MS Delta GU) Partnership will provide services to 8 school districts in rural areas. The MS Delta GU target region is rural and largely micropolitan according to the National Center for Health Statistics.¹ Of the entire population of the state, only 170,249 residents or 5.7% of the population of Mississippi lives in target counties in this region that will be served by MS Delta GU.²

Analysis by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research Service (ERS) using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that gaps between urban and rural earnings by education attainment are significant. Urban employees age 25+ with a bachelor's degree earn \$10,000 more than rural residents of the same profile.³ Additionally, the impacts of low educational attainment on rural counties leads to higher rates of poverty, child poverty, unemployment, and population loss than urban counties. Both a contributing factor and a consequence of this low educational attainment, the USDA ERS analysis shows that the MS Delta counties has one of the most persistently high poverty rates in the country.⁴ In *Why Rural Matters 2018-2019: The Time is Now*, researchers claim **based on these extreme economic indicators, rural students in the MS Delta should be given the highest priority of rural students anywhere in the U. S.**⁵

¹ CDC. (2014). 2013NCHSUrban–RuralClassificationSchemeForCounties. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/series/sr_02/sr02_166.pdf

² US Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey. Data.Census.Gov. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=american%20community%20survey&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S0101>

³ USDA. (2017). Rural Education at a Glance. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib-171.pdf?v=3591.1>

⁴ USDA. (2017). Rural Education at a Glance. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib-171.pdf?v=3591.1>

⁵ Rural School and Community Trust. (2019). *Why Rural Matters 2018–2019: The Time is Now*. <http://www.ruraledu.org/WhyRuralMatters.pdf>

The MS Delta GU Partnership will provide services to school districts in rural areas, as defined by the National Center for Education Statistics.⁶ In addition to providing direct services to students, the MS Delta GU Partnership will provide services aimed at increasing the college going culture in rural schools and will include evaluation of a research question aimed to identify unique needs of rural students and their families.

The state’s rural students are at or below the national median on all five college-readiness indicators—a dire situation that needs urgent attention at the state and community levels. Rural schools in Mississippi have low graduation rates and few students entering college with credit from AP or dual enrollment courses.⁷ Economic conditions are grave in the state’s rural areas, with more than one in four school-aged children living in poverty and instructional spending for each rural student nearly \$2,000 less than the national average.

Table 1: Target Counties Rural NCES Classification

County	Locale Name	Locale Number
Bolivar	Rural: Distant	42
Humphreys	Town: Remote	33
Laflore	Town: Remote	33
Washington	Rural: Fringe	41
Yazoo	Town: Distant	32

A contributing factor for lower college attainment rates is described by the geographic distance the target counties have from postsecondary institutions. Specifically, the entire MS Delta GU target region has only four institutions of higher education that are degree granting with a total of 13 satellite campuses (4-year: Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University; 2-year: East Mississippi Community College, Mississippi Delta Community College).⁷ Within the MS Delta GU target region, the counties with the highest poverty rates, lowest academic readiness rates, and lowest college educational attainment rates (Humphreys

⁶ School Local Definitions. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved From: <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp>

⁷ Adult Attainment. (2019). American Progress. https://interactives.americanprogress.org/maps/2018/12/Adult+Attainment+Report/index.html?_ga=2.135798641.1318648658.1616513259-1291750155.1611756669

and Yazoo counties) do not have one single institution of higher education and are over 30-45 miles away from one (nationally, the median distance a community college student travels is eight miles).⁸ Researchers in *Education Deserts: The Continued Significance of “Place” in the Twenty-First Century* (2016), articulate that these counties are “education deserts” that lack at least one postsecondary option. The impact of not having geographical access to a postsecondary institution is profound. Researchers have found over decades that there is a “spillover effect” in that just having a postsecondary option nearby is associated with higher levels of postsecondary enrollment and that the likelihood of enrolling in college reduces as distance rises.**Error!**

Bookmark not defined. As a result of strong community ties, researchers have found that students of color and rural students are more likely to go to college closer to home--yet, in the MS Delta there are little to no college options close to home.⁹

Students and families in the high-poverty rural MS Delta GU target region have a vastly different social or cultural capital, or shared knowledge and experiences, than that of middle- and upper-class families who more typically access higher education from generation to generation. Applying the framework for social capital theory, it is social ties across social networks (such as schools and the community) that form the cornerstone of sharing institutional knowledge and norms.¹⁰ Yet, many rural students do not benefit from learning about college-going knowledge passed on in their social networks. In addition to lower college aspirations, rural students are more likely to live in areas with no postsecondary institution; have little access to college information; and have parents who did not attend college.¹¹ Unlike students in more populated

⁸ Hillman, N., & Weichman, T. (2016). Education Deserts: The continued significance of. Place” in the Twenty-First Century”, American Council on Education & Center for Policy Research and Strategy.

⁹ Hillman, N., & Weichman, T. (2016).

¹⁰ Lin, N. (2001). Social capital: A theory of social structure and action. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹¹ Wells, R. S., Manly, C. A., Kommers, S., & Kimball, E. (2019). Narrowed gaps and persistent challenges: Examining rural-nonrural disparities in postsecondary outcomes over time. *American Journal of Education*, 126(1), 1-31. s

urban and suburban areas, rural students must often face the dilemma of choosing between going to college (leaving their families) or staying in their communities.”¹² Residents of rural areas do not always have the full understanding of and resources to prepare academically, socially, and financially for college at an early age.¹³

Given this context, many first-generation students living in rural Mississippi have no access to guidance or student support services. John Gomperts, the CEO of America’s Promise Alliance, noted that for students whose parents did not go to college, the school counselor operates not just as an advisor but as a champion, advocate, guide, and even as an accountability officer. School counselors’ influence is important in supporting students’ college predispositions and choice of college types, providing information on financial aid, increasing students’ social capital, and broadening college access.¹⁴ Through comprehensive mentoring, outreach and supportive services, the MS Delta GU Partnership will expand the reach of the high school counselor by providing advising, college match counseling, college visits, SAT/ACT test registration, college application submission, and FAFSA completion workshops.

¹² Beasley, S. Holly, N. (2013). To improve completion, remember the countryside. Retrieved from. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/To-Improve-Completion/139183>

¹³ McDonough, P. M., Gildersleeve, R. E., & Jarsky, K. M. (2010). The golden cage of rural college access: How higher education can respond to the rural life. *Rural education for the twenty-first century: Identity, place, and community in a globalizing world*, 191-209.

¹⁴ Deslonde, V., & Becerra, M. (2018). The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM): Exploring School Counselors' Acceptance and Use of Naviance. *Professional Counselor*, 8(4), 369-382.

Competitive Priority Preference 1 Work-based Learning Aligned with In-Demand Jobs

The MS Delta workforce needs more college graduates. The staggeringly low rates of college attainment in the MS Delta limit the types of job opportunities that are present and emerging in the region and beyond. Nationally, the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce predicts that by 2027, 70% of all jobs will require a postsecondary degree or credential.¹⁵ Currently, in Mississippi, 61% of jobs require some postsecondary education and 39% of these jobs require an associate’s degree or a postsecondary vocational certificate.¹⁶ Yet, the current postsecondary attainment levels are significantly lower with only 25% of adults in the MS Delta with a community college degree or more (see Table 1.2). Meeting these workforce needs will be significantly difficult given the declining number of people overall in the workforce in the MS Delta region. Analysis in the state of Mississippi’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plan¹⁷ and Delta Sector Strategy Plan¹⁸ indicates that the Delta region from 2007-2016 has experienced a loss of 16,478 jobs or 15.2% of its’ workforce. In contrast, the state of Mississippi has only lost 0.7% of its’ workforce in the same period. As a result, there is significant need to invest in career and college readiness for youth in the MS Delta GU target schools.

Workforce skill gaps. The Mississippi Development Authority’s (MDA) projected job growth in the Delta region is manufacturing, health care, agribusiness, and information technology. A vast majority of job openings across the state require “middle skills¹⁹” which are

¹⁵ Resolution Adopting a Postsecondary Goal in Mississippi: Education Achievement Council. Retrieved From: http://www.mississippi.edu/eac/downloads/eac_attainment_goal_resolution_adopted_10-22-2020%5b52%5d.pdf

¹⁶ Mississippi’s Talent Pipeline – Skill UP Mississippi. (2019). Skill UP Mississippi. <https://skillupmississippi.com/employers/mississippis-talent-pipeline/>

¹⁷ Mississippi State Workforce Investment Board. (2020). Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act. <https://swib.ms.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/WIOA-2020-Combined-State-Plan.pdf>

¹⁸ South Delta Planning and Development. (2017). Sector Strategy Plan. <http://sdpdd.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Delta-Sector-Strategy-Plan.pdf>


¹⁹ Mississippi Department of Employment Security, 2021, O*NET OnLine, 2021

generally obtained through postsecondary education in community college. To help attract employers in these areas, the Mississippi university system notes a 31% increase in STEM graduates between 2017 and 2020. Yet, national trends indicate that Black / African American students are underrepresented in these STEM occupations that are the fastest growing and highest paying.²⁰

WORK Model. The MS Delta GU Partnership will provide education and student supportive services that align with in-demand career opportunities and employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency. The MS Delta GU Partnership addresses the competitive preference priority through aligned GEAR UP student services across multiple years with an innovative WORK guided approach to services over seven years: **W**hat are my interests, **O**ccupational Opportunities, **R**esources and Required Skills, **K**nowledge and Coaching (WORK).

Figure 1: WORK: A Model for Education and In-Demand Career Alignment

A Model for Education and In-Demand Career Alignment				
	What are my Interests?	What Occupational Opportunities Relate to my Interests?	What Resources and Skills are Required to Pursue those Opportunities?	Where can I Receive Knowledge and Coaching to Develop the Required Skills?
Services	Interest Inventory Virtual Job Shadowing College Tours	Financial Awareness Career and College Planning In Demand Occupations	Academic Advising Job Fairs Guest Speakers College and Industry Mentoring	Internships Job Shadowing Apprenticeships Supervisor Performance Review
Grades	6-8	9	10	11-12



What are my interests? MS Delta GU Partnership 6th-8th grade students in years 1 and 2 of the project will be provided opportunities to explore a variety of different careers and

²⁰ Carnevale, A. P., Fasules, M. L., Porter, A., & Landis-Santos, J. (2016). African Americans: College majors and earnings.

professions. These services will include interest inventory, virtual job shadowing and college tours to local 2-year and 4-year colleges, and financial literacy topics on the costs and benefits of college completion. This phase of the WORK implementation will help students connect their career interest for students while connecting the required levels of education for those areas of interest.

Occupational opportunities: This phase identifies in-demand industry sectors and occupations as defined in section 3(23) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and make students aware of these opportunities.²¹ The Mississippi Department of Employment Security has published employment projections (Table 1) that will be used to inform students of careers in high demand.²²

Occupations will be discussed with students that prioritize jobs that, at a minimum, pay workers an annual salary above the threshold for free and reduced lunch for a family of four. In addition, MS Delta GU Partnership has identified the top occupations where talent is brought in from other countries due to a lack of available workforce in the state. Table 2 illustrates the top 10 H-1B occupations and their associated median salaries for 2019.²³ These occupations along with those identified by the Mississippi Employment Security will be presented to students and used to engage in further conversations with students about the skills, knowledge and education necessary for these occupations.

²¹ U.S Department of Labor, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014. Retrieved From: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/wioa/about>

²² Employment Projections 2018-2028. North Carolina Department of Commerce. Retrieved From: <https://www.nccommerce.com/data-tools-reports/labor-market-data-tools/employment-projections#occupational-projections>

²³ H1B Visa & Employment Green Card(PERM) Reports | MyVisaJobs.com. (2020). Myvisajobs. <https://www.myvisajobs.com/Reports/>

Table 1: Top 10 In-Demand H-1B Visa Occupations in Mississippi

Occupation	2019 Mean Annual Wage
Software Developers	\$115,152
Health Specialties Teachers	\$174,937
Physicians and Surgeon	\$225,275
Computer Systems Analysts	\$87,514
Medical Scientists	\$89,557
Computer Occupations	\$100,674
Mechanical Engineers	\$92,753
Electrical Engineers	\$102,013
Secondary School Teacher	\$57,485
Industrial Engineer	\$97,452

Resources and required skills: The third phase of the WORK model will provide students additional resources and address required skills and coursework to align with career interests and in demand occupations. This phase takes place during 9th and 10th grade at a time when students future goals need to align with the high school classes they enroll and complete. Student services include job shadowing, career fairs, industry guest speakers and comprehensive mentoring.

Table 1: Top 10 High-Demand Occupations in Mississippi

Occupation	Required Education Level
General and Operations Managers	Bachelor’s Degree
Heavy/Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	High School Diploma
Registered Nurses	Bachelor’s Degree
Internists, General	Doctoral or Professional
Family and General Practitioners	Doctoral or Professional
Nurse Anesthetists	Doctoral or Professional
Elementary School Teachers	Bachelor’s Degree
First Line Supervisors	Associate’s Degree
Dentist, General	Doctoral or Professional
Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary	Doctoral or Professional

Knowledge and Coaching: The last phase of WORK is the most experiential of all phases in that it provides students during 11th and 12th grade opportunities for internships, job shadowing and apprenticeships. Students who participate in these opportunities will have demonstrated an intended career interest, aligned with academic coursework and articulate a plan for after high school graduation. Internships and work-based apprenticeships will leverage the alumni network and partnerships of the higher education partners (Delta State University and MS Delta Community College) of the MS Delta GU Partnership to provide exemplary experiences for students in sectors identified as in-demand. Future employment projections for Mississippi during the duration of the project will be used to update the occupation list that receives priority for internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job experiences for students. The MS Delta GU Partnership's WORK model provides students the necessary scaffolding and service progression that will align students with in-demand occupations.

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - Promising Evidence

The Mississippi Delta GEAR UP (MS Delta GU) Partnership design includes a framework of college readiness services, academic supports, and career readiness based in rigorous research and evaluation bolstered by project components that have been studied and produced **moderate evidence** as key parts of the intervention. The **logic model** in **Table 2.4 (p. 22)** is an evaluative illustration of the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes of the MS Delta GU Partnership to measure effectiveness and includes a pair of project components, Dual Enrollment and Summer Counseling, that have shown to have produced moderate evidence for improving relevant outcomes of college enrollment, persistence, and completion.

The MS Delta GU Partnership project plan incorporates **dual enrollment** opportunities for students as an intervention project component that has shown *positive effects* on postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and graduation.²⁴ Junior and senior students will have expanded opportunities to participate in courses in high school that also earn college credit. The dual enrollment intervention is informed by research from a What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), review that found *moderate evidence* demonstrating that dual enrollment can improve the *relevant outcome of postsecondary enrollment and completion* (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018). In the study, students who completed a dual-enrollment course in their junior or senior year were found to have higher college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates. Building on these findings the MS Delta GU will provide dual enrollment opportunities to students in their junior and senior year.

