

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Energy Express is a research-based summer reading and nutrition program for children in low income, rural West Virginia communities. Energy Express promotes the school success of children entering 1st -6th grades by helping maintain nutritional status and reading achievement. Serving 80 sites across the state, 420 AmeriCorps members engaged as mentors provide research based literacy activities that make reading meaningful for children. In addition, 80 AmeriCorps members serving as community coordinators recruit, train and supervise more than 3,000 family and community volunteers who support children's learning through the provision of one on one reading and other literacy activities at Energy Express sites. Children are provided free breakfast and lunch, served family-style, each day. Evaluation results demonstrate that the typical "summer slide" is halted and reading scores increase an average of 2-4 months for children who complete Energy Express.

## Rationale and Approach

a. In an ideal world, children would be seen as our most precious resource. The future is theirs to create. Our country has incredible wealth, yet many children do not have their most basic needs met. We must look at how to help children navigate a world that makes things increasingly difficult for them. The gap between the haves and the have-nots in this country is growing ever larger. Providing adequate nutrition and strong literacy skills serve the two most fundamental needs of children: to be healthy and to secure an education on their path to productive futures.

Energy Express promotes the success of school-aged children living in low-income and rural West Virginia communities by maintaining their nutritional status and reading achievement during the summer. The program reverses the well-documented "summer slide" of poor children. Children who do not receive support during the summer fall behind their more advantaged peers, and without school breakfast or lunch, poor children lose ground nutritionally.

According to the 2011 Annie E. Casey Foundation data, 23% of all children nationally live in poverty in the US. In WV, 26% of the children live in poverty, making WV's poverty rate for children one of the highest in the country. In 2000, WV's rate was 24%, compared with 17% nationally. Child poverty in WV is a significant, persistent problem.

U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, "Table S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months," documents that 67 % of the 55 counties are above the national poverty level demonstrating that poverty is not just in one small pocket in the state but it is widespread and pervasive. There are some counties within the state where the poverty level is almost twice the

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national percentage. Historically, families who live in poverty have a very difficult time getting out. Studies have shown that 82% of children whose parents have less than a high school diploma live in low-income families, meaning that poverty is often perpetuated across generations.

Children are the most vulnerable to the negative effects of poverty. Energy Express addresses the nutritional and academic needs of children living in poor communities throughout the state. Eligibility for free and reduced-priced meals is also another indicator of economic disparity. 53.5% of WV's school children are approved for free and reduced-price meals with one county as high as 82.9%. Energy Express requires sites to be located at schools where at least 50% of the children are approved for free or reduced-price meals. In 2012, 70% of the children participating in Energy Express qualified to receive free and reduced-price meals.

In the summer months poor families struggle to provide food, therefore the nutritional status of children declines and they return to school in the fall less healthy. Research indicates that malnutrition compromises children's health, cognitive development and educational attainment. Hungry children perform well below their peers in school. The West Virginia Educational Standards Test (WESTEST2) results indicate that economically disadvantaged students perform substantially below their peers in reading achievement.

For decades studies have shown that the "summer slide" has predictable, negative consequences for poor children. The seminal research on the subject indicates that low-income students lose more than two months of reading achievement over the summer months, while their peers make slight gains (Cooper, 1996). When this pattern continues throughout the elementary school years, lower income youth fall more than 2 ½ years behind their more affluent peers by the end of the fifth grade. Two-thirds of the achievement gap between children at the higher and lower end of the economic spectrum can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (Alexander et al, 2007).

In order to reverse the "summer slide" and keep children healthy, Energy Express supports communities that identify summer learning and nutritional loss as a priority. WV communities deal with geographic isolation, poor health, poor infrastructure and lack of opportunities for residents. Energy Express while recognizing these struggles insists that local key stakeholders unite and build collaboratives. The local collaborative submits a proposal and assists with the implementation of the program. All sites must have at least 50% of the children eligible for free or reduced-price meals and have raised 30% of the site costs to support the implementation.

Energy Express has a proven, 20 year record of successfully serving the needs of WV children living in

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poverty by increasing reading skill attainment and improving nutritional status during the summer months. Each year, Energy Express pre-post test results of children completing the program have consistently indicated average increases of 2-5 months in reading skill.

