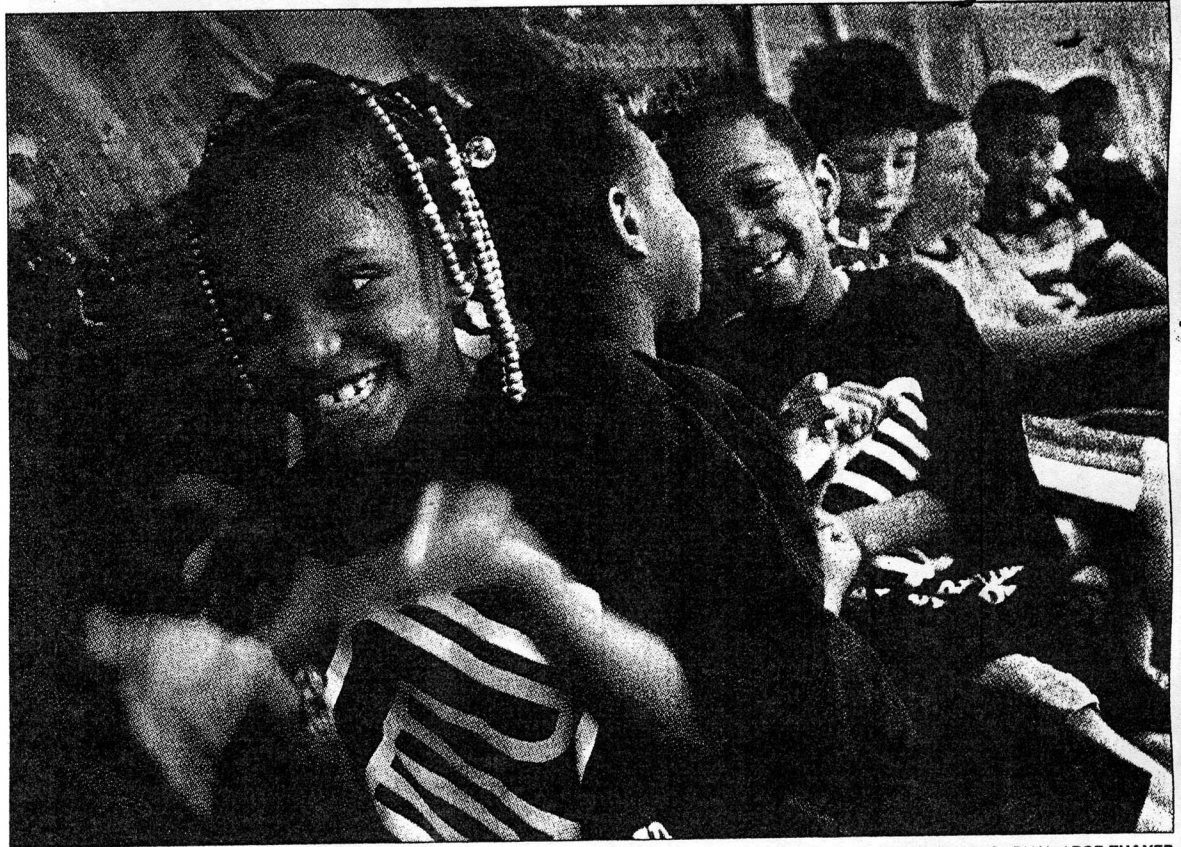


# Playing by new rules

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**Kaylianni Threats**, left, 6, of Providence, plays a patty-cake game with friends at the Wanskuck Boys & Girls Club in Providence, one of the programs that will benefit from new HUD guidelines for allocating federal block grants.

## Smaller programs brace for loss of federal dollars

By **ALISHA A. PINA**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — It's no wonder 17-year-old Noel Puello thinks of New Urban Arts as his home.

He makes waffles there most mornings and races back after school to unwind and laugh with friends. It's also where the budding fashion designer and sculptor honed what could be his future career.

"It's one of the only places I feel comfortable being me," Puello said. While he's excited about college in the fall, "I don't want to leave."

New Urban Arts' executive director, Jason Yoon, says the studio's programs, all free, expose nearly 450 teens to opportunities they probably couldn't afford or find in the distressed neighborhoods where many live. Its artist mentors also encourage them to be leaders, dream wildly and embrace what's outside of their com-



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**Emmy Bright**, an artist mentor with New Urban Arts, watches Sheryl Torres stitch the binding on her art project.

fort zones.

The nationally honored organization — which outgrew its two previous spaces — never turns away students and relies on charitable, local and federal grants for more than half of its

\$450,000 of operating costs.

Providence is not likely to help fund New Urban Arts — and possibly more than 60 others it previously supported — this coming fiscal year.

The city is being pushed by the federal Department of

Housing and Urban Development to change how it distributes the community development money it has been getting for nearly four decades. The new strategy calls for awarding a few large grants — rather than many small grants — so that the money will have a greater impact.

Not complying, HUD warned in a February letter, would be "cause for concern" when the federal agency considers its next allocation for Providence.

Communities nationwide, including many in Rhode Island, already switched to HUD's approach because they want to help the most with less grant money.

Providence received 8.6 percent less — about \$4.7 million — from HUD for the coming year. This year's money was 16.5 percent less than the previous year.

# GRANTS

Continued from A1

## Programs face loss of funding

For this coming year, the city plans to give seven \$250,000 grants and about 22 grants of less than \$110,000. Twelve community centers also will continue to get money. In addition, most of the council members will receive about \$58,000 each to invest in the neighborhoods they represent.