²⁴ Giani, M., Alexander, C., & Reyes, P. (2014). Exploring variation in the impact of dual-credit coursework on postsecondary outcomes: A quasi-experimental analysis of Texas students. *The High School Journal*, 200-218.

The study, cited in full below, was reviewed by the WWC and found to have *moderate evidence*, **thus meets the evidence requirement**, and will be used as part of the MS Delta GU theory of action in supporting students in their educational journey:

Giani, M., Alexander, C., & Reyes, P. (2014). Exploring variation in the impact of dual-credit coursework on postsecondary outcomes: A quasi-experimental analysis of Texas students. *The High School Journal*, 200-218.

A second component of the MS Delta GU project is *summer counseling*, as an intervention to provide services to students during the summer between high school graduation and college enrollment. This counseling will be delivered by college counselors via text messaging campaigns, email, phone, in-person meetings, instant messaging, and/or social media. The services will provide students with information about college enrollment and assistance in overcoming unanticipated financial, informational, and socioemotional barriers.

Summer counseling research reported, and WWC confirmed positive and statistically significant difference between the intervention and comparison group for college enrollment fall following high school graduation.²⁵ The study was found to have *promising evidence* demonstrating that summer counseling can improve the **relevant outcome** of *postsecondary enrollment* (What Works Clearinghouse, 2018).

In the study, students were provided summer counseling services aimed at reviewing key enrollment deadlines, and financial aid counseling. Counselors followed up with students throughout the course of the summer leading up to fall enrollment to work through identified list of tasks that needed to be accomplished. Participating students were found to have higher college enrollment rates the fall following high school graduation. Building on these findings the MS

²⁵ What Works Clearinghouse, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. (2018, March). *Transition to College intervention report: Summer Counseling*. Retrieved from: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/InterventionReports/wwc_summer_counseling_032718.pdf

Delta GU Partnership will provide financial aid counseling, and individual advising during the summer following student's graduation year aimed at improving a key project outcome of postsecondary enrollment.

The study, cited in full below, was reviewed by the WWC and found to have *strong evidence, thus meets the evidence requirement*, and will be used as part of the MS Delta GU theory of action in supporting students in their educational journey:

Castleman, B. L., Page, L. C., & Schooley, K. (2014). The forgotten summer: Does the offer of college counseling after high school mitigate summer melt among college-intending, low-income high school graduates?

I. Magnitude of Need

The beauty of the Mississippi Delta --its people and culture-- is rich with fertile lands, the birthplace of the blues, prolific writers, and generations of a closely knit community. At the same time, there is significant need for educational and economic investment to rectify centuries of neglect and oppression because of slavery, institutional racism, and implicit bias. Sixty-nine percent of people who live in the rural Mississippi Delta GEAR UP (MS Delta GU) target counties (Bolivar, Leflore, Humphreys, Washington, and Yazoo) are Black/African American compared to 38% of the statewide population (see Table 1.1 on Page 3).¹ An investment in education is an opportunity to build the wealth of Black/African Americans and all residents in the MS Delta by tapping into their spirit of optimism which has sustained the community for generations, even in the face of poverty and injustice. As expressed in MDC's *State of the South* (2019), "The South needs mechanisms that enable marginalized voices to join in shaping our common future; a new social contract for investing in future generations."² The MS Delta GU Partnership will serve as this mechanism.

Impact of economic disparities. Since 2010, the MS Delta GU target counties have experienced a 10% population decline.³ The Delta is the only area in Mississippi that has experienced significant population decline in the past ten years.⁴ With such a small and declining population, the need to invest significantly and urgently in future generations in the MS Delta is pressing. Many statewide economic indicators reflect significantly higher needs in the MS Delta compared to the state of Mississippi averages, especially for the Delta region's Black/African American residents.⁵ Even prior to widespread unemployment because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the job market, unemployment rates for Black/African American residents of the Delta were above the state and national averages and at three times higher than the rate for whites. As referenced in Table 1.1, Census data from 2019 reflects that Black/African

American residents of the MS Delta GU target region make up 87% of the people living below the poverty line yet are 69% of the population. In this MS Delta GU target region, almost 50% of children are living below the poverty line,⁶ the median household income is about \$29,000 or around the poverty line for a family of four.⁷ **Nearly 100% of students in the MS Delta GU target schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch rates** (see Table 1.8 on page 9).⁸

Researchers in *The Business Case for Racial Equity in Mississippi* (2018) estimate that **closing these economic disparity gaps along race in Mississippi alone would generate an additional \$10 billion in earnings.**⁹

Table 1.1: Demographics: Magnitude of Need by MS Delta Target Region and County

Geographic Area	Population Black/AA	People Below the Poverty Line who are Black/AA	Children Below te Poverty Line	Median Household Income	Education Attainment HS graduate or less (age 18-24)	Education Attainment Assoc. Degree and more (adults 25+)
MS	37.7%	58.4%	34.4%	\$45,081	44.3%	31.8%
Target Region	69.4%	87.4%	49.1%	\$29,876	49.3%	24.6%
Bolivar	64.2%	80.1%	48.5%	\$29,854	34.5%	31.9%
Humphreys	76.0%	90.7%	55.8%	\$28,962	59.2%	18.6%
Leflore	74.2%	92.8%	51.2%	\$26,735	38.5%	23.3%
Washington	72.2%	89.8%	49.9%	\$29,705	59.1%	25.7%
Yazoo	59.6%	79.5%	46.8%	\$33,279	62.9%	20.0%

Low rates of education attainment. Rural schools in Mississippi spend \$2,000 per year less than the national average on instructional spending on each student, largely due to the region’s extreme poverty and low tax base. Low education spending matched with high rates of children living in poverty and low academic readiness rates (see Table 1.5 on page 6) leads to lower rates of educational attainment in the community.¹⁰ As a result, rural students in Mississippi rank the second lowest in the U.S. for rural students in educational attainment.¹¹ As noted in Table 1.2, college education attainment rates in the MS Delta GU target region shows the need to increase high school graduation and college attainment rates for all residents in the

Delta target region. Overall, in the MS Delta 18% of the population has less than 9th grade education¹² and in the MS Delta GU target counties nearly 50% of 18-24 year old residents have a high school degree or less. Only 25% residents aged 25 and older have an associate degree or more compared to 32% average for the state of Mississippi¹³ and about 40% nationally.¹⁴ Researchers project that 90% of new jobs in growing industries with high wages will require some form of postsecondary education. Yet postsecondary institutions express concerns that the K-12 education system is not adequately preparing students for this type of career success.¹⁵

Disparities by race in educational attainment. The need to address disparities in college attainment rates in the MS Delta GU target region is especially significant for Black/African Americans, Latinx, and Native

residents, see Table 1.2. Analysis by Campbell in *Those Left Behind: Gaps in College Attainment by Race and Geography* (2019), the gaps in college attainment rates between white and Black/African American, Latinx, and Native residents in each of the MS Delta target region counties ranges from 8

Table 1.2: College Attainment Disparities by MS Delta Target County

Associate's degree or higher for adults 25+		
Geographic Area (by county)	Total	Black/AA, Latinx, Native
Bolivar	30%	14%
Humphreys	18%	11%
Leflore	22%	14%
Washington	26%	15%
Yazoo	22%	11%

to 23 percentage points with the highest gaps in the county with the highest college attainment rate, Bolivar County.¹⁶ **Only 11-15% of residents of color age 25 or older in MS Delta GU target counties have an associate degree or higher.** Error! Bookmark not defined. As noted in MDC's *State of the South* (2019), even more alarming is that the gap between white and Black/African American residents with a college degrees in the south was larger in 2016 than it was in 1970.¹⁷

1.2 The extent to which specific gaps or weaknesses in services, infrastructure, or opportunities have been identified and will be addressed by the proposed project, including the nature and magnitude of those gaps or weaknesses.

Across the rural MS Delta GU target region where 69% of residents are Black/African America there are a series of significant and compounding gaps in infrastructure that result in cycles of generational poverty, lack of economic investment, and the impact this has had on children, the education system, and the economy. As articulated in *Improving college access in the United States: Barriers and policy responses* by Paige and Scott-Clayton (2016), these gaps are categorized by academic, informational/behavioral, and financial constraints.¹⁸ Narrowing in on the rural MS Delta GU target region, these constraints/gaps are profound and will be addressed by the comprehensive suite of MS Delta GU services anchored in college and career readiness research. The following section explains the connection between research-based barriers, the magnitude of the needs of the region, and the MS Delta GU services designed to meet those needs to achieve the goal of increasing the number of students who graduate high school and enroll in a postsecondary education.

Academic Gap: Students in MS Delta GU target schools are not graduating high school academically ready for college or career.

Low academic performance rates and achievement gap. One reason why college education attainment rates are lower in the MS Delta GU target region is a result of students' academic readiness gaps as early as elementary grades and growing into secondary. ACT's 2010 *Mind the Gaps: How College Readiness Narrows Achievement Gaps in College Success* provides evidence that meeting or surpassing college readiness benchmarks leads to increased first-year college enrollment, retention, grades, GPA, and decreases the need for remedial coursework in college.¹⁹ Tables 1.3 and 1.4 provide data on the level of academic readiness for students in the NAEP tests in 4th and 8th grade reading and math, including the achievement gaps between white

Table 1.3: NAEP Proficiency by Race Data in the Target Region²⁰

Geographic Area	4 th Reading		4 th Math		8 th Reading		8 th Math	
	White	Black/AA	White	Black/AA	White	Black/AA	White	Black/AA
Target Region	43%	19%	55%	22%	37%	12%	38%	10%

and Black/African American students. With a nearly 20-28 percentage point gap between racial groups and only about one in ten Black/African American 8th grade students proficient in math and reading--there are significant needs in the MS Delta GU target region to significantly turnaround these academic readiness gaps so that students are prepared to succeed across the educational continuum. As noted in Table 1.4, trends for these rates follow along economic lines with economically disadvantaged (ED) students lagging about 30 percentage points compared to their higher income peers who are not-economically disadvantaged.

Table 1.4: NAEP Proficiency by Economically Disadvantaged (ED) Status for Target²⁰

Geographic Area	4 th Reading		4 th Math		8 th Reading		8 th Math	
	Non-ED	ED	Non-ED	ED	Non-ED	ED	Non-ED	ED
Target Region	54%	26%	67%	31%	46%	17%	45%	19%

Low college and career readiness rates. The lack of academic preparation for the rigor of college continues into secondary grades, see Table 1.5. The MS Delta target region has overall low rates--especially compared to the state of Mississippi averages--of Math and English proficiency in high school, participation in advanced coursework, college readiness,²¹ HS graduation, and high rates of students needing remediation in college for English or math. With as few as about 5% of high school graduates in Leland School District in Washington County meeting the college readiness benchmarks, a vast majority of students in this target school district do not have the minimum admissions requirements to enroll in the 4-year university in Mississippi.²²

Table 1.5: Secondary Academic Data: Magnitude of Need by MS Delta Target Region County²³

		English Proficiency	Math Proficiency	Advanced Course Participation	College & Career Readiness	Graduation Rate	Postsecondary Remediation English or Math
Mississippi		41.8%	47.0%	48.2%	37.4%	84.0%	42.0%
MS Delta GU Region		23.2%	26.7%	44.7%	14.6%	79.6%	45.5%
Boliver	N. Bolivar	20.8%	19.2%	30.2%	7.3%	80.0%	46.4%
	Cleveland	29.2%	28.7%	32.2%	32.4%	85.9%	44.9%
Humphreys/ Yazoo	Achievement	10.5%	11.9%	36.0%	15.1%	70.3%	43.7%
Leflore	Greenwood	23.3%	38.5%	55.8%	20.7%	79.9%	27.0%
Washington	Greenville	23.4%	26.2%	54.8%	14.7%	70.8%	55.5%
	Hollandale	21.3%	26.8%	79.4%	10.9%	88.0%	39.4%
	Leland	25.8%	22.3%	57.1%	4.7%	85.5%	60.0%
	Western Line	38.0%	42.0%	39.3%	22.1%	81.5%	54.4%

Table 1.6 illustrates the services to address the identified gaps in student academic performance.

Table 1.6: Addressing the Academic Gap with MS Delta GU Services

GPRA 1 Outcome: Increase the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education of participating students	
<p>Associated needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low academic performance • Achievement Gap • Lack of rigorous courses • Low rates of college and career readiness 	<p>GU Services appropriate to needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring, increased AP offerings • Academic advising, Tutoring; PD • Increase STEM and AP/Dual Enrollment courses • Employability skills curriculum • Summer programs, HS transition

Informational/Behavioral Gap: Students, families, and educators in MS Delta GU target schools lack needed support navigating the complex steps to accessing college, financial aid, and career pathways.

Lower rates of college aspirations and expectations. Related to college access, research shows rural students have lower college aspirations and are less likely to attend college than their urban counterparts.²⁴ These lower aspirations can stem from beliefs and actions at the

school level. In *A Framework for Reducing the College Success Gap and Promoting Success for All*, Perna & Thomas (2006) find that high schools can “facilitate or impede” students’ college knowledge and resources towards college access.²⁵ Yet, research shows that schools and networks that have expectations about college-going are more likely to have graduating seniors enroll in college.²⁶

Limited college-going culture. Students in the MS Delta GU target schools do not have access to the social capital and supports they need to navigate the college-going processes. The impact of low education and college attainment rates on the rural MS Delta GU target region, especially for residents of color, goes beyond economic disparities. First, these rates limit the ability to build social capital and gain knowledge about going to college from family and members of the community.²⁷ Second, lower college attainment rates often limit the number of jobs in the community that require postsecondary training since lower attainment rates serves as a barrier to attracting potential employers to the region. Both of which perpetuates the cycle that low college attainment rates are both the cause and consequence of poverty²⁸ and racism²⁹ in the MS Delta. The result in the MS Delta GU target region is the same as across the U.S.--college enrollment and graduation rates among low-income students lags their more affluent peers.³⁰

Not enough school counselors to help. There is a declining trend in the student-to-counselor ratio in Mississippi with a -10 percent change between 2005-2015³¹. In 2018, the ratio for Mississippi was 446:1³², and the target region at about 458:1,³³ nearly twice the American School Counselor Association recommended 250:1. Simply put, there are not enough school counselor to help the hundreds of students on their case load, especially if these students have specialized needs. Counselors have a host of needs they are responding to due to the significant number of children living in poverty and the impact this has especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if there were enough school counselors to address all students’ needs, including

related to college access, research shows that students need multiple and intersecting streams of information from adults in the school building and beyond.³⁴ Table 1.7 illustrates the services to address the identified gaps in information.