### b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems:

Energy Express is a stand-alone AmeriCorps program based entirely on AmeriCorps service activities; AmeriCorps Members are critical to the implementation of Energy Express in WV. In order to implement the program at 80 sites across the state, 420 members serve as mentors who provide research-based literacy activities for more than 3,000 children and 80 members serve as community coordinators who recruit, train and supervise thousands of volunteers who assist with the program. Member service is focused on three major activities: (1) providing reading-related activities; (2) facilitating nutritious family-style meals; and (3) recruiting family and community members to assist with these activities. Sites follow the Energy Express research-based program model: Reading in a print-rich environment; Nutritious meals served family-style; Small groups; Cooperative environment; Family and community involvement; Ethic of service and civic responsibility. Members serve a minimum of 300 hours in 80 low-income, rural community sites in WV. Most Energy Express sites are in public schools; several are in churches or community centers. A professional educator serving as a Site Supervisor is responsible for supervising members. Each site serves between 32-64 children entering 1st through 6th grades. Children are divided into younger (grades 1-3) and older groups (grades 4-6). In order to increase (maintain and or increase) children's reading scores, members serving as mentors work with groups of 8 children using a place-based curriculum that encourages reading. The curriculum follows 6 weekly themes focused on the child and the people and places to which the child is connected: Myself, Family, Friends, Homeplace, Community, and Making My World a Better Place. Mentors guide children through enriching integrated book-based experiences that make reading meaningful -- writing and performing plays, reading aloud, creating books, and reading with a volunteer for 20 minutes each day. Creative and exciting art activities engage children and help make reading come alive. Each week every child receives a free theme-based book to take home and keep. During Making My World a Better Place week, children do a community service project, such as reading to nursing home residents or writing and recording public service announcements about reading. Small groups facilitate the development of strong connections and bonds between members and children which is important for at-risk children (youth). The small group of children works as a team in a cooperative environment. The accomplishments of the group are celebrated. Members and

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children share breakfast and lunch served family-style. During these meals children learn to make choices, assume responsibility, cooperate and engage in conversation. The atmosphere is relaxed and inviting. The meals provide 58% of daily nutritional requirements to children in need.

At each site, one to two members serve as community coordinators. They are responsible for managing the program's volunteer component. They recruit community volunteers including preteens and teens, family members of participating children, members of civic and faith-based organizations, stakeholders, and others to volunteer at Energy Express sites. To ensure safety, community coordinators screen potential volunteers using policies developed by Energy Express and West Virginia University (WVU). They orient volunteers on program policies and procedures and provide training, particularly in one-on-one shared reading strategies. They schedule, supervise, and recognize volunteers. Two community coordinators are placed at sites having a large number of preteen and teens.

The first two weeks of member service include AmeriCorps orientation, pre-service training, site preparation, family visits, and recruiting volunteers. During the six weeks with children, members maintain contact with families and community stakeholders, continue training and reflection activities, and complete a visible community service project. Since Energy Express is a summer program, the 300 hour minimum time service assignment spanning eight weeks is in perfect alignment with the program design and activities. 500 minimum time slots (105.8 FTEs) will be dispersed across the state in 80 low-income communities.

A typical Energy Express service day for members (on site at least 6 hours):

\*8:30-9:00am-Site team meets, reviews daily activity plans and volunteer needs, prepares for the day, and welcomes children, families, and volunteers;

\*9:00-9:30am-Mentors engage in family-style breakfast (mentors with their groups of 8 children and community coordinators with pre-teen and teen volunteers);

\*9:30-12:00pm- Mentors lead children in daily activities that include read aloud, art, writing, drama, cooperative recreation, and one-on-one reading. Community coordinators recruit orient, train, assign tasks, and supervise to support volunteers as they read with children or perform other needed tasks.

Community coordinators engage in public relation efforts including open house events;

\*12:00-12:30pm-Family style lunch with children and volunteers;

\*12:30-1:00pm-Site team says good-bye to children, families, and volunteers. Departure times vary depending on bus schedules and may take up to 45 minutes. Mentors engage children in recreation, including cooperative activities, until they depart.

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1:00-2:30pm- Once children are gone, the site team meets to plan, problem-solve, complete paperwork, receive additional training, plan for site team community service projects, and engage in reflection activities. Mentors maintain contact with children's families through home visits, phone calls, newsletters, notes, and special program activities. They preview potential read aloud books, prepare and gather materials, and prepare activity plans.

Ongoing: Community coordinators keep in touch with volunteers through thank you notes, phone calls, and recognition activities; recruit new volunteers; and engage in public relation efforts for the site. The mentors partner with a faith- or community-based organization to plan, implement, and evaluate their own service project based on identified community needs;

Evenings and weekends- Members continue their service assignment responsibilities and go to the library, gather found objects, and continue community service.

Members serve a key role through their direct implementation of research based learning strategies, facilitation of family-style meals, and work with volunteers.

c. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact:

Energy Express has consistently been successful in achieving performance measure goals and objectives throughout the history of the program. The impact of Energy Express on West Virginia children, AmeriCorps members and communities is well-documented and measurable. During the current competitive funding cycle, Energy Express has supported rural communities in implementing 234 community sites through the dedicated service of AmeriCorps members, professionals and community volunteers and organizations. AmeriCorps member led community service projects designed to meet local needs were implemented through each site.

