

USAID Youth Challenge Alliance Program: Providing Opportunities to Guatemala's Vulnerable Youths

Washington, D.C. — May 12, 2008 — In recognition of Creative Associates' pioneering success in helping former gang members turn their lives around through mentoring and job opportunities, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded Creative the Youth Challenge Alliance Program in Guatemala.

The award builds on Creative's successes under a longtime predecessor project known as the Youth Alliance Program, which developed unique education and employment programs targeting the country's vulnerable youth and former gang members through initiatives including Challenge 10—Peace for the EX™, Challenge 100—Peace for Guatemala and seven Outreach Centers For My Neighborhood.

"Integrating and improving the ability of vulnerable youths to access the labor market and succeed, is not only critical to their well being and that of their families, it is equally important to the national security of the region and the United States," said M. Charito Krivant, President and CEO of Creative Associates. "We have found that when these youth are given a chance to succeed, they do, and become responsible contributors to civil society and the economy."

Creative will continue to provide workforce development opportunities to reduce the risk of youth entering or taking part in gang activity. Toward that end, Creative will work to leverage private sector, faith-based organizations and government resources to provide adequate interventions for at-risk youths.

The Youth Challenge Program (YCP) will also provide employment, mentoring and training for 200 former gang members – both young men and women alike – by building on alliances developed with the private sector under the Youth Alliance Program which was implemented by Creative from 2004 until earlier this year.

"The YCP will build on the Youth Alliance Program's impact which continues to benefit Guatemalan youth, who would otherwise have few alternatives to counteract the powerful influence of gangs," said Harold Sibaja, Creative's Latin America Regional Representative and Director of Youth Challenge Program. "Former gang members are now fully employed due to our efforts and many vulnerable youths are kept from the streets by frequenting our Outreach Centers. Creative, working with USAID, will continue to provide sustainable crime-prevention capacity through training, education and income generating activities."

Under the 18-month \$1 million cooperative agreement, Creative will engage its technical expertise in vocational training, youth education, alliance building among the private sector, public sector and faith-based organizations to improve the lives of vulnerable and at-risk-youths in Guatemala, a group that makes up 66 percent of Guatemala's total population. Of those, many face challenges finishing elementary school. The number of those involved in gangs regionally is estimated by the U.N. to approximate 70,000 and of these, 14,000 are believed to be in Guatemala.

Given these demographic factors, the YCP's attention to youths is timely and critical to the country's future socio-economic development. With a focus on impoverished youths who live in neighborhoods with high unemployment and limited job training opportunities, it's expected that the YCP will provide positive alternatives to street life and crime.

In addition to workforce development and the insertion of former gang members into society, the YCP's other activities include establishing at least 10 new Outreach Centers to provide vocational, recreational and educational services to vulnerable youths. The program will also collaborate with the Government of Guatemala to develop and implement a youth focused crime-prevention strategy.

The YCP will also benefit from the activities of the Regional Youth Alliance USAID-SICA for Central America and Mexico, another Creative-implemented program. Known in Spanish as Alianza Joven Regional USAID-SICA, the program will provide local, national and regional stakeholders the necessary resources to use proven community-based gang prevention approaches and assess regional legal frameworks and practices for multi-country policy and legal reforms.

To ensure sustainability, the Creative-implemented YCP will support the implementation of the newly formed Youth Alliance Association, known in Spanish as the Asociación Alianza Joven, (AAJ), by providing organizational development support aimed at making the Association a formal institution, capable of soliciting and serving as a legal recipient of funding and in-kind support from donors including the USAID, the Government of Guatemala, faith-based organizations and the private sector.

On a regional level, YCP activities are designed to help reduce the pool of potential candidates of youth crime and violence in Guatemala, and help stem the tide of illegal youth migration to the United States. The YCP will also continue to build on the alliance developed under the Youth Alliance Program with the Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industrias y Financieras (CACIF), a prominent umbrella organization for nine branches of private business.

Working with Creative, CACIF will provide job training and placement to former gang members, both young men and women, as it did under a previous job training program, Challenge 100 – Peace for Guatemala. That program paired former gang members with business executives for mentoring, training and jobs. Through its alliance with CACIF, Creative raised the business community's awareness of the limited opportunities available to these young people and the tremendous potential they have to contribute to society and the economy when provided with the proper resources.

For more information, please contact Lynn Sheldon, Creative Project Manager for the Youth Challenge Alliance Program, at LynnS@cai.com.