Table 1.7: Addressing the Informational/Behavioral Gap with MS Delta GU Services

GPRA 2 Outcome: Increase the rate of high school graduation and participation in postsecondary education of participating students	
<p>Associated needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low college attainment rates • Limited college-going culture • Not enough school counselors to help 	<p>GU services appropriate to needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Going Culture targeted professional development (with a focus on college and career readiness) • College Coaches focused on college and career readiness and pathways matching counseling/advising to students and families • Mentoring with GU Advisory Team

Financial Gap: Students in MS Delta GU target schools are not accessing much needed financial aid to pay for college.

Not meeting academic requirements for financial aid. The state of Mississippi’s HELP (Higher Education Legislative Plan for Needy Students) Grant covers full college tuition for eligible students for up to four years. However, to be eligible for this grant, Mississippi high school graduates must complete the FAFSA by March 31 of senior year, have a 2.5 minimum GPA, 20 minimum ACT score, complete the HELP Grant curriculum, and meet income requirements.³⁵ Table 1.8 shows that for the MS Delta GU target schools, while **nearly 100% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch rates** and therefore meet the income requirements,³⁶ these schools are not adequately graduating students nor preparing them for the academic requirement based on average ACT composite scores. Specifically, the ACT scores for fall/spring 2020 (most recent data available) in MS Delta GU target schools is far lower than this academic requirement and the state’s ACT average composite at 17.7, see Table 1.8. As a result, very low numbers of students in these MS Delta GU target schools are even eligible for the HELP Grant.

Table 1.8: MS HELP Grant Requirements and Rates by MS Delta GU Target School³⁷

MS Delta GU Target High School Name	Free and Reduced Lunch %	Grad Rate 2020	Average ACT Class of 2020 Juniors ³⁸	# HELP eligible students 2018	# HELP eligible students 2019	# HELP eligible students 2020
Mississippi	75%	87.7%	17.7	1630	2099	1924
Amanda Elzy High	100%	81.6%	15.3	0	2	0
Cleveland Central High	100%	81.3%	16.3	8	2	2
Greenville High	100%	73.2%	15	7	6	8
Greenwood High	100%	81.6%	15.7	7	14	7
Humphreys Co. High	100%	77.6%	14.4	2	1	2
Leflore County High	100%	84.7%	16.4	0	1	1
Leland High	100%	87.2%	16.4	2	1	1
Northside High	100%	86.1%	14.9	1	0	0
O'Bannon High	99%	81.8%	14.8	17	20	1
Riverside High	99%	87.2%	17.5	7	9	6
Simmons High	100%	90.3%	16	2	0	5
Yazoo City High	100%	70.7%	14.3	0	2	3

Low FAFSA completion rates. Research from Mississippi State University's Social Science Research Center and Get2college found that students who completed the FAFSA had 4.43 times greater odds of enrolling in college than those who did not complete a FAFSA.³⁹ Yet, students in the MS Delta GU target schools are completing the FAFSA at much lower rates than their state and national peers. As of May 7, 2021, only 32.8% of students in these target schools completed the FAFSA compared to 49.1% national rate and 51.9% state rate in Mississippi. Completing the FAFSA is a requirement for eligibility for MS state-based financial aid, and federal student aid such as the PELL grant for students with exceptional financial need.

High student loan debt. When MS students and families in low-income households do not have the support they need to complete the FAFSA (at all or within the 3/31 deadline for state aid), they are likely leaving millions of dollars of PELL grant money left on the table. Students do not enroll in postsecondary education because they do not have the resources to pay for it and/or are not aware of the complex set of steps needed to complete the FAFSA to get access to these resources. Another result is students take on student loan debt that must be repaid. Researchers found that first-generation students are more likely to take out larger loans than their

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peers.⁴⁰ Analysis by the Institute for College Access and Success of the class of 2019 (most recent data available) that Mississippi has an average student loan debt of \$31,651 and the percentage of residents with debt at 55% -- one of the highest rates in the country.⁴¹

Table 1.10 illustrates the services to address the identified gaps in information and financial aid.

Table 1.10: Addressing the Financial Gap with MS Delta GU Services

GPRA 3 Outcome: Increase educational expectations for participating students and increase student and family knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.	
<p>Associated needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low rates of low-income students eligible for and applying for the HELP grant • Low FAFSA completion rates • High student loan debt 	<p>GU services appropriate to needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Coaches focused on mentoring and financial aid and FAFSA completion counseling/advising to students and families • Financial aid workshops and professional development • Career readiness counseling/advising

Investing in education through GU services will lead to economic prosperity.

Research shows that investing in education and preparing the workforce, especially in low-income communities, will grow local economies both by boosting residents’ wages and by attracting viable employment opportunities.^{42,43} Specifically, providing GU services aimed to improve academic outcomes for children in the MS Delta GU target region will improve their life outcomes, boost the economy,^{44,45} and translate into economic payoff.⁴⁶ Across the state of Mississippi, the median household income for a high school graduate is \$25,954 (around the federal poverty line) compared to a college graduate at \$40,952.⁴⁷ Higher levels of postsecondary attainment for all residents of the Delta, especially Black/African Americans, will increase earning power translating into higher tax base⁴⁷ given that four-year college graduates pay 82% more in taxes than high school graduates.⁴⁸ Additionally, having a college degree reduces an individual’s reliance on social services by four times compared to a high school graduate (e.g., Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program SNAP).⁴⁸

Business case for racial equity. By investing in youth and the educational to career pipeline with a focus on closing the racial academic readiness and college attainment gaps, the MS Delta GU Partnership is positioned to meet the state and region’s goals for economic development and growth. In *The Business Case for Racial Equity in Mississippi* (2018), researchers claim, “closing the educational achievement gap can be one of the most beneficial strategies for producing economic, human, and social gains in Mississippi.” It is critical to address the profound need in the MS Delta region that disproportionately impacts Black/African American children and families. The MS Delta GU partnership will address these needs by investing in education with a focus on evidence-based practices that dramatically increase college and career readiness and success to boost job growth and economic prosperity.

II. Quality of Project Design

2.1 The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

MS Delta GU Cohort Approach. The MS Delta GU Partnership design will include incorporating services to 8 school districts using a 2-grade cohort model, and the project will serve 2729 students in grant years 1-6 with a reduced number of students served in year 7 reflecting an estimate of non-college going students.

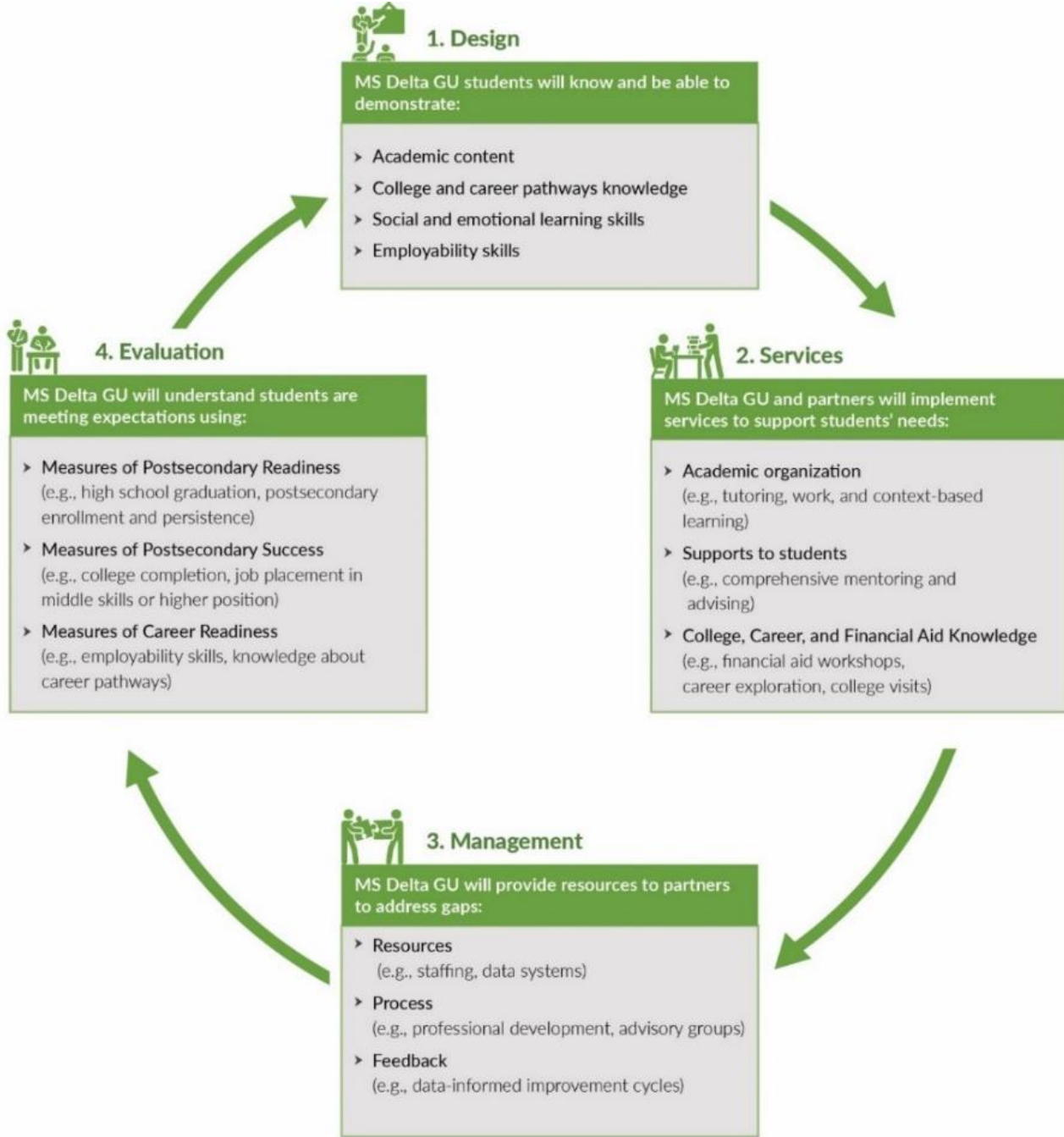
Table 2.1: Two-Grade Cohort Model

Year	Grade Levels Served								# Students
2021/22	6	7							2727
2022/23		7	8						2727
2023/24			8	9					2727
2024/25				9	10				2727
2025/26					10	11			2727
2026/27						11	12		2727
2027/28							12	College	2014

College and career readiness design approach. The MS Delta GU partnership will implement a research-based design approach focused on enhancing students' college and career readiness. Research shows that students with higher levels of on-track indicators for college and career readiness are more likely to graduate high school, enroll in, and complete postsecondary education.⁴⁹ To respond to the needs of the communities it will serve, the MS Delta GU partnership will implement a theory of change based on the framework from American Institutes for Research (AIR), the **College and Career Readiness and Success (CCRS) Organizer**, see Figure 2.1. These CCRS organizer components will guide the implementation, management, and evaluation of MS Delta GU services. **Through a comprehensive suite of GU services, MS Delta GU students will be more likely to enroll and complete postsecondary education that leads to a career pathway that provides higher wages and attracts more viable employment opportunities.**

Originally developed by the National High School Center, the CCRS organizer provides a synthesis of feedback provided by content-area experts across the workforce, early childhood education, career and technical education, community college, education nonprofits, and out-of-school time organizations.⁵⁰

Figure 2.1: MS Delta College and Career Readiness Organizer



This CCRS organizer is a tool to guide decision-making and provide alignment of strategies as MS Delta GU partners, including Local CCSR Advisory Councils (Figure 2.1), locally and grant wide work together on a shared goal that all students are academically and

socially ready for college and career readiness and success. Additionally, the CCRS organizer provides a framework for evaluating measures of career readiness, measures of postsecondary readiness and success throughout the 7 years of the project. To supplement and enhance the CCRS organization, the MS Delta GU partnership will infuse the research into the college and career readiness design (described on page 14).

The goals and objectives of the MS Delta GU Partnership were developed by identifying the needs of the communities and the schools the project intends to serve, as well measures outlined in the CCRS organizer--on-track indicators for readiness, measures of postsecondary readiness, measures of career readiness, and measures of postsecondary success. Baseline data will be verified by third-party sources. For measures that do not yet have a baseline, data will be collected and reported in Grant Year 1 (GY1) and reported in the Annual Performance Report (APR) to the U.S. Department of Education and assessed annually thereafter.

The following table includes the GEAR UP Objectives, GPRA Indicators, Required Performance Measures (PM) and Project Specific Measures. These indicators provide a periodic assessment of progress toward achieving project objectives. Data will be collected every 9-week grading period and housed within a web-based student-level data tracking system for each of the PMs to meet APR reporting requirements.

Table 2.2: MS Delta Performance Measures

Objective 1: Increase the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education for students,		Baseline	Goal
1	The percentage of students completing Algebra 1 by the end of 9th grade will increase by 5% annually in years 3 and 4. (Federal Performance Measure 1)	GY1 ⁵²	5% annual increase GY3,4
2	Percentage of cohort students completing 2 or more Dual-Enrollment courses by 12th grade will increase by 5% in grant years 4,5,6, and 7 (Project Specific Performance Measure 1)	GY1	5% annual increase GY4-GY7
3	The average daily attendance of cohort students will increase to 95% by GY6 (Required Program measure A)	93.0%	96% increase by GY6
4	The promotion rate of cohort students will maintain the current rate through GY7 (Required Program Measure B)	96.0%	Maintain Through GY7
Objective 2: Increase the rate of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education for schools.		Baseline	Goal
5	The high school graduation rate will increase by 5% annually in GY 6 and 7 (GPRA 2)	79.0%	5% annual increase GY6,7
6	The percentage of cohort students' postsecondary enrollment rate will increase by an average of 5% in grant years 6 and 7 (Federal Performance Measure 4)	57.0%	5% increase GY6,7
7	Percentage of cohort students who persisted into the 2nd year of college at the initial or a subsequent IHE will increase 5% in grant year 7 (Federal Performance Measure 5)	TBD GY1	5% in GY7
8	Teacher postsecondary enrollment expectations of their students will increase by 5% in grant years 2,4, and 6. (Project Specific Performance Measure 3)	TBD GY1	5% annual increase GY2,4,6

Objective 3: Increase students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing.		Baseline	Goal
9	Seniors who complete the FAFSA will increase 5% annually in GY 6 and 7 (Federal Performance Measure 3)	33.0%	5% annual increase GY6,7
10	Students and their families will report increased knowledge and expectations for postsecondary education beyond high school in years 2, 4, and 6 by 5% each survey. (Required Program Measure 4)	TBD GY2	5% increase GY2,4,6
11	The college-going culture of each school will increase by 5% annually (Project Specific Performance Measure 5)	TBD GY1	5% annual increase
Objective 4: Increase the Career Readiness of Cohort students		Baseline	Goal
12	Number of students who take a career interest assessment will increase 10% each year to 95% in GY4 (Project Specific Performance Measure 5)	TBD GY1	Increase to 95% GY4
13	Number of students who complete an individualized career plan with an associated postsecondary pathway will increase 15% each year to a goal of 90% completion in GY7 (Project Specific Performance Measure 7)	TBD GY1	Increase to 90% GY7
14	Number students who participate in an internship, part-time job, apprenticeship, or job shadow by the 12th grade will increase by 60% (Project Specific Performance Measure 8)	TBD GY1	Increase by 60%
15	Number of internship students who receive a supervisor performance review will increase 15% each year to a goal of 95% by GY7 (Project Specific Performance Measure 9)	TBD GY5	Increase to 95% by GY7

2.2 The extent to which the proposed project demonstrates a rationale.

The MS Delta GU Partnership design is based on researched practices to produce a strong theory, demonstrating a rationale and evidence of promise. The MS Delta GU partnership’s **logic model**, outlined in Table 2.3, is a linear illustration of the intended outcomes and the related inputs/outputs tracked to measure effectiveness as it relates to the target region’s need and research-based design and services. MS Delta GU’s **career and college readiness** design approach, based on a synthesis of research by American Institutes of Research (AIR)⁵¹ and the Institute of Education Sciences Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast at Florida State University,⁵² will shape the rationale of the implementation of GU services that addresses academic, informational/behavioral, and financial needs in the target region. These MS Delta GU

services are designed to support students to develop and stay on-track for college and career readiness for postsecondary pathways that leads to a viable career and contributes to the local economy. This design approach will support MS Delta GU students in developing employability skills, having exposure to and the support to success in rigorous academic coursework, and create individualized career and college plans. The long-term outcomes are to increase the number of students in the low-income MS Delta GU target region who graduate high school academically prepared and enroll in postsecondary education.