Literacy Gains-Energy Express employs research-based strategies in phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension and aligns with the West Virginia Department of Education content standards and objectives. Using a stratified random sample and matched pair design, children who complete Energy Express demonstrate significant increases on three subtests (letter/word identification, fluency, and passage comprehension) and broad reading scores of the Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement. In 2012, a statistically significant gain of 3.1 months in reading achievement was documented for children completing Energy Express. Throughout the 20 years of program operation Energy Express has documented statistically significant gains of 2-4 months in reading achievement. During the current competitive funding cycle Energy Express has exceeded the goal that at least 70% of children who complete the program increase or maintain literacy skill. Based on pre-post test results each year, average gains in child literacy skill are consistently documented

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between 2 to 5 months. The program has also exceeded the goal of enrolling at least 3,200 child participants in the program each summer with 3,515 children enrolled in 2010, 3,300 enrolled in 2011, and 3,293 children enrolled in 2012. Each year children participating in Energy Express receive 20,000 free take-home books, and more than 25,000 hours of one on one reading time.

Nutrition-As the relationship between nutrition and academic achievement is well-documented, Energy Express sites provide effective venues for addressing the nutritional needs of children through the delivery of two meals each day. Between June 18 and July 27, 2012 Energy Express sites provided more than 126,000 meals to West Virginia children. This impact on children and families living in small, rural communities is significant. When the longevity of this 20 year program is taken into account, the impact is even more pronounced. During the period between 2006 and 2012 alone, the number of meals served to children in the program was 1,033,018.

Impact on AmeriCorps members-All members receive significant training through their service with Energy Express. In addition to the formal training that they receive, members are provided with invaluable site based experiences and daily mentoring from experienced education professionals through the duration of their 8 weeks of service. One measure of the positive impact of service with Energy Express is a reported increase in efficacy by those who serve. For example, the evaluation of completed mentor post service surveys indicates that the majority of mentors serving in classrooms with children increased their perceived ability to plan and provide educational intervention to children (efficacy) as the result of their service. Analysis of pre -post service surveys for mentors in 2010 demonstrates that at least 70% of mentors rated themselves as having maintained or increased efficacy in providing educational intervention for children. In 2011 69% % of mentors reported gains in confidence and 80% of mentors reported gains in 2012. Most members who serve with Energy Express live in the same isolated, rural communities that they serve. These members would not have any comparable opportunities for training and experience in their communities during the summer months without Energy Express.

Community Impact-Through Energy Express, community collaborative groups in 78-80 rural communities are successfully empowered to meet the needs of children in their communities. Thousands of adult and teen volunteers have been empowered through learning effective strategies for reading with children. AmeriCorps service is spotlighted, and education professionals gain new skills for implementing this research based program model. In addition to their service with children, each Energy Express site completes at least one community service project. The objectives of the service projects are to partner with a community organization, operate in a team driven manner, be visible,

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and meet an identified need. Although site teams are required to complete only one project many exceed this, with 174 projects completed in 2012 and with a total of more than 156 projects completed in 2010 and 2011. Examples include: the distribution of weekend snack packs for participants and siblings, clothing drives, and blood drives.

Long Term Impact-Energy Express has been in operation for 20 years. Between 2001 and 2012 AmeriCorps members were able to secure 875,982 hours of volunteer service through community volunteers. During that same period the total number of children participating in Energy Express summer sessions was 37,017. The long term impact of Energy Express member service is that children from resource poor communities have been able to maintain or increase their reading achievement, and children receive two nutritious meals a day, enabling them to return to school better prepared and healthier in the fall. Through the service efforts of AmeriCorps members, Energy Express has been able to consistently ensure an average gain of 2-5 months in reading achievement for children participating in the program throughout the years of Energy Express AmeriCorps program operation. In addition, the expertise, relationships, and strategies for implementing community change that have been learned through member and community collaborative work with the program will continue to impact West Virginia communities long after Energy Express has ended.

### d. Member Recruitment:

Energy Express, will recruit 500 members for the summers of 2014, 2015, and 2016. Energy Express has a strong record of member recruitment with a majority of enrolled members from rural WV communities. Energy Express successfully employs a multi-level recruitment strategy which relies on collaborative efforts involving numerous organizations on both the state and local levels. Statewide, Energy Express seeks the expertise and assistance of Volunteer WV and the WVU Extension Service's communications and human resources offices. Recruitment materials are distributed to all 55 county WVUES offices and all WV colleges and universities., including press releases. Recruitment visits are made to colleges in WV and adjoining states to promote the program through class presentations, summer job fairs, and booths and displays in busy areas. Special attention is given to minority student offices and disabilities services offices. Some local collaborative groups make visits to high school classrooms and guidance offices. Energy Express has a presence on numerous social networking sites such as Facebook. All current program information is posted online on My AmeriCorps and all online applications are considered.