In total, Mayor Angel Taveras proposes to put nearly \$3.7 million in HUD money back into the city. The remaining money, less than \$1 million, would be used to pay the Planning Department staff that administers the money and other program costs.

While Providence City Council members have agreed to the new approach, they express concern about the many organizations that will get no money.

"I don't think [HUD officials] realize how much these programs, ones that we know in our city, make a difference, too," City Councilman Nicholas Narducci said.

Narducci is chairman of the council's urban renewal and planning subcommittee that recommends to the full council what organizations should get money and how



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**Sherry Torres, 16**, has been coming to New Urban Arts since she was a freshman at Central High School. The program's request for \$20,000 in community block grant funds has been denied under new federal guidelines that favor larger programs that will benefit more participants.

much. The subcommittee considers the list recommended by the mayor, as well as other applications. Several groups pitch directly to the subcommittee after learning

they haven't made Taveras' cut.

The subcommittee plans to recommend its choices soon to the full council, which is to submit the plan to HUD by May 11.

"There are a lot of small organizations that need the money just as badly as the big ones," Narducci said. "And they depend on the Community Development Block Grant money to get through."

His example was Roger Williams Day Care Center, a well-respected preschool in South Providence for nearly 190 children. It asked for \$60,000 and didn't make the mayor's cut.

Others that are not on Taveras' list include: the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, which requested \$40,000 for its community kitchen and culinary-arts job training; First Works, which asked for \$50,000 for its arts program for at-risk youth; and the Women's Center of Rhode Island, which requested \$13,980 for its violence-protection plan.

New Urban Arts asked for \$20,000 — and did not make the cut.

"We understand there are excellent organizations that are doing excellent work that will not get this funding," said Garry Bliss, the Planning Department employee primarily responsible for administering the grants once they are approved. He worked with the mayor on his list and helped compose the new strategy for the city with HUD's guidance.

His January presentation to the council subcommittee said HUD believes, Providence's previous process had a "diluted" impact. It "lacks a strategic focus, fails to support significant outcomes and does not provide meaningful financial support to projects," Bliss' slide reads.

Bliss said the new approach builds on best practices, accommodates the reduced funding and allows the



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**Diamond Cassell, 8**, right, concentrates on her next move during a game of "Sorry!" with fellow club member Aliyah Preston, also 8, at the Wanskuck Boys & Girls Club in Providence.

Planning Department to fully adhere to HUD's strict monitoring regulations. He cited a 2011 report from HUD that found 13 violations, though he said they were not significant. The findings included: a grant used to help an organization refinance an existing mortgage was not an eligible use; the planning department's economic development revolving loan fund was not properly administered; and another organization awarded money did not meet HUD's national objective for the grant.

"It's a process that requires you to say no a lot," said Bliss, "but that does not mean the organization is not doing great things."

To soften the blow to organizations denied the HUD grants, the mayor's staff says some may receive other city money. Providence, for example, administers the Dexter Donation Charitable Fund that gives money to nonprofit organizations that provide

food, clothing, shelter, health care and other services. About \$100,000 remains to be awarded this year; \$170,000 was recently awarded.

"These [Community Development Block Grant] reforms are intended to strategically invest in community development and improve the quality of life for low-income and moderate-income Providence," Taveras said in his introduction letter to the council subcommittee.

The mayor wants to award one of the \$250,000 grants to the Boys & Girls Club of Providence, specifically the Wanskuck and Chad Brown facilities.

The six clubs in the city collectively serve 5,000 children each year with swimming programs, homework clubs, teen outreach and affordable childcare. Working with the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, the clubs also feed 48,000 meals annually to the children, mostly suppers during the school year and

breakfast, lunch and dinner in the summer, said David M. Bodah, its senior director of development.

The cost per child is \$500 each year — membership to the club is \$24 a month — and its annual operating budget is \$3.2 million.

"Without their support, we probably wouldn't even be able to operate here," Bodah said while talking about how the clubs spent previous grants: to comply with sprinkler codes, make buildings accessible to the handicapped and fix aged and leaking roofs.

The money, if approved, would primarily allow Wanskuck to renovate an out-of-service pool and create a teaching pool with new filtration and deck lighting.

Pools, Bodah said, are a "magnet for kids." It's their most effective way to get them in the door, "and then we can help more."

apina@providencejournal.com  
(401) 277-7465

### BY THE NUMBERS

#### Community Development grant spending

The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development awards money annually for community development. Providence officials give that money as grants to organizations and community centers that provide critical services, improve neighborhood conditions or enhance the lives of city residents.

**\$4,696,207**

Money awarded by HUD for the fiscal year that begins July 1

**\$5,137,432**

Money awarded by HUD for the current fiscal year

**8.6%**

Reduction of money awarded by HUD for the coming year

**\$6,152,614 million**

Money awarded by HUD for the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2011

**16.5%**

Reduction of money awarded by HUD this fiscal year versus the last

**105**

Number of organizations and community centers awarded grants in this fiscal year

**41**

Number of organizations and community centers recommended by mayor to receive grants in the coming year

**44**

Number of grants \$10,000 or less awarded for this fiscal year

**4**

Number of grants \$10,000 or less recommended by mayor for the coming year

**\$1,542**

Smallest grants awarded for this fiscal year

**\$7,796**

Smallest grant recommended by mayor for the coming year

SOURCE: Providence Planning