Program components that serve as the foundation for the MS Delta GU partnership design and demonstrated rationale is grounded in the following research:

Cultivate a college-going culture. Research shows that students who attended a school with a high college-going culture were 2.4 times more likely to apply to college as compared to students who attended a high school with a low college-going culture.⁵³ These findings support previous research by McDonough arguing for the importance of school context in shaping students' college-going behaviors.⁵⁴ McDonough found specifically that students who attend a school with a college-going culture--especially related to college expectations and college talk--have better postsecondary outcomes.⁵⁵ Applying McDonough's definition of college-going culture and the associated rubric will enable the MS Delta GU evaluation to measure the relationship between a college-going culture and the student outcome of enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education. The rubric is built upon nine research-based college-going culture elements: college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation.⁵⁶ The MS Delta GU Partnership will use research from *What is a College Going Culture: Facilitating College Preparation through Organizational Change* (UCLA, 2010) to provide professional development to educators with

the goal of increasing the college-going culture in target schools. The rubric designed at the UC Berkeley Center for Educational Outreach measuring the nine elements of a college going culture will be used to assess growth over the project period and pinpoint specific areas for improvement. This will lead to a strong platform to maintain the investment made by GU through a cultural shift to include a commitment to college and career readiness by teachers and administrators.

Providing multiple pathways to college and career success. The MS Delta GU Partnership recognizes the need to implement multiple ‘pathways’ to postsecondary success and recognizes that an adaptable approach is key. As outlined in key position papers such as *Pathways to Prosperity*,⁵⁷ estimates are that nearly half of the job openings in the future that require a postsecondary degree will go to people with an associate’s degree or occupational certificate. As a result, emphasis will be placed on what is known about effective reform models, outlined in *Pathways to Prosperity* including a focus on “middle skills” occupations that are aligned to the researched workforce projections in the target counties in the MS Delta GU Partnership, as outlined in the State of Mississippi’s Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) report findings⁵⁸ and corresponding statewide initiative, Skill UP Mississippi.

Boosting Career Readiness in Secondary Schools. The MS Delta GU Partnership will also support schools’ implementation using a “self-study” approach for sustaining career readiness in secondary schools published in the Institute for Education Sciences *Self-Study Guide for Career Readiness in Secondary Schools* (2020)⁵⁹ and developed in partnership with the Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast’s Florida Career Readiness Research Alliance. This guide covers seven career readiness elements in four areas of implementation drawn from research, including preparing career-ready students, teaching and advising, counseling, and building school and career networks. Based on this information the MS Delta GU Partnership

developed the WORK model (in CPP1 pg. viii) and included project specific measures to track annually.

Focus on Employability Skills. One of the career readiness elements focuses on employability skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, social interaction, goal planning, problem solving, conflict management, initiative and enterprise, organization, self-management, resume writing, and interviewing). Researchers have found that these employability skills are both critically important for human capital development and workforce success--and there is growing evidence base that employability skills predict employment and earnings even better than academic or technical skill development.⁶⁰ Additionally, these employability competencies contribute positively to a student's acquisition of academic content and also are essential to learner success in college and career settings.⁶¹ Target GU schools will use this guide to collect information, prioritize student needs, evaluate for continuous improvement and to determine patterns in student outcomes.

Connecting curriculum and programs to college and career success. The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Institute for Education Sciences (IES) Practice Guide, *Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools (2017)*⁶², indicates strong evidence for impact for interventions related to staying in school, progressing, and graduating high school. These interventions include making direct connections in school curriculum and programs to college and career success to improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school. Specifically, providing (1) checklists to students for college and career-focused options after high school, (2) curriculum that helps students build supportive relationships and teach social and emotional learning (SEL) skills to use when responding to challenges, and (3) opportunities to assess student engagement via school culture surveys to determine areas for improvement and targeted support for students who are not meaningfully engaged in school.

Promising Evidence: Dual Enrollment and Summer Counseling. A critical program component of its suite of services, the MS Delta GU Partnership will implement increased dual enrollment opportunities for students by partnering with the two institutions of higher education that offer dual enrollment courses. In order to *demonstrate a rationale*, the MS Delta GU Partnership will increase access to dual enrollment, a *project component*, to produce the *relevant outcomes* of postsecondary access, enrollment, first-to-second year persistence, and degree attainment. The dual enrollment intervention positively related to every postsecondary outcome (*postsecondary access, first-to-second year persistence, and eventual degree attainment*) regardless of how the outcome was defined or what sample was used for the analysis (Giani, et al., 2014). The following study, reviewed by the WWC, was found to have *promising evidence*, which includes *demonstrating a rationale*, and will be used as part of the MS Delta GU theory of action in supporting students in their postsecondary endeavors:

The referenced study by Giani, et al. (2014) was part of an intervention report prepared by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) which reported a *"positive effect" on a relevant outcome with no reporting of a "negative effect" or "potentially negative effect" on a relevant outcome*. The intervention report can be found here: <https://ies.ed.gov/incee/wwc/Study/84225> and the study here: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1026262>.

A second component of the MS Delta GU project is *summer counseling*, as an intervention to provide counseling services for students between high school graduation and college enrollment by college counselors or peer mentors via text messaging campaigns, email, phone, in-person meetings, instant messaging, and/or social media. The services will provide students with information about college enrollment and assistance in overcoming unanticipated financial, informational, and socioemotional barriers.

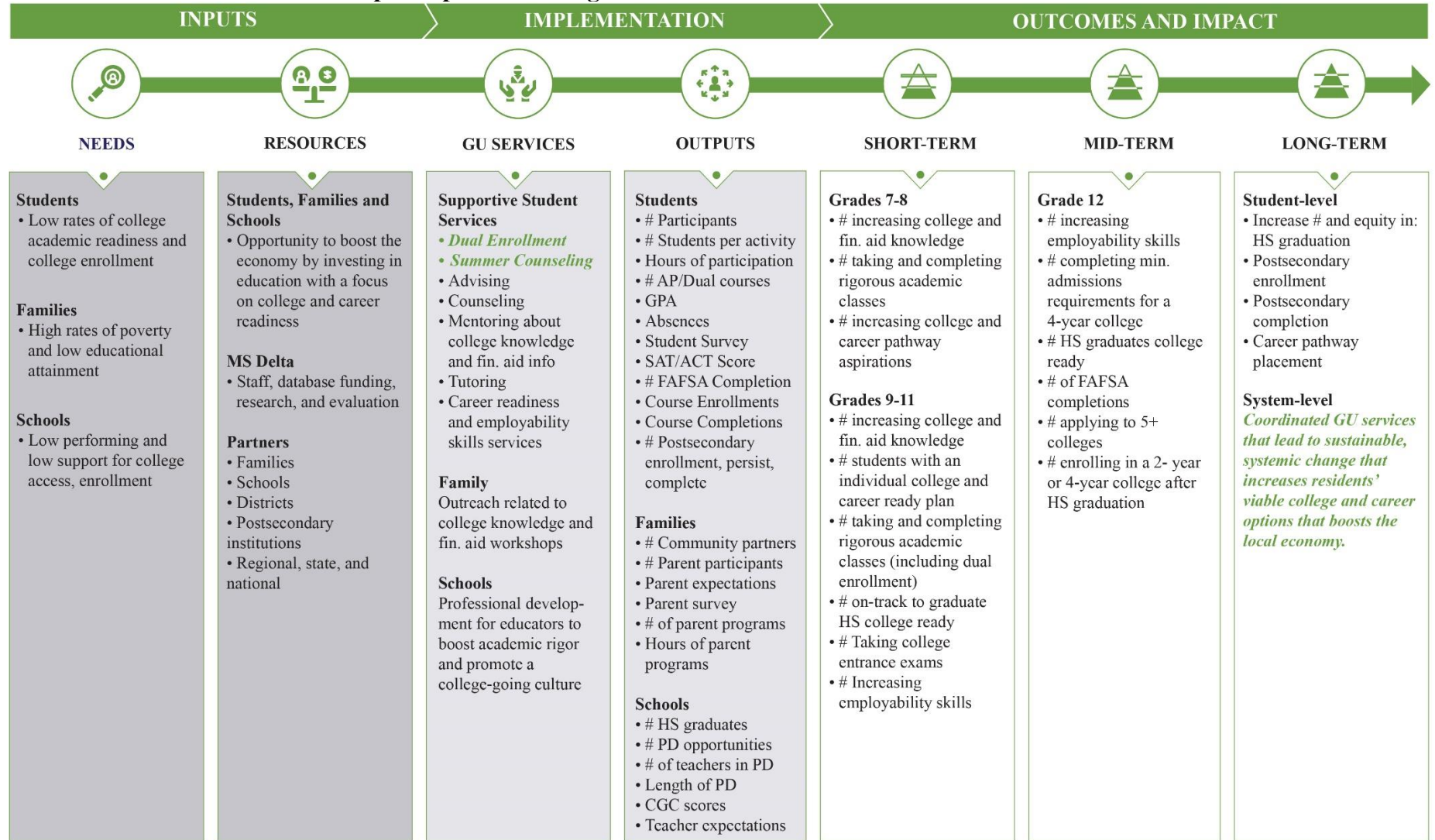
Summer counseling research reported, and WWC confirmed a positive and statistically significant difference between the intervention and comparison group for college enrollment in the fall following high school graduation.⁶³ The WWC characterized this finding as a statistically significant positive effect and was found to have *promising evidence* demonstrating that summer counseling can improve the **relevant outcome** of *postsecondary enrollment* (WWC, 2018).

Table 2.3: Demonstrating a rationale for program components/interventions:

Intervention	Intended Project Outcomes	Supporting Research	What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence	MS Delta Partnership Intervention Evaluation Effort
Dual Enrollment	Increase college enrollment, persistence, completion	Giani, M., Alexander, C., & Reyes, P. (2014)	Moderate Evidence supporting increase in college access, college completion and persistence outcomes	Quasi-Experimental Design
Summer Counseling	Increase postsecondary enrollment	Castleman, B.L., Page, L. C., & Schooley, K. (2014).	Strong Evidence supporting increase in fall college enrollment	Quasi-Experimental Design

MS Delta GU Partnership Logic Model (Table 2.4) outlines the approach for MS Delta GU’s educational logic model and is derived from two main sources, the Institute of Education Sciences⁶⁴ and research by Catherine Cooper⁶⁵ showing how educational alliances used Integrated Logic Models to advance coherent and sustainable research, practice, and evaluation towards educational equity for students and systems. Integrated Logic Models, unify programs into a single logic model, including research evidence to design activities for building student and system-level equity also known as a ‘Theory of Change’; linking research-based activities and measures to outcomes; and merging student-level longitudinal data. The MS Delta GU Partnership’s logic model will guide program administrators and evaluators on identifying aligned research questions and understanding the extent to which the intended impacts are achieved.

Table 2.4: MS Delta GU Partnership Comprehensive Logic Model



Evidence for *Dual Enrollment* comes from:
 Giani, M., Alexander, C., & Reyes, P. (2014). Exploring variation the impact of dual-credit coursework on postsecondary outcomes: A quasi-experimental analysis of Texas students. *The High School*, 200-218.

Evidence for *Summer Counseling* comes from:
 Castleman, B.L., Page, L.C., & Schooley, K. (2014). The forgotten summer: Does the offer of college counseling after high school mitigate summer melt among college-intending, low-income high school graduates.

III. Quality of Project Services

3.1 The quality and sufficiency of strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.

The Delta MS GU Partnership will ensure equal access and treatment for students, families, and educators in compliance with the US Department of Education's *General Education Provisions Act* (GEPA), Section 427, which requires each federally funded project to ensure equitable access to all program beneficiaries, regardless of gender, race, national origin, color, disability or age. Delta State University, the fiscal agent, is an affirmative action and equal opportunity employer. Delta State does not discriminate in access to educational programs and activities, or with respect to hiring or the terms and conditions of employment, on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, sex, gender identity and expression, political affiliation, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation. Delta State University actively promotes diversity among employees and is committed to deepen applicant pools by attracting interest from diverse, qualified individuals. This is important to the implementation of grant services because staff that reflect the diversity of the student population will be more effective at connecting with students and their families.

Delivery of project services will use student service data to ensure that services are being distributed to students equitably. Student service data will be updated monthly to ensure access to timely and near real-time service data is used to make decisions. The MS Delta GU Partnership will provide staff trainings on disability laws and resources, poverty, cultural, gender, and bias sensitivity; developing strong relationships with organizations that serve underrepresented populations; working with schools to ensure students with disabilities can fully participate; and offering information and resources in Spanish for Spanish-speaking families.

3.2 The extent to which the project services are likely to provide comprehensive mentoring, outreach, and supportive services to students in support of the required activities including: i) provide info regarding financial aid for postsecondary education to participating students, ii) encouraging student enrollment in rigorous and challenging curricula and coursework in order to reduce the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level, and iii) improving the number of participating students who obtain a secondary school diploma and complete applications for and enroll in a program of postsecondary education

Project services were designed using research that underpins the **Career and College Readiness (CCRS) organizer** along with evidence-based practices to meet specific needs of each community and school. MS Delta GU partnership will test and assess services and efforts continuously to inform program improvements. Aligned with research-based practices, the MS Delta GU partnership will ensure that students and families have sufficient understanding of college-related requirements and processes, make appropriate college-related choices, and can navigate the complex pathways associated with higher education institutions.⁶⁶



2. Services

MS Delta GU and partners will implement services to support students' needs:

- ▶ Academic organization (e.g., tutoring, work, and context-based learning)
- ▶ Supports to students (e.g., comprehensive mentoring and advising)
- ▶ College, Career, and Financial Aid Knowledge (e.g., financial aid workshops, career exploration, college visits)

Academic Organization

The MS Delta GU Partnership will implement GU services connected to the College and Career Readiness organizer **Academic Organization** component as well as indicators, predictors, and other factors of secondary success as outlined by AIR in *Predictors of Postsecondary Success*⁶⁷ and research that serves as the foundation of the design. This academic organization serves to boost access and success in rigorous academic curricula and enhance employability skills needed to succeed in the workforce.