AmeriCorps members represent the diversity within local communities. WVU Extension, as an equal

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opportunity employer, follows fair and equitable hiring practices and is committed to making reasonable accommodations for members with disabilities. WVU requires that the trained extension faculty member in each county oversee the selection process. Training sessions for agents are held each February. The state office sends screened member applications which meet the requirements for completeness and minimum qualifications to each county. Members are then selected at the local level by a committee appointed by the county collaborative. The local process includes initial screening, interviews using standard questions, and reference checks. Fingerprint based criminal background and National Sex Offender Public Registry checks, conducted prior to the start of service, are handled by the state Energy Express office.

Members serving as mentors must meet minimum qualifications outlined by AmeriCorps, be at least 18 years old, and a full-time college student or college bound graduating high school senior. Members serving as community coordinators must meet the same minimum qualifications with the exception of the college requirement. Members should exhibit the following characteristics: commitment to community service; self-motivated, energetic; flexible; strong communicators; strong cooperative skills; and emotional maturity. It is most desirable that members serving as community coordinators have knowledge of the community and experience working with teens and that the members serving as mentors have experience working with children.

### e. Member Training:

Excellent training materials and protocols have been developed for members serving with Energy Express. All members participate in extensive training at the time of service initiation and ongoing member training takes place at every Energy Express site each day. Six to nine AmeriCorps members are supervised by one site supervisor at each site. Individuals hired as site supervisors are classroom teachers, Title I teachers, or elementary school principals. The first step in member development is to train site supervisors during two and one-half days in the spring and additional sessions at a statewide training in June. Site supervisor training topics include: AmeriCorps program basics, member supervision, Energy Express program model, program fidelity, AmeriCorps member prohibited activities. Print, online and DVD training materials are provided for the supervisors.

Members are provided with on-site training during their first two days of service. On day 1, site supervisors train members on the AmeriCorps program, guidelines and prohibited activities. They assist with completion of required paperwork and address the program model. In counties with more than one site, some of this training is done with multiple sites in attendance. On day 2, County contacts instruct members on policies regarding social justice, professionalism, sexual harassment,

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and recognizing and reporting child abuse or neglect. Members are provided with information regarding Energy Express guidelines, orientation to the site and community, and identification of community needs as a basis for a service project.

Next, a three day Statewide Training is provided to motivate members for service and provide initial program training. Training topics include guidance; family visits; creating a print-rich and art-rich environment; facilitating family-style meals; connecting children, families, and communities; and recruiting, training, and recognizing volunteers. There are sessions on community service projects and reflection. Statewide training is followed by additional on-site training which provides time for members to make family visits and recruit and train volunteers. Rooms are prepared to welcome children, and reading and writing activities are planned. Community Service Project plans are initiated. Continued On-Site Training occurs every day of the program on specific topics identified by members and site supervisors.

Each member receives a manual covering all program components. A demonstration DVD, Connecting Children to Reading, illustrates basic reading strategies and dictation techniques that members and volunteers use with children. Another DVD, Energy Express: Where Breakfast, Lunch and Learning Don't Take a Summer Break, uses actual program footage to illustrate program components. Community coordinators receive a manual that includes sections about recruiting, screening, supervising, tracking, and recognizing volunteers; publicity; and working with teens. The Energy Express state office staff, the WVU literacy team, site supervisors and former members are well-equipped to provide training and technical assistance.

### f. Member Supervision:

Members are under the direct daily supervision of their site supervisor who is a well qualified professional educator. The supervisor ensures that members are implementing the program curriculum and complying with all AmeriCorps and program regulations. Member training and development sessions, including reflection, are focused on activities and concepts that support Energy Express objectives. Two site team meetings are held each day with the site supervisor and members. The meetings take place in the morning before the program begins and in the afternoon after the program ends. The supervisor visits each mentor's group daily, gives assistance when needed, and provides on-site training on a variety of relevant topics. The site supervisor also meets with the community coordinator to review needs and potential volunteers, discuss public relations and give other assistance and advice. Although a great deal of training is provided to members at the outset of service, it is essential that training and support continue throughout the program as members work

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with children and volunteers and become aware of issues in their communities. Members take an active role in planning their work and in developing innovative strategies to connect with children and volunteers. Second and third year members are given opportunities for leadership within the site team. These members often assume leadership at their sites through facilitating a reflection activity, coordinating the open house event, or coordinating the community service project. The site supervisor guides and empowers the members in their work.

