A. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF AGENCY SETTING

The North Missoula Community Development Corporation (NMCDC) incorporated in 1996 and received its IRS nonprofit status in 1998. The NMCDC’s vision is to build a healthy neighborhood with opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to live, work and play. The organization’s mission is to build from community strengths to form partnerships for neighborhood revitalization.

The North-Missoula Community Development Corporation (NMCDC) has been working more than four years setting up a cutting-edge, five million dollar revitalization project in its distressed neighborhood. This is the most timely, challenging, and ambitious project the neighborhood-based nonprofit has ever taken on – and the one with the greatest potential reward for the community. Practicum students will be involved in the planning aspects of the Burns Street Square Project which includes 17 new homes for low- and moderate-income homebuyers and a Community Center building to house commercial services and social programs for the underserved community. The building will include space for a shared-use community kitchen (with nutrition education and job training opportunities) and a café and coffee shop with public meeting space and supplemental nutrition services for neighborhood children. Currently, the Missoula Community Food Co-op (a small member owned, food cooperative concentrating on local farm and ranch products and whole and bulk foods) is housed in the building. The Co-op opened its doors in December 2007.

B. DESCRIPTION OF CLIENT GROUP

The NMCDC’s constituents live north of the Clark Fork River between Russell and Madison Streets. The neighborhoods here comprise the old Northside, Westside and residential downtown (sometimes colloquially lumped together and referred to as simply “the Northside”). The total population of this area according to the U.S. 2000 Census is 8,368 persons, approximately 20 percent greater than ten years before. Overall, the NMCDC service area contains 25 percent of Missoula’s minority population. In 2002, the neighborhood’s elementary school, Lowell, had a student population in which 18 percent were minorities. Of this number 63 percent were Native American Indian, 23 percent were Hispanic American, 6 percent African American and 6 percent Asian American. Seventy-one percent of Lowell’s children were, in 2002, eligible for free and reduced school meal programs.

C. LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Students involved in a practicum at NMCDC will be involved in the Burns Street Square Project as community organizers and planners. The NMCDC owns the acre-and-a-half Burns Square and has completed the project’s housing component. The organization is currently spending a federal appropriation of $950,000 (from an original application for $1.5 million) to retrofit the commercial building. As a platform for raising the additional funds for the completion of the building’s
commercial kitchen and cafe, the NMCDC has been planning for the needs and strategies for the nutrition center. Students will be key players in the development of the plan and will work with a steering committee of community stakeholders to formalize infrastructure, staffing, and programming needs, and to help develop strong and engaged stakeholder relationships with the project. They will learn about and engage in community coalition building, steering committee facilitation, media strategies, action planning, and community organizing skills and efforts.

D. EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

The NMCDC has a small staff and limited resources. The office atmosphere is cooperative and collegial. Staff and volunteers share mission and vision, as well as space. Students will work closely with a supervisor and a VISTA member. A detailed work plan that incorporates learning objectives will be collaboratively constructed but students will also be expected to work independently to move the project forward and follow through on key tasks and planning details. Good writing and communication skills are a must and the ability to work cooperatively with others is crucial to the development of the Burns Street Square Project.