Math Interventions. To boost the rigor of math curriculum and student success, the MS Delta GU Partnership will develop a math advisory group charged with identifying and implementing strategies specific to each school's needs with a focus on increasing access to and completion of Algebra in middle school and by 9th grade. Several studies support that the completion of Algebra I in 8th grade and Algebra II in the 9th grade is inversely correlated with the need for remediation at the postsecondary level.⁶⁸ Additional strategies include incorporating the **AP potential tool**, an instrument used to gauge a student's readiness for AP coursework and to identify students to place in AP coursework. A 2015 study showed that students who take AP course, the exam and pass are more likely to score higher on college entrance exams and enroll in college.⁶⁸ Another strategy includes using **math tutoring** adapted from *Not too late: Improving academic outcomes for disadvantaged youth* (2016)⁶⁹ meets WWC standards without reservations, ESSA Tier 1 (strong evidence).

Employability Skills. Using program components listed in the Institute for Education Sciences *Self-Study Guide for Career Readiness in Secondary Schools* (2020),⁷⁰ the MS Delta GU Partnership services include a focus on teaching students employability skills, exploring careers through focused activities, making explicit connections between academics and careers, developing individualized education plans that have a career component, involving families and community partners in these career counseling efforts, and providing opportunities for work-based learning.⁷⁰ To supplement this guide, MS Delta GU partnership will also use AIR's professional learning modules to integrate employability skills⁷¹ using the framework developed by AIR and the U.S. Department of Education and program components identified by a recent literature review (2020) in *Enhancing College and Career Readiness Programs for Underserved Adolescents*.⁷² These program components include exposing students to a broad range of possible

selves, constructing personal stories, leveraging personal strengths, grit, adaptability and to facilitate learning opportunities that include experiential learning.⁷³

Supports to Students

The MS Delta GU Partnership will implement GU services aligned to the College and Career Readiness organizer **Support** component to provide wrap-around services some students need to be college and career ready and understand the college-going process.

Mentoring. A 2016 study by Schwartz and Rhodes found that a long-term relationship with an adult mentor or counselor has a positive impact on students' college aspirations and enrollment.⁷⁴

High school students will have multiple opportunities to connect with college students and entrepreneurs in the community for mentoring and shadowing related to college and career readiness with an emphasis on cultivating entrepreneurial ideas to benefit the local economy and community. MS Delta GU students who have a mentor focused on entrepreneurship will develop business plans to implement their ideas and contribute to the Delta economy. These plans will include connections to students' individual career plans and postsecondary pathways.

Individual career plans and counseling. Aligned with the IES Self-Study Guide on Career Readiness, MS Delta GU will provide students with individualized career plans and teach employability skills in the classroom or in after-school programs using the framework developed by the Career and Technical Education (CTE) initiative from the U.S. Department of Education⁷⁵ and aligned to the current and projected workforce trends in the Delta region. Through career counseling, MS Delta GU will develop individualized career plans for each student 14 and over in the cohort that includes a postsecondary pathway.⁷⁶

Guiding college matching and enrollment advising/outreach. Specific to the concept of mentoring within college counseling, research from MDRC titled, *In Search of a Match*,

developed a guide for college counseling and found that ‘near peer’ mentors were especially important.⁷⁷ Additionally, related to the concept of matching in the college counseling process, the Chicago Consortium for School Research (CCSR) report, *The Potholes: On the Road to College*, found that postsecondary completion rates increase as students are more accurately matched academically with postsecondary institutions.⁷⁸ Through MS Delta GU Partnership near peer college match counseling and advising, students will identify the best pathway for their postsecondary education.

Preparation for College, Career, and Financial Aid Knowledge

The MS Delta GU Partnership will implement GU services aligned to the College and Career Readiness organizer **Preparation** component to provide college, career, and financial aid knowledge to students, families, educators, and the community so that everyone understands the steps necessary to plan, apply, and pay for college and connect to viable careers. To ensure that all college and career preparation focused services are aligned to the school culture, MS Delta GU will provide professional development services on cultivating a college-going culture to educators and administrators.

College-going culture PD will be offered in several formats for accessibility, including face-to-face, online, and conference style presentations. These PD opportunities will use active learning strategies with a focus on adult learning theory to give teachers skills and tools to make plans that can be adapted to meet the needs of their students. Using McDonough’s definition of college-going culture⁷⁹, MS Delta GU will provide PD to educators and school leaders aligned to the nine research-based elements of building a college-going culture: college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation.

College and career knowledge curriculum. The foundation of these services is developing students' and families' general college and career knowledge. Each partner school will schedule instructional time for GU specific content, to provide grade-level specific 'college knowledge' aligned with the goals of the MS Delta GU Partnership (in addition to implementing the employability skills curriculum). This programming includes academic advising to promote enrollment in rigorous coursework, financial literacy instruction, FAFSA completion, study and test-taking skills, SAT/ACT preparation, and college academic matching that ties college knowledge directly to career interests and programs across many pathways (e.g., postsecondary training, community college, 4-year degree, etc.).

Get2College Center. Get2College, part of the Woodward Hines Foundation currently operates 3 centers across the state providing support to students and their families to navigate the path toward applying and paying for college. Get2College will open and operate a new College Access Center in the Delta region as part of the MS Delta GU Partnership and sustain it after the grant. Typical programming will include, 1) strengthening the pipeline between high school and postsecondary education by improving college advising, sharing information on college options, and increasing access to financial aid assistance, 2) Increase college completion rates, including course completion, credit accumulation, supporting working students, transferring between institutions, and attainment of credentials with labor market relevance, and 3) Strengthening postsecondary alignment with workforce needs, build relationships with business and industry to align curricula to meet job demands, and connect students with work skills.

Ensuring financial aid awareness. As listed in the WWC IES Practice Guide, *Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do*,⁸⁰ there is moderate evidence of impact related to strategies that increase families' financial aid awareness and help students

apply for financial aid. Additionally, The Pell Institute identified concerns regarding affordability and the lack of clarity regarding financial aid as reasons for why first-generation students do not apply to college. The report suggests three practices for increasing college enrollment, each of which have been included in the program design: (1) connect with parents about financial aid and how to pay for college, (2) improve and simplify financial aid and affordability communication, and (3) increase college campus visits for students and their families to hear directly from financial aid officers. Through MS Delta GU Partnership financial aid counseling and advising and family outreach, students and their families will identify increase their knowledge of financial aid and execute the steps to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Outreach: Family Events and Financial Aid and FAFSA Completion Workshops to engage families and community members on students' college and career topics such as STEM, math, advanced courses, and college and financial aid knowledge. These outreach services serve to share critical knowledge about the college-going process and applying to financial aid, while also bringing in families and the community into the school environment in a positive way. Career counseling for students and families will be available as a service at the Family Events with the goal of connecting adults in the Delta to jobs.

Rural youth adjust their educational aspirations, and subsequent college enrollment, based on their attitudes about, and connections to, family and place. While research on the services that lead to rural youth enrolling in postsecondary education is limited, one recent study provides evidence that parents' increased aspirations for their child to enroll in college leads to adolescent's increased college aspirations and enrollment.⁸¹ This is likely the result of rural youth being even more dependent on interpersonal connections and social networks.⁸² The

MS Delta GU Partnership will expand family-school partnerships through increased family services specific to FAFSA completion, choosing, applying, and paying for postsecondary education. By engaging parents in the process of college readiness, rural youth will build their identity toward aspiring to, enrolling in, and succeeding in postsecondary education.

WorkLife Career Guidance App. To address the needs of high school students to explore and plan for a career, the MS Delta GU Partnership will incorporate a student-centered web and mobile career guidance and financial education technology app, named *WorkLife*. WorkLife will be developed by NSPARK, through Mississippi State University, a partner to this proposal. WorkLife engages high-school students through a holistic approach to career counseling that moves beyond traditional interest surveys and presents a realistic and colorful introduction to the world of work. The MS Delta GU Partnership will use WorkLife in its career counseling services and will train an existing network of secondary school counselors and educators to use the technology in career exploration and connecting directly to careers in the community.

Local CCRS Advisory Councils in the target school community include critical stakeholders, often faith-based and business leaders, elders, and others who can work with students, family members, and educators to develop, reinforce, and promote community-wide messages aligned with the MS Delta GU Partnership design for promoting a college and career readiness for all youth. These local councils will also be charged with connecting businesses and other employers with GU programming to create a pipeline for connecting GU students and their families to colleges and careers in the community.

Table 3.1: Services Provided, When, and to Whom to Achieve the Outlined Performance Measures

MS Delta GU Partnership Services	Grades Served								S – Student F – Family E – Educator	Performance Measures
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	College	Audience	
Academic Organization and Supports										
Academic Planning/Career Advising			•	•	•	•	•	•	S, F	1,2,3,4,5,7,8
Advanced Placement, and Dual Enrollment Opportunities					•	•		•	S	2,4,5,6,10
Pre-Algebra/Algebra I Support	•	•	•						S	1,2,3
Tutoring Support- Face-to-Face and Virtual	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		S	1,2,3,4,5,6,10
Math Advisory Group	•	•	•	•					E	1,2,3
ACT/SAT Preparation					•	•		•	S	4
Growth Mindset and SEL Professional Development	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		S, E	2,3,4,5
Math Coaching PD	•	•	•	•					E	1,2,3
Dual Enrollment courses					•	•	•		S	2,4,5
Supports to Students and Families										
Parent University	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	F	3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11
Parent and Family Workshops	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	F	3,4,5,7,8,9,10
Comprehensive Mentoring	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	S	3,4,5,6,7,8,9
SEL Curriculum for Students	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	S	2,3,4
SEL Professional Development		•	•	•	•	•	•		S, F	3,4,6
College, Career, and Financial Aid Knowledge										
College Application and Exploration Week	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	S	3,4,5,6,11
College Campus Visits	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	S, F	3,4,5,7,11
Get2College Delta Center										4,5,6,7
College-Going Culture PD	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	S, F, E	3,4,9
College Knowledge Curriculum	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		S,F	3,4,7
College Match Coaches						•	•		S, F	4,5
Employability Skills			•	•	•	•	•	•	S	9,10,11,12,13
FAFSA Completion Workshops						•	•	•	S, F	6
Parent/Family College Prep Advising and Financial Aid/Literacy Workshops		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	S, F	6,7,10
College Application and Exploration Week	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	S	3,4,7,10,11,12
Bridge, Transition to College					•	•	•	•	S, F	4,5
Summer College Counseling Intervention						•	•	•	S, F	4,5,6,7
WorkLife Career App			•	•	•	•	•	•	S, F	10,11,12,13

3.3 The extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project involve the collaboration of appropriate partners for maximizing the effectiveness of project services.

The MS Delta GU Partnership includes a comprehensive network of organizations committed to developing and implementing **college and career readiness** services to MS Delta GU students, families, and educators. The MS Delta GU Partnership will address the conditions of progress to achieve goals related to the overall economic prosperity in the south, as outlined in MDC's *A Time of Reckoning* (2009).⁸³ These conditions include implementing (1) Bold ideas: promoting increased hope, wellbeing, and engagement in college and career with racial equity at the core; (2) Institutional capacity: creating network of partners hosted by an institution of higher education; and (3) Public will: tapping into the state's college attainment goal.⁸³ Bold ideas, institutional capacity and public will drove the identification of partners for MS Delta GU. As partners were identified, they were asked to share the bold ideas they have for services to students, families, and educators, to provide evidence of a history of providing culturally appropriate service to Black/African American students and families, and to provide evidence that their services work. It was from these responses that the partners were chosen from. The following list of partners are critical to the project's success:

Institutions of Higher Education. To carry out services to students across these cohorts, MS Delta GU Partnership will strengthen partnerships across institutions of higher education (IHEs) where students are most likely to attend which is within the geographical region. Most students in the proposed service area will attend a community college or a 4-year university in the MS Delta region, specifically Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University, and Mississippi Delta Community College as evidenced by 92.7% of Mississippi students attending an Institute of Higher Education in state.⁸⁴ The MS Delta GU partnership has been developed to provide services to students by a four-year public institution in the region, Delta State University

(the lead fiscal agent), along with Delta Community College, a 2-year college. **Contribution:** This partnership of MS Delta postsecondary institutions will offer unique programming highlighting the academic match and fit of each institution of higher education to students--along with career exploration, counseling/advising, mentoring, college visits, STEM programming, tutoring, and professional development for educators.

Foundation for the Mid-South. Is a non-profit focused on improving lives in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. It is a daunting task because the Mid-South is home to 30% of the nation's poverty, which has eroded the well-being of the region's communities, education and health systems, as well as financial security. These deficiencies—if left unhindered—will continue to grow and deny further opportunities to better conditions for families today and future generations. The Foundation for the Mid-South was established to bring together the public and private sectors and focus their resources on increasing social and economic opportunity. Our approach is straightforward and long term: enable communities to develop solutions to better conditions and improve lives. The Foundation for the Mid-South focuses on strengthening four priorities that, we believe, are the bedrock for prosperous communities and a strong region. The Foundation's Education work supports efforts that help students succeed academically—by strengthening traditional education systems and programs and community institutions serving students. In Health and Wellness, the Foundation works to promote physical and mental well-being in order to comprehensively improve the health status in the region. In order to break the cycle of generational poverty, the Foundation's Wealth Building work is helping people become financially secure so they can move up the economic ladder. And finally, Community Development, the Foundation invests in and partners with efforts that enable communities to

grow and prosper. **Contribution:** Foundation for the Mid-South will implement and provide oversight for all programming related to this MS Delta GU Partnership.

Woodward Hines Foundation. The Woodward Hines Education Foundation is a nonprofit organization working to help more Mississippians obtain the postsecondary degree, certification, or credential that will allow them to improve their quality of life, strengthen their communities, and contribute to a vibrant and prosperous future for all of Mississippi. *Get2College*, a program of the Woodward Hines Education Foundation, is a college planning program that works to increase the chances that more Mississippians of all ages will have access to a postsecondary education. Across three brick-and-mortar centers and virtually, *Get2College* counselors provide students and families with free college counseling, ACT prep, and hands-on assistance completing the FAFSA and Mississippi Aid applications. *Get2College* staff members also offer professional development to educators, school leaders, and community leaders that centers around creating a college-going culture for students and community members. Topic areas include training in FAFSA completion, ACT Teacher Training, College and Career Readiness Teacher Training, and how to better help students of all ages engage in the college-planning process. The work of *Get2College* is grounded in the belief that all Mississippians should have the opportunity to go to college and receive the help they need to get there. **Contribution:** As part of the *Get2College* initiative, Woodward Hines will develop of a center to support for MS Delta GU students transitioning to college.