### g. Member Experience:

It is clear that members serving at Energy Express have powerful service experiences that produce documented, statistically significant impacts. Member development objectives foster civic responsibility and increase member skills through well-designed training, reflection, service experiences and supervision. Members are provided with opportunities to collaborate and reflect on service experiences with other members on a daily basis. During site team meetings, members are provided with structured opportunities to engage in service reflection, collaborate with other members and receive supervision. Site supervisors conduct mid-term assessments of members to establish continuous improvement goals and make weekly reviews of service hour timesheets to ensure members are on track to earn a of minimum 300 service hours. Members are also empowered to complete an assessment of their supervisor. Member satisfaction is assessed on the member exit form. Near the end of the program, members and site supervisors get together with site teams from neighboring communities for a regional reflection event. This event provides members with the opportunity to reflect on their service experiences with other members and gain a broader understanding of the impact of their national service.

### h. Volunteer Generation:

At each site, one member serves as community coordinator responsible for the training and supervision of volunteers who read with children and perform other tasks. The community coordinator provides training in shared reading strategies that are part of the Energy Express curriculum. These strategies are easy to teach, learn and use, and are appropriate for all volunteers from preteens to senior volunteers. Community coordinators organize volunteers in teams that rotate from one mentor group to the next, insuring that each child has 20 minutes of one-on-one reading time each day. Reading practice time is a key factor in maintaining and increasing reading scores during the summer.

Site supervisors and county contacts also play an active role in recruiting volunteers. The entire team spends time brainstorming potential volunteer pools. Volunteers are often recruited from civic and

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community organizations, high school groups, faith-based organizations and family connections. Energy Express engages both episodic and ongoing volunteers within the six week program. Many episodic volunteers are recruited as "guest readers," those stakeholders who read aloud to each group of children. This is an ideal way to involve stakeholders in the program and builds commitment and sustainability. Some parents and community members become ongoing volunteers, serving at sites almost every day. Many of the ongoing volunteers are preteen and teen volunteers. Teen and preteen volunteers are provided with mailboxes on site in order to encourage daily communications with the community coordinator. They are provided with dialog journals, and encouraged to participate in group meetings, reflection activities and community service projects. Youth volunteers assist in the development of plays and puppet shows and assist with cooperative recreation for the children. At sites with high numbers of teen volunteers, an additional member serves as a teen community coordinator. Energy Express recognizes that the energy, time and expertise of this generation must be harnessed to insure positive and productive experiences for children, teens and young adult members. According to a study conducted by the WVUES youth literacy team, the preteen and teen volunteers indicated that without the opportunity to volunteer at Energy Express, they would spend their summers watching TV or sleeping because of the lack of other activities in their poor, isolated rural communities. They reported that they were motivated to serve because they wanted to help children with reading. Breakfast, lunch and social interaction are additional benefits for preteen and teen volunteers. Numerous recognition strategies are employed for volunteers. Volunteer names are displayed on bulletin boards, they are featured in site newsletters and newspaper articles; they receive thank you notes from children and community coordinators.

### i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification:

Energy Express has a strong history of prominently branding the national service of members. Every Energy Express site displays the AmeriCorps banner in a highly visible outdoor location for the duration of the program. Members are required to wear AmeriCorps branded t-shirts at all times while engaged in service. The AmeriCorps logo on member shirts must be uncovered and visible at all times that members are engaged in service. The AmeriCorps logo and Corporation funding statement appear on the Energy Express Website and Energy Express recruitment materials and publications. Members, supervisors, and county contacts are provided with training in the appropriate use of the logos, and are instructed to provide AmeriCorps funding information to all media contacts. Each year hundreds of local news releases and articles are written about the program, generating a great deal of publicity regarding the impact of national service. Energy Express has received national

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recognition during each of the past three years of the program and a long list of national recognitions and awards over the past 15 years. This recognition has provided opportunities to highlight AmeriCorps service. In 2011, Energy Express received a visit from Corporation for National and Community Service staff members and was featured on the CNCS Let's Read, Let's Move service blog. Energy Express has been recognized as a National 4-H Program of Distinction by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and received the 2009 Excellence in Summer Learning Award from the John's Hopkins University National Center for Summer Learning. Energy Express is a highly visible program in every WV community it serves. In isolated, rural WV communities, Energy Express members may be the only individuals engaged in AmeriCorps service that residents see.

### Organizational Capability

#### a. Organizational Background and Staffing:

The current Energy Express application for AmeriCorps funding builds on years of successful program development, implementation, evaluation and continuous improvement. Energy Express is now in its twentieth program year and its eighteenth year supported by AmeriCorps.

Energy Express is a collaborative venture of West Virginia University Extension Service (WVUES), several state agencies, and local communities and schools. WVUES serves as the applicant organization and lead agency in administering the Energy Express program. The organization has the ability to provide sound program and fiscal oversight. University support units assist with all aspects of grant management, fiscal and human resource management, communication, and technology.