Casey Family Programs. Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care in the United States. Our mission is to provide and improve — and ultimately prevent the need for — foster care. Casey Family Programs is committed to *Building Communities of Hope*, a nationwide effort to prevent the need for foster

care by supporting families in raising safe, happy and healthy children. We work with a wide range of partners, including the children and families we serve each day. **Contribution:** Casey will provide funding for increased family programming through Village of Wisdom and CARES.

Higher Purpose Co. Tim Lampkin is the co-founder and CEO of Higher Purpose Co. a 501c3 economic justice nonprofit building community wealth with Black residents across Mississippi by supporting the ownership financial, cultural, and political power. The Mississippi Business Journal selected Lampkin as one of the 2019 Top Entrepreneurs in the state. Ashoka and American Express recognized him in 2018 as an emerging innovator addressing the racial wealth gap in the United States. Lampkin is a former Common Future Fellow and Movement Voices Fellow, who has over a decade of community development and entrepreneurship experience.

Contribution: Higher Purpose Co. will provide entrepreneurship programming for students interested in starting their own business.

NSPARK. Founded in 1998, NSPARC is a university research center with more than 100 diverse employees, ranging from data scientists to software architects and security experts. NSPARK supports Mississippi State University's overarching goals of learning and service by collaborating with local, state, and federal agencies, and across the private sector to help society grow by discovering solutions to societal problems by using data science. **Contribution:**

NSPARK will provide the development of the WorkLife app for career and job placements.

Village of Wisdom. Village of Wisdom builds on the collective power of Black parents and amplifies their role as drivers, authors, and curators of research. We use a community-driven and participatory approach that places power back into the hands of members of our community to use research and stories generated from research to drive change across learning environments that promote inequity. **Contribution:** Village of Wisdom will work with Black families to build

families capacity to navigate and cope with racial bias and build community connections and advocacy skills.

CARES. A pioneering, community-mobilization initiative, directly addresses the life-shredding impacts of intergenerational Black poverty and lays a blueprint for community recovery.

Anchored in 58 U.S. cities by a network of CARES Affiliates, we are the nation’s recognized leader in the recruitment, training and engagement of African American mentors, and the only organization providing holistic programming on a national scale to undergird and advance impoverished Black—and Brown—children. CARES provides the emotional, social, academic- and career-readiness support they must have to flourish and become self-sustaining and successful contributors to their families and our society. **Contribution:** CARES will provide mentoring through a model called The Rising, a curricula-based, workforce-development and healing initiative.

Table: 3.2 MS Delta Partners and their Contributions

Business/Service Partners	Contribution to Direct Services
CARES	Mentoring and Family programming
Casey Family Programs	Increased family programming
Foundation for the Mid-South	Providing oversight to all programming
Higher Purpose Co.	Entrepreneurship programming
Princeton Review	Virtual tutoring platform
Vela Institute	Providing external evaluation and consulting
Village of Wisdom	Family programming
Woodward Hines	Development of a center to support students transitioning to college
Local and State Education Partners	Contribution to Direct Services
MS Delta Community College	Increased Dual enrollment, campus visits/programs
Delta State	Increased Dual enrollment, campus visits/programs
Mississippi State NSPARK	Development of Career App
LEAs- Identified Schools to be served	Each school district brings assets to enhance services
Delta State Campus Partners	Contribution to Direct Services
Center for Community and Economic Development	Office space for Project Director, Finance Specialist and Coordinator, conference room, and all work-related materials
Office of Admissions	Support to areas schools for application assistance and college matching

Office of Human Resources	The Human Resources Department will post position announcements and provide assistance in the hiring process
Marketing and Communications	The Office of Marketing and Communications will provide design expertise in the development of promotional materials
Office of Financial Aid	The Office of Financial Aid will provide technical assistance to program staff and resources to program participants on financial aid, FAFSA, and information about financial resources
Academic Affairs	Access to content-area experts through a diverse faculty, PD to teachers, and guidance to MS Delta GEAR UP staff on the development of strategic services.

IV. Quality of Project Personnel

The extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented.

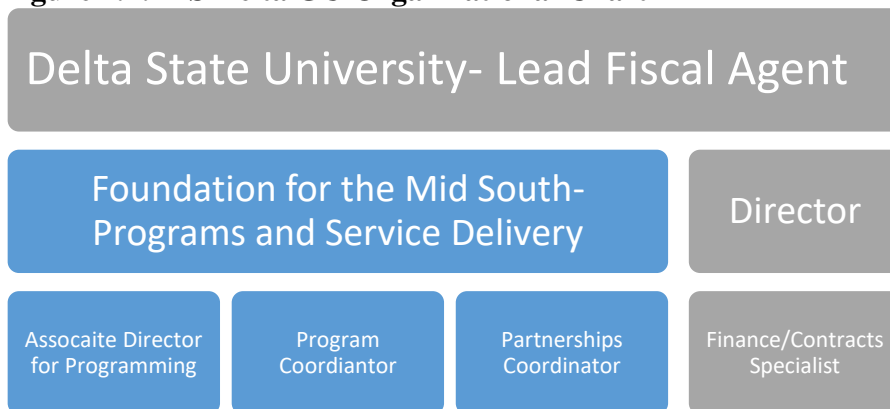
Diversity is the cornerstone of Delta State University’s strong commitment to a learning and working environment that highly values access and opportunity for all. Delta State’s commitment to student success, public service and research in the context of a multicultural environment is embedded in the University’s mission statement--"In the pursuit of academic excellence, Delta State University is committed to creating and maintaining an inclusive academic community that fosters productive intellectual exchange while bridging gaps in the differences in the human experience.” Through robust recruitment efforts that include advertising through a wide range of networks, Delta State expects to attract and hire candidates who have succeeded in overcoming barriers similar to the students, families, and communities MS Delta GU serves. This includes the barriers outlined in GEPA: gender, race, national origin, color, disability, or age. Candidates follow the rigorous requirements established by Delta State’s Equity and Diversity office and will be recruited, interviewed, and selected by committees made up of diverse individuals including representation from partner school districts and community

partners. Reciprocally, partner schools will include MS Delta GU Partnership personnel on the hiring committees and either MS Delta GU Partnership PI or Director will provide final approval for all partner positions. As state agencies, partner school districts will not discriminate against any person protected under federal and state law, additionally, schools are required to hire site coordinators who are representative of their communities. Additional strategies to ensure equitable access include, explicit language included in all job descriptions valuing a diverse workforce, bias training for search committees, and blind resume review.

In preparation for the writing of this proposal, a group of partners began assessing the capacity and cultural appropriateness of each of the institutions of higher education in them MS Delta region to identify the best fit institution as the lead fiscal agent. Delta State University was chosen for their successful implementation and management of large federal grants, but the university is a predominately white institution (58.6% White, 29% Black or African American, 2.75% Hispanic or Latino) therefore, Foundation for the Mid-South was identified as a critical partner to provide program implementation and oversight to local as they currently work with MS Delta region school districts and their staff reflect the demographics of the region.

Given this unique partnership the following organization chart illustrates the management and personnel for MS Delta GEAR UP:

Figure 4.1: MS Delta GU Organizational Chart



Key project personnel include principal investigator, the director and associate director of MS Delta GU. In addition, the program is supported by additional (“non-key”) staff personnel (see Table 4.1 on Page 42).

4.2 The Principal Investigator and Director are highly qualified.

The MS Delta GU Partnership will be executed under the management of principal investigator, Dr. Moore. **Dr. Billy C. Moore** has been the Dean of the College of Business and Aviation at Delta State University since 2003. In his role as dean, he is the leader for one of the four academic units for Delta State University. He oversees four undergraduate programs and four master’s programs with budgets totaling over \$3,000,000 annually. Dr. Moore serves on the University’s Academic Council to develop academic policies. Before to serving as dean he served as Chair of the Division of Economics and Finance for eight (8) years.

In addition, Dr. Moore has served as the Director of the Center for Community and Economic Development since 2018. The Center was established in 1998 and is the university’s arm that connects to and works directly with the community. The center partners and collaborates with businesses, elected officials, public school districts and other community organizations to strengthen communities. Dr. Moore oversees five 5 grant funded programs through the Center for Community and Economic Development.

Dr. Moore also serves on the board of Mississippi Council on Economic Education (MCEE). The mission of the MCEE is to increase the economic and financial literacy in Mississippi by providing resources and training to public and private K-12 school teachers, empowering students to create a more prosperous future for themselves and Mississippians. Dr. Moore has been a Certified Financial Planner and a Certified Treasury Professional for 19 years. Dr. Moore has conducted numerous workshops on financial planning and treasury management

for small businesses and individuals and carries the requisite financial skills and support for the proposed initiative. **Dr. Moore will devote 10% of his time and effort to MS Delta GU.**

Minimum Qualifications for PI mirror Delta State University's PI eligibility requirements: university employee status in a professional capacity (faculty/director) and invests time in the project to a significant degree. Additional qualifications for serving on as MS Delta GU Principal Investigator include a background in college access and administrative experience in higher education and/or K-12 schools.

Minimum Qualifications for MS Delta GU Director (100% time and effort):

Master's degree in education or related field, 5 years of previous grant management experience preferably in the area of college access, and 5 years' experience in a leadership role in education or non-profit environment, or a combination thereof. Prior experience must include responsibilities related to the major areas of grant administration including a proven record of success with the management of major projects, oversight of budget and financial accountability, effective hiring and supervision of personnel, supervision of program delivery, coordination of multiple partner services, and the ability to recognize and solve potential problems. **Role and Responsibilities for Project Director:** Reports to Dr. Moore, Principal Investigator.

Provides strategic vision, advocacy, and resources needed to successfully implement MS Delta GU; Coordinate with Foundation for the Mid-South to implement services and resources; Develops and maintains policies and procedures relevant to the fiscal administration of GU; Directly supervises finance specialist, and administrative support; Final approver for all school district annual workplans; Develops and monitors budget and acts as primary point person for audits; Oversees preparation of federal annual and final reports to U.S. Department of Education.

4.3 The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key personnel.

Associate Director for Programming (AD) Minimum Qualifications (100% time and

effort): Master's degree in education or related field, 3-5 years of education leadership in education or non-profit management, or a combination thereof. Prior experience must include responsibilities related to the major areas of grant administration including a proven record of success with managing and evaluating the design, development and coordination of projects, participation in committees and/or task forces designed to improve the quality of service/education to students and staff, organizing training programs, professional development workshops and conferences, evaluation and assessment of short and long term goals, supervision and completing comprehensive reports related to programming and services as required by federal agencies. **Role and Responsibilities:** Reports to Ivey Allen, Executive Director for Foundation of the Mid-South. Provides supervision to Program Coordinator and Partnerships Coordinator; Liaise with all partners in the establishment of sub-grants and the MS Delta Sponsored Programs office executing these contracts; Provides guidance and oversight to all school district and partner workplans; Provides oversight to grant-wide professional development.

Program Coordinator (100% time and effort)- Minimum Qualifications: BS with 3-5 years of experience working in education or related field preferably with experience in college access and an understanding of the barriers to postsecondary education. **Role and Responsibilities:** Reports to the Associate Director for Programming. The coordinator will support local efforts in school districts to enhance preparation for postsecondary education, as well as serve on each of the local advisory boards providing oversight to local GEAR UP implementation; Support partner districts' creation, implementation and amendment of work plans; Check all activities for pre-approval prior to reimbursement as a part of the internal finance process; and liaise with local coordinators to support their efforts to provide direct

student and families services.

Partnerships Coordinator (100% time and effort)- Minimum Qualifications: BS with 3-5 years of experience working in education or related field preferably with experience in college access and an understanding of the barriers to postsecondary education. **Role and Responsibility:** Reports to the Associate Director for Programming. Act as the central resource for all programming available grant-wide targeted to students, families, and educators to strengthen the transition to high school and transition to college; Collaborate with community partners; Coordinate and implement academic year and summer programs with identified partners; Support the efforts of workplan development in local school districts; sit on local advisory councils as needed; and provide data entry support to local schools.

The MS Delta GU Partnership includes additional (non-key) personnel. The role of these positions and preferred qualifications are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Non-key Personnel, Position Descriptions and Qualifications.

Title	Description	Qualifications
Administrative Associate- 1 FTE	Coordinates work activities and schedules of key personnel; performs administrative functions related to acquisition and allocation of resources; liaises with MS Delta facilities and other university departments.	Bachelor's degree and 3 years' experience.
Finance Specialist- 1 FTE	This position is responsible for preparing and monitoring the MS DELTA GEAR UP federal and match budgets; administering agreements with school and community partners; establishing controls and procedures related to financial operations; and regularly advising school personnel and project partners on fiscal matters to ensure compliance with OMB circulars and Uniform Guidance.	Undergraduate in Accounting, Business or a related field and 3-5 years' experience managing grant budgets or a combo of education and experience.

The MS Delta GU Partnership team includes additional school-based staff. Each partner school will hire one or more **site coordinators**, depending on the school's student body size. As

district employees, these individuals will dedicate 100% time and effort to delivering direct services according to work plans developed annually by site teams under the direction of MS Delta GU administrators. **Minimum Qualifications** include a bachelor’s degree with 3-5 years relevant experience in the areas of education, college access or school counseling.

MS Delta GU will replace key personnel who depart the program with a candidate with equal or greater qualifications and will ensure that the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of GEAR UP is notified of any departures of key personnel and will request approval.

V. Quality of the Management Plan

5.1 The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

A robust management infrastructure will ensure that best practices, programming and services are never compromised. At Delta State University, GEAR UP will be housed within the community outreach programs offered through Delta State University's Center for Community and Economic Development. Delta State has a longstanding commitment to the Mississippi Delta region. This is articulated in its Guiding Principles:

COMMITMENT TO REGIONAL & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In partnership with various organizations, Delta State will advance community and economic development in the Delta region to improve the quality of life and raise the educational level of its citizens. <http://www.deltastate.edu/about-dsu/guiding-principles/>



3. Management

MS Delta GU will provide resources to partners to address gaps:

- ▶ Resources
(e.g., staffing, data systems)
- ▶ Process
(e.g., professional development, advisory groups)
- ▶ Feedback
(e.g., data-informed improvement cycles)

This base of operation will provide access to a wide array of appropriate resources, ranging from academic colleges, admissions and financial aid offices, finance and contracts support, and direct access to the Universities leadership. This office provides oversight of all college access programs at Delta State and is uniquely positioned to successfully implement and manage the GEAR UP program. Delta State University is the flagship center in the Delta region for college access services. Hosting GEAR UP at Delta State University is a practical way of ensuring that services are streamlined so that they complement the services provided by other eligible entities with similar missions, ultimately avoiding the duplication of efforts. This management structure facilitates information flow across multiple organizations providing college access services in the region, making it easier to share best practices and collaborate on strategies for improving the academic experiences of low-income and first-generation students.

The Project Director has ultimate responsibility for ensuring all tasks are completed on time and within budget, and for supervising project timelines with clear, measurable milestones. The leadership team made up of the MS Delta GU PI, director and associate director will provide guidance for program implementation. Table 5.1 illustrates the division of responsibilities and the accountability provided by GU staff and entities outside of GU.

Table 5.1: Division of Responsibilities

Entity	Responsibilities
Delta State University	Lead fiscal agent, match, process reimbursements, LEA education partner.
GU Executive Director	Provides oversight to budget and fiscal operations of all aspects of grant administration.
GU Leadership Team	MS Delta PI, GU Dir, and Assoc. Director for Programs will ensure progress is made overall and provide an additional mechanism for course-corrections as needed and ensure communication between Delta State and Foundation for the Mid-South.
School District Liaison	An administrator will supervise the local coordinator, participate on the Advisory Council, develop the work plan, attend monthly GU meetings, primary point of contact at the district level, and oversee the financial management of GU funds in the district.
School District Coordinator	Each school district coordinator will participate on the Advisory Council, develop the work plan, implement or facilitate programming,

	meet with finance to document expenditures and matching, and attend monthly GU meetings.
External Evaluator	The Evaluator will work closely with the GU Director and Associate Director to provide support to ensure seamless data collection and evaluation.
Participatory Evaluation Team	A participatory evaluation team will be formed made up of stakeholders and experts in the field. The primary purpose is to take ownership of the evaluation process and increase the capacity to sustain the efforts of GU across schools.

MS Delta GU Partnership Management Practices. Specific programming and activities have been created to guide and direct the efforts of full implementation of the MS Delta GU Partnership. The following list and associated table detail the plan for implementation and oversight to ensure that the project tasks and objectives are met on time and within budget. Each year the associate director for programming and coordinators will work with the external evaluator to develop an infographic detailing each performance measure goal and the actual data for each school within each school district so that the workplan development and services are designed to produce positive gains towards meeting the performance measures. The following list details the plan for implementation and oversight:

GU Leadership Kit – Each school district will receive a kit to ensure that GU programming begins promptly at the kick-off event held soon after notification of the grant awarded. The kit includes a subcontract, a first-year work-plan, a job description and plan for hiring local coordinators, and a step-by-step process for setting up and operating the CCRS Advisory Council. The kit also describes policies and procedures for submitting reimbursements and data entry.

Finance and Data Trainings – Local training on all aspects of finance and data tracking will be delivered as part of the project launch and repeated as needed to address personnel turnover.

Establish Local CCRS Advisory Councils – Each school district will establish an Advisory

Council composed of the superintendent, the GEAR UP liaison, principals, teachers and counselors, local coordinators, MS Delta GU central staff, community partners, and parent/guardians. The council will establish goals, develop annual GU work plan, and monitor programming and progress.

Work Plan Development – Each local CCRS Advisory Council will be charged with the development of an annual work plan specific to the needs of its district. Strategic analysis of school data, such as test scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates, as well as research cited in this proposal will inform the annual process for creating the work plan. Reports from the database, as well as a review of progress toward each GEAR UP Partnership objective, will determine work plan programming in future years. A rubric and template has been designed for each school district to use in developing a work plan.

Partner Development and Communication – Upon notification of the grant award, partners will be contacted immediately to confirm their commitment to the program. Ongoing communication will occur through the Partnerships Coordinator, newsletters, meetings, and Advisory Council meetings.

Partnerships Collaboration – The quarterly meeting of GEAR UP staff, partner school districts, local coordinators, and liaisons is crucial for continuity of services, the flow of communication between GEAR UP staff and school district staff, and the review of data and best practices. This collaborative approach will support program implementation and course corrections as needed.

Reimbursement Meetings – School district coordinators and finance managers will meet monthly to coordinate documentation for the reimbursement packets.

Reimbursements Process- The process for reimbursement of grant funds to local school districts and confirmations of matching funds is as follows:

Table 5.2 Reimbursement/ Match Checks and Balances

GEAR UP Staff	Action
Administrative Assistant	Stamps date received. Attaches <i>Quality Assurance Checklist</i> .
Finance Specialist	Confirms appropriate documentation is submitted. Initials and dates.
Partnerships Coordinator	Reviews approved work plans to ensure activities and purchases have been pre-approved. Initials and dates.
Assistant Director	Confirms activities have been entered in the database. Initials and dates.
MS Delta GEAR UP Director	Gives final approval.

Reimbursements will be submitted on a monthly basis along with matching documentation. The above process is an internal process to MS Delta once reimbursement request has been received.

Annual Performance Report (APR) and Evaluation – The APR will be submitted annually to the U.S. Department of Education and will detail the progress of performance measures.

Annual Audit – With a project of this magnitude, an annual audit will occur to ensure proper fiscal management, responsible use of resources, intelligent interpretation of regulations, and fulfillment of the matching obligation.

Coordinator/Finance Management Annual Performance Review (MAP) – An annual review of local coordinators and finance personnel will examine progress toward meeting GU objectives, timeliness, and appropriateness of reimbursements and match documentation. This tool will be important for communicating accomplishments and providing ‘course corrections.’

Subcontracts – School districts and partners will enter a subcontract detailing an annual budget, an approved work plan, and reporting guidelines.

Table 5.3: Implementation and on-Going Timeline

Start Up Milestones	Key Personnel	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Start-up Kit	PD, AD, LC	•											
Hire Staff/Coordinators	PD, DL	•	•										
Finance/Data Trainings	FA, AFA, DM	•			•			•			•		
Establish Advisory Council	PD, DL, LC	•	•										
Establish Work Plan (WP)	PC, LC, DL	•	•	•	•								
Partner Development	AD, DL	•	•										
Begin Services			•	•									
Ongoing Implementation Years 2-7													
Advisory Council Meetings	All	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Annual Audit	PD, FA					•	•	•					
APR and Evaluation	PD	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Coordinator/Finance MAP	AD, FA			•							•		
Data Report Analysis	AD, EE	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
External Evaluators	AD, EE	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Partner Communication	AD, PC	•		•		•		•		•		•	
Reimbursement Meeting	AD, FA, PC	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Reimbursements	PD, AD, PC, FA	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Staff Meetings	Central Office	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Sub-Contracts	PD, FA												•
WP Development/Approval	PD, AD, PC, FA										•	•	•
AD= Associate Director, FA=Finance Specialist, PC = Program/Partnerships Coordinator, D = Director, EE= External Evaluator													

Local College and Career Readiness and Success (CCRS) Advisory Councils. The MS Delta GU Partnership will incorporate successful GEAR UP initiatives from other grants based on the collective impact approach⁸⁵, a critical recommendation in the *State of the South* (2019) report by MDC.⁸⁶ This collective impact approach integrates institutions in the education and employment sectors along with the ecosystem of influencers to implement local College and Career Readiness and Success (CCRS) Advisory Councils in target school districts. These CCRS Advisory Council will consist of the district superintendent, the GU liaison (a school district leader), principals, counselors, GU coordinators, community partners, teachers, local businesses, families, and student leaders. The CCRS Advisory Council will meet monthly to establish local college and career readiness goals, develop the local annual GU work plan, implement and monitor





programming, and connect students and families to careers. These activities keep the focus of all stakeholders on the MS Delta GU Partnership’s shared goals leading to collective impact.

5.2 The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project

Communication processes have been created to facilitate feedback and stimulate continuous improvement. The Evaluation section provides details for the Participatory Evaluation Team. This team will address pertinent questions, contribute to improving program performance, communicate findings to stakeholders and support the development of sustainable partnerships. The focus will be on building the capacity of local school districts to create change within their communities. This team will act as a mechanism for feedback for the project overall, specifically related to the evaluation and leveraging it to create more meaningful programming.

Building on the design and comprised of the key constituents: students, parents, teachers, postsecondary educators and community partners, the project will ensure that a diversity of perspectives is reflected through implementation of the CCRS advisory councils. Monthly advisory council meetings will review data, assess progress, creatively address issues, and share a professional learning community. These advisory councils are aligned with the Human Centered Design, specifically in the areas of identifying needs and co-creating solutions.

Table 5.4: Communication Plan

 WHO	 WHAT	 WHEN	 WHERE
MS Delta GU Administration	Fiscal and programmatic monitoring	Weekly	Staff Meeting
MS Delta Coordinators with school-based coordinators	School-level Programming, data collection	Monthly/As needed	Local meetings
MS Delta Asst. Director and Partners	Partner contribution, updates, logistics	Monthly	Virtual Zoom calls

Local GU Advisory Members	Local GU Oversight, Work-plan development	Monthly	Local school districts
School district liaisons and school coordinators	Project Risks, Opportunities, logistics	Monthly and As Needed	Local School districts
MS Delta Partnership Meetings- Grant-wide	GEAR UP Implementation, logistics, work-plan development	Quarterly	Grant-wide meetings- Zoom, in-person
Partners and local coordinators	Collaboration	Quarterly	Grant-wide meetings- Zoom, in-person
Partner Schools and Participatory Evaluation Team	Reports, Trainings, and Analysis Deliverables, APR	Quarterly	Grant-wide meetings- Zoom, in-person

5.3 The extent to which the time commitments of the project director and principal investigator and other key project personnel are appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed project.

Key personnel, including director, associate director, school district coordinators and support staff, will fully commit their time to the project at 100% to ensure successful implementation and management of the MS Delta GU Partnership. Positions have been identified within each partner to devote time to the successful implementation. This combination of GEAR UP staff, embedded coordinators, and identified personnel are adequate to operate and manage the project.

5.4 How the applicant will ensure that a diversity of perspectives are brought to bear in the operation of the proposed project, including those of parents, teachers, the business community, a variety of disciplinary and professional fields, recipients or beneficiaries of services, or others, as appropriate

Diverse perspectives will be ensured in the MS Delta GU Partnership project operation through the creation of **CCRS Advisory Councils**, comprised of stakeholders in each district. Each school district will establish a CCRS Advisory Council composed of the superintendent, the GU liaison, principals, teachers and counselors, local GU coordinators, GU central staff, business community partners, parent/guardians, and students. The council will establish goals, develop annual GU work plan, and monitor programming and progress, in addition to

supporting the development of a local college-going culture implementation plan. This localized input will help address local context and support a grassroots effort to connect services to the needs in schools instead of a one size fits all, top-down approach.

VI. Quality of the Project Evaluation

The MS Delta GU Partnership evaluation will prioritize reporting on project performance as measured by required federal performance measures, along with a series of research questions. The goal of the MS Delta GU Partnership is to ensure that students from the low-income target region schools graduate high school, enroll in postsecondary education, and complete college. The evaluation plan will follow the project's logic model and includes two components that demonstrate promising evidence.

The MS Delta GU Partnership evaluation plan adheres to the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Uniform Guidance Regulations, the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), Government Performance and Result Act (GPRA), and national GEAR UP objectives.

6.1. The extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible

MS Delta GU Partnership will utilize mixed/multiple methods evaluation that includes rigorous research using quasi-experimental design (QEDs), formative and summative assessment and an analytical yearly review of project goals and objectives. The *primary purpose of the evaluation is to measure progress toward the project objectives and performance measures set forth in this proposal (pg. 20), provide continuous feedback to MS Delta GU Partnership school districts and stakeholders, and to produce evidence-based results and strategies that can guide future college access programs.*

Longitudinal data collection system. Central to the MS Delta GU Partnership is a robust longitudinal data collection system (Performance Insights) for gathering and storing identifiable student-level academic performance, post-secondary enrollment, and GEAR UP service data. Performance Insights (Pi) provides a central database which allows for efficient and accurate transmission of all student, demographic, course academic data, attendance, and end of year testing performance. In addition, students’ post-secondary enrollment and persistence data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a third-party verification warehouse of postsecondary enrollment, will be imported to Pi. These capabilities improve the efficiency in which outcome measures and project performance can be measured and acted on.

The data system will enable increased data-driven decisions about the effectiveness of programming ensuring progress towards improving GEAR UP outcomes, and effective management of all GEAR UP funding.

Figure 6.1 Project Design- Evaluation



4. Evaluation

MS Delta GU will understand students are meeting expectations using:

- ▶ Measures of Postsecondary Readiness (e.g., high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment and persistence)
- ▶ Measures of Postsecondary Success (e.g., college completion, job placement in middle skills or higher position)
- ▶ Measures of Career Readiness (e.g., employability skills, knowledge about career pathways)

Student and Family Surveys will be administered to students and their families every year to obtain information about their perceptions and expectations regarding current experiences within GEAR UP, the students’ future academic goals, and where they are on their path toward achieving their postsecondary goals. A School Staff Survey and College Going Culture assessment will be administered each year to all staff in GEAR UP schools to obtain information about their perceptions regarding the teacher’s role in supporting students’ postsecondary educational goals and to provide insight into college going culture.

The following **Questions** will address formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and embedded research studies.

Table 6.1 MS Delta GU Partnership Evaluation Efforts

#	Type	Question
1	Formative Evaluation	What is the effect of targeted services on increasing academic success as measured by GPA, as a predictor of postsecondary success?
2	Formative Evaluation	What is the effect of targeted services on increasing high school completion and postsecondary aspirations?
3	Summative Evaluation	What is the relationship between the number of service events (occurrences) and hours (duration) spent in MS Delta GU services in middle and high school and college enrollment, persistence and completion?
4	Research Study 1	What effect does Summer Counseling have on postsecondary enrollment compared to the control group, the preceding cohort of students who did not receive GEAR UP services?
5	Research Study 2	What are the unique barriers to postsecondary education for rural students?
7	Research Study 3	What has been the learning impact of the COVID-19 disruption of school for cohort students?
8	Research Study 4	What effect does Dual Enrollment participation in high school have on postsecondary enrollment, and persistence?
9	Research Study 5	What effect do GEAR UP services have on postsecondary enrollment compared to the control group, the preceding cohort of students who did not receive GEAR UP services?
10	Research Study 6	What is the relationship between the WORK model services and the student outcome of gainful employment?

Quantitative measures in the MS Delta GU Partnership evaluation plan include descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate and track the progress of project outcomes. More

advanced statistical and analytic techniques will be used to examine the relationships between GEAR UP service delivery and the project's outcomes. The hierarchical structure of the quantitative data (e.g., students nested within schools) will be accounted for in the analyses using either a fixed- or random-effects (i.e., hierarchical linear or linear mixed modeling) modeling with a preference for the random-effect approach. Employing random-effects models will allow the evaluation to provide statistical control for student-level characteristics (e.g., gender, race-ethnicity, first-generation) and school-level factors (e.g., percentage of free and reduced-price lunch, cohort graduation rate, percentage of fully licensed teachers). Additional analyses also include chi-square, Pearson and Spearman correlations, and Analysis of Variance. The primary summative impact analysis will employ logistic regression to evaluate the differential results between the students who enrolled and those who did not enroll in college. Standardized effect sizes will be calculated to determine the magnitude of the effects (e.g., Hedge's *g* or Cox index). The longitudinal quantitative plan includes linking all data with a unique identifier so that specific service interventions can be measured in relation to their impact on the MS Delta GU Partnership.