WVUES has an annual budget of \$41 million and receives federal, state and county funding. Federal and state grants account for \$8 million of the total budget. The total yearly Energy Express budget is more than \$3 million; this includes support from the Corporation for National and Community Service, WVU, USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), WV Department of Education and the Arts and local agencies and organizations including boards of education. Of this amount, approximately \$1,700,000 is from grants, \$1,070,000 is generated at the local level (including SPSF funding) and \$240,000 is in-kind through WVU. Deloitte and Touche Associates conduct an annual audit of WVU's financial accountability.

Energy Express is managed through the 4-H Youth Development Unit of the WVUES. The unit director supervises the Energy Express program director and most of the county faculty members serving as county contacts. The unit director is an excellent resource and is especially knowledgeable about county issues, faculty strengths and weaknesses and problem-solving to insure that statewide

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programs are implemented in appropriate ways. Numerous WVU faculty and staff members support program planning, implementation and evaluation. Excellent training materials have been developed, and a cadre of WVU faculty members and former team members assist with planning and training. Accounting activities are provided by WVU staff with federal grant experience. Annual evaluations document that Energy Express has a strong record of managing major grant activity.

The Energy Express staff has the expertise and experience to administer federal grants, to follow AC provisions and to meet grant objectives. All staff members are faculty or staff at WVU. The program director has been a member of the WVU ES faculty since 2008; the community strengthening coordinator has been with WVU ES for 14 years. Specific activities of all staff members with direct responsibility for members are described in the budget narrative. At the local level, sites are supported by county collaborative groups comprised of key community stakeholders concerned about children's nutrition and learning. The collaborative groups, led by the county contacts, also include parent representatives from each site.

As the land grant university in the state of WV, West Virginia University (WVU) has a network of faculty-level county extension agents to extend the University into every community in the state. Campus-based state faculty members link the field staff with the research and knowledge base of the University's academic units. In late fall, local collaborative groups submit their applications to host Energy Express sites. The applications are reviewed by a state review team and sites are selected based on the documented need, the capacity of the community to acquire the 30% match (an average of \$8,500) and ability to implement the program, along with the site's past performance, and the feasibility of the selected location.

Key state staff:

AC Program Director: MA in Counseling Services; 20 years of youth development experience; previous grants management experience; program development and administrative experience; employed as a WVU faculty member since 2008; numerous publications, awards and national presentations.

AC Community Strengthening Coordinator: Master's in social work and public administration; 14 years of experience with national service; numerous national presentations; awards and publications; tenured West Virginia University faculty member.

AC Program Coordinator: MA in Educational Leadership; 30 years of experience as a teacher, principal, director and assistant superintendent; previous Energy Express experience as a site supervisor.

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AC Curriculum Specialist: Master of Arts in Elementary Education; 14 years of teaching experience and previous service as an Energy Express site supervisor.

AC Program Manager: Hired in May 2008; previous experience in data management with an emphasis on payroll; attended the Corporation for National and Community Service 2009 Financial and Grants Management Institute.

AC Administrative Assistant: The administrative assistant has a BA in Business Administration with an emphasis in Human Resources.

Energy Express Accountant (not listed in the AC budget): multiple years of accounting experience; participated in the Corporation for National and Community Service 2012 Financial and Grants Management Institute.

Student assistants and a graduate assistant are hired on a year to year basis.

Key local staff:

County contacts: They are typically WVU county extension agents who are Master's level university faculty members. Some of these faculty members have been with Energy Express since 1995.

Site supervisors: Site supervisors are professional educators chosen locally and hired through WVU for the 8-week program. Many of the supervisors have numerous years of teaching experience and Energy Express experience.

WVUES has the capacity to evaluate activities of the scope and nature which a project of this magnitude and complexity demands. Comprehensive annual evaluations document that Energy Express has an excellent record in meeting programmatic objectives based on community needs and in managing major grant activity. The program evaluation documents consistent results: statistically significant increases in children's reading; 58% of daily nutritional requirements provided to children; statistically significant increases in member personal efficacy; volunteer support and communities working collaboratively to enhance children's learning.

Since the first year of AmeriCorps funding, university faculty members directed an intensive evaluation that included both summative and formative strategies. For the past 5 years, the evaluation has been conducted by Ben Edmonds, Director of the Secondary Transition to Teaching Program at Indiana University, who holds a Ph.D. in special education. All evaluation meets WVU standards for research. Excellent evaluations have given Energy Express national and statewide recognition and credibility and have allowed the program to leverage funding from other sources, including the WV's Legislature. The impact evaluation of children's reading (finding significant increases in reading comprehension, letter/word identification, and fluency) documents increases in

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reading skill of 2-5 months for participants each year and mentor development (finding significant increases in personal efficacy) has validated Energy Express and its non-traditional approach to reading enrichment delivered by college students.

### b. Sustainability:

Energy Express has a long history of meeting targeted, compelling community needs. Many of the benefits enjoyed by communities are in the area of capacity building, and will be maintained beyond the grant period. This is because Energy Express builds the capacity of communities to provide needed programming through training and collaboration. Rural communities are strengthened as groups and organizations, each with few resources gain valuable training and experience the success of working together collaboratively to solve identified local needs. Agencies with little or no history of working together successfully join forces to meet the needs of children through Energy Express. These relationships are maintained even after the Energy Express planning and implementation activities end each summer.

The county collaborative has become a vehicle for developing a sense of local ownership and pride. Energy Express sites are community driven, and are only opened when communities have made a collective commitment to work toward the implementation of a site. This process ensures community ownership in the program, and increases the likelihood that relationships and progress gained will be maintained by community stakeholders even after the program ends. The local collaborative enhances the capacity of organizations to meet the needs of children by sharing human and financial resources. County collaborative groups are responsible for: 1) Securing 30% of the site costs, 2) selecting and supporting the site team, 3) problem-solving and 4) monitoring. Energy Express is built on diversified and committed funding which helps foster sustainability. In addition to Corporation funds, the program is supported by state agencies (Energy Express is a line-item in the WV State Budget), the state's land-grant university and hundreds of local resources. Documented impact has generated support from these entities.

Energy Express has a cadre of volunteers who support the program. Anecdotal reports indicate that some parents begin volunteering at school after an Energy Express experience. Volunteers who receive training on shared reading strategies are encouraged to utilize those skills in numerous settings beyond Energy Express sites. Awareness of the issue of child hunger is increased through the involvement of volunteers and collaborative members who witness the benefits of free meals provided to children at Energy Express sites and the high levels of publicity that result when sites are covered in local news media. Through their involvement in community service projects, members become

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resources and advocates for addressing compelling community needs.

### c. Compliance and Accountability:

Energy Express has a record of excellent multi-site program management. Compliance with program requirements and regulations is ensured through a variety of methods. Extensive training, multiple levels of accountability, and regular site compliance visits help Energy Express sites achieve compliance with AmeriCorps and Energy Express program policies. A monitoring checklist of program expectations is used when site staff, local contacts, and collaborative members visit sites. Every new site supervisor and returning site supervisors who need assistance are visited within the first two weeks of the program. If necessary, a subsequent visit is scheduled. The Energy Express state office faculty visit as many other sites as possible within the six week time frame. County contacts are also responsible for monitoring of Energy Express sites through weekly site visits and monitoring checklists. County contacts are responsible for addressing site issues with supervisors and, if concerns exist, with the state Energy Express office.

Site supervisors are in key positions to help ensure that sites operate in compliance of AmeriCorps guidelines and the Energy Express model. Site supervisors are responsible for the implementation of the progressive discipline policy for members which may include suspension or release from service as the result of failure to comply with rules and regulations. Special emphasis is placed on AmeriCorps prohibited activities and behaviors that would place children or others at risk. Members receive extensive training about AmeriCorps (outlined in the member training section).

Special Circumstances: Energy Express is in its 20th year of implementation. First piloted in 1994, Energy Express received its first AmeriCorps grant in 1995 to support the 1996 summer program with 80 members. Energy Express currently places 500 members at sites across the state. It is an exemplary program with proven results and a national reputation.

Energy Express serves resource-poor communities. Our sites are located in some of the poorest, most isolated communities in the rural state of WV. These communities typically have few services and a lack of human capital and corporate resources. Over the past three years, Energy Express has been present in 6 of the 9 counties with the highest poverty rates in the state. In some cases, Energy Express hosts multiple sites in these counties. Energy Express has an excellent record of successful program implementation without compliance violations.

Energy Express has also been successful in enrolling members. In 2011 and 2012 the program achieved 99% enrollment with 498 members. Prior to the enrollment date on the first day of service, every effort is made each year to successfully recruit 100% of our member slots. However, some

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inevitably decline the opportunity due to emergent family issues, school commitments or unforeseen circumstances. In some instances, individuals notify the program the day before the first day of service that they are unable to serve. The nature of summer programs excludes rolling enrollment. All members must start on the same day which can limit the ability to achieve 100% enrollment. While alternates are chosen in the spring, many have pursued other opportunities by the time the openings are available. To help provide options, an emphasis has been placed on recruiting additional alternates for each site.

Energy Express strives for the highest retention rate possible. In 2011 the retention rate for the members was 99%, with 494 members earning an education award. In 2012 an average of 99.6% of members received all or part of an educational award surpassing our target goal of 98%. Two members exited early due to personal compelling circumstances and received partial awards and two members exited for cause and received no award. Our high retention rate is due to a strong selection process, daily supervision and support, and knowledge that the service is making a difference for children. The plan for improvement includes continuing to focus on selection of members "ready to serve" and training site supervisors to support members. While 100% retention is desirable, we are not willing to sacrifice program expectations, service to children or quality. Sites supervisors receive extensive training on member supervision, progressive discipline and coaching. At times, a member's behavior interferes with the well-being of children and achieving program objectives despite the supervisor's best attempt to coach the member into reversing negative behaviors and attitudes. Release for cause is sometimes the only viable option. The state office works closely with supervisors to use the progressive discipline process appropriately.