Qualitative data will also be collected through focus groups and open-ended survey questions. NVivo will be used to manually thematically code and analyze data to identify common topics in unstructured text. Focus groups will be guided by widely accepted design and the application of sound manual and analytic coding techniques to produce valuable insights and actionable results from the project's qualitative data⁸⁷.

6.2 The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes

The MS Delta Partnership evaluation plan provides systematic review of performance and outcome data to ensure short-, mid-, and long-term outcomes are met. As outlined in Table

2.4, the logic model is the theory of action. Formative evaluation efforts include analysis at the student-level made possible through frequent data pulls from the student information system and alignment with the longitudinal tracking system Performance Insights. This longitudinal student-level data will: 1) facilitate the development of MS Delta GU Partnership annual service framework, 2) guide professional development to better facilitate local programming, 3) facilitate the coordination of reporting annual evaluation results, 4) identify and summarize performance measures and student outcomes, and 5) provide continuous feedback in easy-to-understand formats. Analyses will allow for deeper understanding of student characteristics of students who are most at risk and with time to act on that evidence.

The MS Delta GU Partnership will investigate student learning loss as a result of disruptions caused by COVID-19 (Research Study 3). Previous year student end of grade test scores will be analyzed using predictive modeling to determine which students and schools need targeted strategies to mitigate any slide in academic preparedness. Performance feedback will be crucial in getting students on track before entering high school.

One of the MS Delta Partnership's primary goals is to better use data to drive student progress. Given the commitment to enhance data use, this is the ideal model to truly implement a formative, ongoing framework that provides real-time performance feedback to leverage target GEAR UP services. The continuous evaluation includes data analyses at the student-level to target students for services that will most help them meet the educational objectives of the GEAR UP grant. Student-level analyses will also allow for disaggregation of data to understand the student characteristics of those most at-risk. This model will ensure that GEAR UP funds have a strong return on investment for the students served by the MS Delta GU Partnership. The continuous improvement model will be three-fold: 1) through student-level assessment targeted

services will be provided to students most at risk; 2) through PD the GEAR UP school personnel will be trained to implement school-wide strategies to better use data and build a college-going culture; and 3) the MS Delta GU Partnership will work to change local and state policy to best meet the needs of students and families.

6.3 The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings.

The MS Delta Partnership will make a substantial evaluation investment increasing the body of evidence for all college access programs, serving as the catalyst for groundbreaking contributions to assist community and school-based efforts to increase college attainment for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The MS Delta GU Partnership evaluation team plans on first and foremost producing evidence to support students in Mississippi to be prepared and succeed in postsecondary education. A second focus is to build on the body of evidence and understanding what support students most need to complete a post-secondary degree.

The project proposes a series of research questions intended for peer reviewed publication, coupled with presentations and dissemination at national college access and success conferences. Six Research Studies will be conducted focusing on the following questions: (1) What effect do GU services have on postsecondary enrollment compared to the control group, the preceding cohort of students who did not receive GU services? (2) What are the unique barriers to postsecondary education for rural students? (3) What is the relationship between WORK model services and the student outcome of gainful employment? (4) What has been the learning impact of the COVID-19 disruption of school for GU students? (5) What effect does dual enrollment participation in high school have on postsecondary enrollment, and persistence? (6) What effect does **Summer Counseling** have on postsecondary enrollment

compared to the control group, the preceding cohort of students who did not receive GEAR UP services?

The intended studies and lessons learned will be shared so that other school districts will be well-positioned to make policy and programming decisions based on quantitative, longitudinal data. Findings from the MS Delta GU evaluation will be published and disseminated through presentations at national conferences (National College Attainment Network, National Council for Community and Educational Partnerships) and peer reviewed publication.

6.4 The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well-implemented, produce promising evidence (as defined in 34 CFR 77.1(c)) about the project's effectiveness

This evaluation will provide a rigorous evaluation of services and programs as required by the 2017 White House Budget (Office of Management and Budget, 2017) and will promote services and practices that show evidence of promise and moderate evidence of effectiveness (both defined by 34 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 77.1). Additionally, statistical, and analytic techniques used will assess moderating or enabling variables between family and student characteristics, GU activities, and GU outcomes. Examining the moderating and non-linear relationships between these factors will enhance the collective understanding of the factors that result in students being prepared and successful in enrolling, persisting, and graduating with the necessary skills to contribute to Mississippi's economic growth. The quality and type of data collected combined with the use of advanced and robust evaluation and analytic methodologies will enhance the collective understanding of the nuances of college access and produce promising evidence to guide future GU implementation on a national scale.

The MS Delta GU evaluation design and proposed activities are based on researched practices to produce a strong theory, making it likely the evaluation will demonstrate a rationale and show evidence of promise. As presented in the logic model (Table 2.2) the

components/activities related to **dual enrollment, summer counseling** will be replicated using a quasi-experimental design and evaluated adhering to the WWC Standards. These replication efforts meet the standards for yielding “promising evidence” for a variety of reasons. First, they include adequate assessments of the key study components (e.g., type and frequency of services received and intervention enrollment). Second, they have relevant outcomes (e.g., PS enrollment, PS persistence, and PS completion) that will be captured using an innovative longitudinal data-tracking system. Third, they will use the appropriate statistical analyses to both control for selection biases and appropriately account of the inherently hierarchical structure of the project (e.g., students nested within schools). Fourth, the use of random-effects models to account for the studies nested-effects combined with the project sample size will provide adequate statistical power for the proposed analyses. As a result, the projects findings have the potential to meet WWC standards for promising evidence of the effectiveness.

In addition to the local evaluation plan, the MS Delta GU Partnership is committed to strengthening evaluation in the broader GEAR UP community by participating in the national GEAR UP College and Career Readiness Evaluation Consortium (CCREC), a learning community comprised of multiple GEAR UP State and Partnership grantees and national education organizations. To date, CCREC has created a data infrastructure and collected data on over 100,000 students which will be analyzed to evaluate the impact of GEAR UP activities on select secondary and postsecondary outcomes. In 2019 CCREC expanded to include new members with a goal to build capacity to utilize evaluation for continuous improvement, to demonstrate the impact of GEAR UP across local, state, and national levels of implementation,

and to further advance a culture of evidence-based decision-making within the GEAR UP community.

VII. Adequacy of Resources

Delta State University has the academic expertise, infrastructure, and institutional knowledge to successfully launch and implement the MS Delta GU Partnership and commits these resources to provide the robust leadership necessary to successfully administer, implement, achieve, and sustain the far-reaching and bold goals of this project. Delta State University further brings substantial grant and business management capacity to this project, along with a history of proven effectiveness in administering sponsored projects. The numerous partners and match commitments the University has secured will ensure adequate resources for the cost-effective delivery of services and implementation of federal goals. The MS Delta GU Partnership has intentionally embedded strategies to support the project during implementation as well as sustain the effort once the project is over.

7.1 The adequacy of support, including facilities, equipment, supplies and other resources from the applicant organization or the lead applicant organization and the relevance and demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project to the implementation and success of the project.

Delta State University, the lead applicant organization, has led college-access and preparation programs in the region including TRIO and other local grant funded programs. Local Mississippi communities see Delta State as a trusted source for information and expertise to provide best practices and programs to advance the goal of increasing postsecondary enrollment and completion. Therefore, the MS Delta GU Partnership is a natural extension of this existing work to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for increasing postsecondary enrollment and completion and evaluating the services or set of services most closely related to successful student outcomes. Delta State University fully commits to the support of the MS Delta GU

Partnership as demonstrated by the generous commitment of resources which more than **adequately support** the proposed programs and services.

Facilities: The MS Delta GU Partnership is housed on the campus of Delta State University within the Center for Community and Economic Development. This location ensures that a wide array of resources and support are dedicated to GEAR UP such as all academic departments and faculty, the support of the full administration, and supportive services from Student Affairs.

Equipment and Supplies: All staff have secure laptops that allow them remote access to email and internet, printer, office supplies, audiovisual technology, and access to printing and mailing.

MS Delta Personnel Support: The MS Delta GU Partnership will receive information, guidance, and support from MS Delta State’s in-house expertise, including the Offices of Financial aid, Admissions, public relations, marketing, research, information technology, and human resource departments.

Table 7.1: Delta State University Commitment

Contributing Partners Associated with Delta State University	Contribution/Programming/Interventions
Center for Community and Economic Development	Office space for Project Director, Finance Specialist and Coordinator, conference room, and all work-related materials
Office of Admissions	Support to areas schools for application assistance and college matching
Information Technology	Information technology support is provided 24 hours a day via a contract with Ellucian, with full time staff on campus at all times
Office of Human Resources	The Human Resources Department will post position announcements and provide assistance in the hiring process
Marketing and Communications	The Office of Marketing and Communications will provide design expertise in the development of promotional materials
Office of Financial Aid	The Office of Financial Aid will provide technical assistance to program staff and resources to program participants on financial aid, FAFSA, and information about financial resources
Office of Sponsored Programs	accounting and financial reporting, general liability insurance, grants management support through the Institutional Grants Office, and annual auditing services for all of its externally-funded projects
Academic Affairs	Access to content-area experts through a diverse faculty, PD to teachers, and guidance to MS Delta GEAR UP staff on the development of strategic services.
Office of General Counsel	Assistance with review and execution of contracts that are compliant with state, federal, and institutional policies. Provides guidance on overall compliance with FERPA and other state and federal laws

	applicable to GEAR UP
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7.2 The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the number of persons to be served and to the anticipated results and benefits.

The MS Delta GU Partnership developed a budget plan that is reasonable and cost-effective given the magnitude and scope of services to be provided and the number of students, schools, and parents to be served. The MS Delta GU Partnership will provide a broad range of direct services to over 2,000 students to achieve the results stated in Table 2.2 and the ultimate benefit of increased college enrollment and persistence for cohort students. The MS Delta GU Partnership will also provide services to partner schools, more than 500 teachers and principals, and over 2,000 families.

To provide the services described in the Services Section, the MS Delta GU Partnership is requesting roughly \$2,183,200 million per year for the seven-year grant period in order to provide direct-service support to 2729 students annually. This equates to an average of \$800 per student. Grant-funded salaries are comparable to other positions within the University. Volunteer matching salaries are based on the Corporation for National and Community Service.

MS Delta GU partners are central to program implementation and success. As a result, the MS Delta GU Partnership developed strong partnerships with public schools, postsecondary institutions, and local and state agencies to ensure efficient, effective, and comprehensive services. Table 7.2 outlines the MS Delta GU partners committed to the implementation and success of the project and how their programming relates to GU objectives.

Table 7.2: MS Delta GU Partners and Their Commitment

Contributing Partners (Commitment/Match)	GU Objectives	Programming/Interventions (Relevance)
MS Delta Community College	3,4,5,6,7,9	Campus visits, summer programming, Dual Enrollment
LEAs	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	Campus visits, in-person tutoring, PD, local interventions

Contributing Partners (Commitment/Match)	GU Objectives	Programming/Interventions (Relevance)
Foundation for the Mid-South	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13	Implementation and oversight of all programming
Woodward Hines	3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11	Get2College Center to support choosing, applying and paying for college, college-advising corps members, FAFSA completion
Higher Purpose Co.	10,12, 13	Entrepreneurial Education
Casey Family Programs	10, 11	Increased family programming
NSPARK	10,11,12,13	WorkLife App development
Village of Wisdom	6,7,8	Community and family programming
CARES	3,4,6,7,8,	Mentoring and family programming
Tutor.com, Princeton Review	1,2,3,5	Virtual tutoring

7.3 The potential for continued support of the project after Federal funding, including, as appropriate, the demonstrated commitment of appropriate entities to such support.

A new module of the Performance Insights database has been developed to associate the project service costs with outcomes achieved. Reports generated by student and service cost will provide **cost analysis** capability for the full grant. Additionally, Vela Institute will produce an **economic impact study** to highlight the return on investment of GU dollars. The report will compare the Federal funds invested to the economic impact of the increased income potential for students because of increased postsecondary education; clearly indicating the possible cost/benefit of the Federal dollars spent and the return on investment realized.

Expanded access to higher education is of the highest priority to Delta State University, Mississippi, and the network of partners in this proposal. The MS Delta GU Partnership includes a comprehensive network of organizations committed to the core proposition of enhancing opportunities for all students to successfully transition to high school, postsecondary education and become career ready. This network is made up of national and local organizations that will provide services and support in a culturally appropriate context to rural, severely under-resourced schools that are majority minority, with an emphasis on sustainability. MDC’s State of the South elaborates,

“For rural areas, the definition of immediate success or improved economic well-being is different from their urban counterparts. Rural areas have a smaller employer base, less robust public infrastructure, an aging workforce, and fewer four-year colleges or universities. Short-term, front-end investments are not enough to address these challenges and elicit sustainable growth in rural areas. Investment must go beyond front-end capital and incorporate process-oriented models, ones that involve continued technical assistance, strategies for scale, and leadership development to fulfill a vision of sustainable growth.”⁸⁸

To this end, the Woodward Hines Foundation, will maintain the center in the MS Delta target area after the GEAR UP grant ends to continue providing specific supports to students, workshops for families and the College Advising Corp model in the region.

The Performance Insights database will continue to be available to participating school districts for continued data collection and tracking of postsecondary patterns of their students. Professional development will provide teachers and administrators with the leadership tools and increased teaching skills lasting beyond the grant. Additionally, coordinators will have become vital resources within their schools, moving students towards postsecondary education. Once the project has been established continuation costs will diminish while economic impact will expand, making targeted fundraising possible. In grant years 6 and 7, workshops for LEAs and coordinators will provide grant writing skills.

The Participatory Evaluation team will collect and evaluate data and the progress of the evaluation so that by grant year 5 the team can begin to make recommendations as to what activities/services are making the most impact and what activities/services each LEA should be heavily investing in to sustain the investment of the MS Delta GU Partnership. The two-year

cohort design is important for sustainability to track positive gains in student outcomes and the services related to those in not just one year but two making the results more robust and reliable. The team will also continue to look at student performance in grades that come after the cohort to look for signs that increases in student performance are truly sustaining.

The immense needs of the rural MS Delta GU target region are deeply related to the impacts racism and poverty has on the rural region resulting in economic and educational disparities disproportionately impacting Black/African American residents--low rates of academic readiness and low education attainment rates. An investment in supporting students, their families, and educators through MS Delta GU Partnership services across the education pipeline will help the community thrive by helping students cultivate necessary college and career readiness skills that will boost the local economy, attract employers, and empower entrepreneurs.

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