We have identified an issue with enrollments and exits. In the majority of the cases with late enrollments and exits, our program made an error in calculating the 30 day window which led to the completion of several enrollments and exits at the 31 day mark instead of the 30 day mark. For example, 63 individuals show on our report as enrolled at 31 days. They started on 06/07/2012 and were activated on 07/07/2012. We have found and corrected the same problem with exits. In a few cases, individuals that left service prior to their scheduled completion date were not exited within 30 days. Now identified, the problems have been addressed in our system. We are providing more stringent monitoring and enforcement of enrollment/exit procedures. Enrollment and exits for members will be reviewed within the 30 day period as required. Reports will be run from e-grants to document that all member enrollments have been completed within the required time periods. The program manager will complete enrollments and exits and the AmeriCorps Coordinator will provide

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review and sign-off on the reports within the 30 day window.

### Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

#### a. Cost Effectiveness:

Some line items have changed from previous years in order to accommodate increased costs, simplify accounting procedures, and/or anticipate availability of other funds for certain program requirements. The proposed Corporation cost/MSY of \$11,905 has been deliberately kept as low as possible. We are proposing a living allowance of \$1850. In 2012 transportation remained the single largest sub-contract cost at Energy Express sites. In rural communities, public school busses are generally the only available transportation. The transportation costs for some sites are paid through the AmeriCorps grant, some through other grants and some with local funding. Energy Express has a history of obtaining non-federal support from diverse sources. Our largest sum is \$470,000 by the WV Legislature through the Department of Education and the Arts has been in place for the past 14 years. Other sources include private foundations, county commissions, businesses, parent/teacher organizations, community action agencies, faith- and communities based groups or sponsor a child campaigns. In-kind commitments from WV University Extension Service remain strong as Energy Express is a key WVU outreach program that (has measurable outcomes to meets identified needs.) Local communities secure 30% of site costs through a variety of local sources. All match requirements for the 2014 grant funding cycle will be met.

#### d. Budget Adequacy:

WVU and the WVU Research Corporation (the University) assess fringe benefit charges to sponsored agreements by utilizing the federally approved fringe benefit rates.

Based on 20 years of experience, the proposed budget is adequate to plan, implement and evaluate a summer program that serves approximately 3000 school-aged children and meets the stated performance measures. Energy Express is a no-frills operation. There is no fluff in the budget, and expenditures are closely monitored. While federal AmeriCorps funding is not the sole source of funding, it is the largest sum, and Energy Express depends on these funds to make the world better for children living in poor, rural WV. Other funding sources are secured to match AC funding and to cover expenditures not identified in this budget. Energy Express is a community program that builds support through collaboration, partnering with faith- and community-based organizations, documenting impact through evaluation, and involving volunteers and other organizations. The total 2012 budget is about \$3 million: \$1.5 million from grants, \$1.05 million from local sources, and \$240,000 as in-kind from WVU. Almost \$400,000 comes from the federally-funded Summer

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Food Service Program for children's meals. Sources for match are: faculty salary and fringe-WVU; other staff salaries and fringe-WV Education & the Arts and local boards of education; indirect costs - WVU. Energy Express is a program of enormous magnitude in terms of statewide sites, AmeriCorps members, children and volunteers. It requires a staff working year round to meet funding obligations and to maintain the high quality for which it is known. Funding from the legislature has been consistent in spite of state budget cuts. WVU has committed to the match included in this proposal. Each Energy Express site serves between 32-64 children. Given the ambitious performance measures documented, including the number of meals served and an average 3.1 month gain in broad reading scores, Energy Express is provided at an extremely low cost. Due to participant gains, schools spend less on remedial instruction when children return to school in the fall. Another significant contribution is the enhanced capacity building of community organizations which can reach more children by working collaboratively. Energy Express strives to provide an effective program at a low-cost in order to spread dollars and provide the program to the maximum number of children in the most WV communities possible. The statewide program is managed with minimal staff. The program director's salary is provided 100% in-kind from WVU. The program has negotiated an extremely low cost for the purchase of \$22 a set for quality children's literature for the take-home books. At statewide training, site supervisors and members stay in dorm rooms rather than expensive lodging. Our site supervisors' salaries are less than most education professionals receive when working in the summer. The program maximizes the use of technology to lower costs of printing, copying and mailing. In addition, web-based technology is utilized when having sites submit forms and data.

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### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

Copy of 2012 evaluation sent.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A