

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

As the first, original "Schools of Hope" (SOH) AmeriCorps Project, this dynamic partnership in the CNCS focus area of Education has refined an evidence-based tutoring model fueled by impassioned AmeriCorps members and committed volunteers. SOH has inspired program replication nationwide. Most significantly, it boosts literacy achievement for students of color and those from low-income families in three Dane County, WI school districts. Our AmeriCorps team of 26.77 MSYs annually leverages 800+ trained tutors serving 1600+ struggling elementary students in designated Focus and high-need schools. The 2013-14 request is for \$342,249 in CNCS funding matched by \$294,000 in local funds and \$70,248 in local in-kind contributions.

## Rationale and Approach

a. NEED - ADDRESSING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP - SOH resources are systematically focused on addressing the persistent gap in achievement between students of color and those from low-income families and their white, middle- and upper-income peers. The strong correlation of race/ethnicity and economic status to ultimate school success is clearly established (Education Trust, 2012; Reardon, 2011). In the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), from the time a child enters school, performance indicators demonstrate this reality. This is clearly apparent for low-income students of color, especially Black and Latino students. On the 2012 kindergarten screener, a measure of school readiness, Black and Latino children scored 34% compared to 79% of White children, as did 36% of low-income children vs. 64% of middle/upper-income children. On the 2011 WI Knowledge and Concepts Exam in reading, 15% of Black and Latino students scored "advanced", the highest category, compared to 64% of White students, as did 14% of low-income students vs. 66% of middle/upper-income students. In 2011-12, Black and Latino students averaged 19 on the ACT (college admission test) vs. 25 for White students. Finally, 54% of Black and Latino students graduated from MMSD in 2011 vs. 84% of White students, as did 54% of low-income students vs. 86% of middle/upper-income students (WI Info Network for Successful Schools [WINSS] and MMSD data).

In the past fifteen years the percent of children in Madison living in poverty (based on free-reduced lunch eligibility) has nearly doubled; the population of students of color has increased over 50%, and the number of English language learners, primarily Latino students, has grown over 300% (MMSD). Currently, the percentage of students of color in Madison is more than double that of WI (56% compared to 26%), and the poverty rate exceeds that of WI by about 25% (just over 50% compared to

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41%)(WINSS). Similarly, the student population is trending toward greater ethnic and linguistic diversity and higher poverty in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District (MCPASD) and the Sun Prairie Area School District (SPASD), the two additional county districts served by SOH, where the average growth in the past 15 years in students of color is over 400%, and the number of students living in poverty has nearly doubled (WINSS). The growing numbers of children in Dane County at risk for school failure puts ever more urgency on addressing the achievement gap.

The key importance of academic achievement is echoed in life-long outcomes relating to economic stability and overall adult wellbeing. Success in the preK-12 system is positively linked to persistence in higher education, job attainment, life-time earnings, later parenting, reduced incarceration rates and physical and mental health (World Health Organization, 2005; Kirby, 2005; Baker, 2001). We view our work as the first essential step to ensuring this trajectory is not one characterized by a lifetime of struggle and unrealized potential, and are energized by our 2012 evaluation outcomes in this task.

Working closely with school staff, AmeriCorps tutor coordinators focus tutoring support on elementary students of color and those from low-income families who are not achieving at grade level. SOH recruits and trains volunteers and implements tutoring strategies prioritizing 1) high-impact early intervention, 2) specific emphasis on third grade, the key point at which most students transition from learning to read to reading to learn, and 3) targeted support for Spanish-speakers. SOH tutoring is part of a coordinated school district plan that includes small class size, teacher professional development, in-class assessment and alignment to Common Core Standards. SOH tutoring resources, especially those focused on third grade and bilingual learners, are cited specifically in MMSD's 2012 "Plan for Eliminating Gaps in Student Achievement," approved by the MMSD school board. Tight alignment of SOH resources and targeted district initiatives results in a high level of AmeriCorps member efficacy and purposeful use of community volunteer talent that ultimately benefits the students served by boosting literacy skills (Good, 2012).

Twelve SOH schools (10 MMSD, 1 MCPASD, 1 SPASD) have been identified as Focus Schools by the WI Dept. of Public Instruction via the U.S. Dept. of Education's plan for school improvement based on achievement gap data. Along with schools identified as Priority Schools, they are required to implement specific interventions (e.g. Response to Instruction and Intervention/RtI2) and monitor progress under close scrutiny. SOH tutoring aligns well with these, and SOH tutor coordinators are vital links in these interventions. School districts historically do not staff volunteer management positions; their allocations are directed toward certified personnel. Since SOH started in Dane County, sites with systematic volunteer management have increased almost 400% - from 11 in 1998 to 43 in

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2012 - with a comparative rise in volunteers.

b. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS - The overarching SOH principle is that our program is as strong as the engagement and added value demonstrated by our AmeriCorps team. It's our job to ensure that we support and champion our members with this in mind so that they can deliver on both SOH and personal goals. This philosophy has proven successful. Members bring their formidable skills and passion to bear on boosting student learning, creatively engaging a caring public as volunteers, and transforming a year or two of national service into a life-long dedication to improving community outcomes.

This proposal maintains last year's MSYs. During the school year, 20 full-time members will serve as both tutor coordinators and tutors in 40 elementary schools, including Focus and high-need schools in Dane County. In addition, 10 minimum-time Spanish bilingual tutors will serve solely at Focus and other high-need schools. During the summer an additional 22 minimum-time members will support the MMSD K-Ready program for entering kindergarteners with low screener scores.

Full-time members will serve primarily as tutor coordinators responsible for the recruitment, screening, training, orientation, placement, support, evaluation and recognition of community volunteers in accordance with volunteer management best practices. These members actively place new and experienced tutors in 40 schools with the lowest standardized test scores in reading. Members serve at two schools, which allows them to actively collaborate with school staff to identify specific student needs and align SOH resources. Full-time members also provide direct 1:1 to 1:3 tutoring to students. The school year minimum-time bilingual members will serve at Focus schools and high-need schools based on standardized test scores in reading and the needs of Spanish-speaking students. The focus on bilingual members is a direct outcome of the rapid growth of our Latino population (noted above), largely from low-income families with limited and disrupted educational experiences. Bilingual members will tutor targeted Spanish-speaking students 1:1 to 1:3 in alignment with classroom curriculum and in extended-day programs.

During the summer months all full-time and the 22 minimum-time members will serve as teacher assistants in the MMSD K-Ready program, designed to boost entering kindergarteners' academic readiness skills. Members train with and work alongside certified staff on literacy skills with students who are predominately children of color from low-income families.

Members also actively incorporate community volunteers, especially bilingual individuals, people of color and/or Baby Boomers, into preK-5 summer programming.

The role of members in the larger academic lives of targeted students is significant and unique. In

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in addition to directly enhancing children's educational outcomes while tutoring, they make it possible for hundreds of dedicated volunteers to wield a similar positive influence. These collective efforts support a cohort of students who would otherwise not have this level of individualized attention. Members also extend their reach into students' homes by helping them build home library collections of children's books. The special projects they design and implement to address local school needs bring in thousands of donated books and supplies.

Members interject a special perspective on their school staffs. They are culturally diverse adults very comfortable working with students from a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, economic and family backgrounds. They are enthusiastically engaged in school-based professional development, especially offerings in culturally and linguistically relevant instruction. School staff surveys show that they are assets who are appreciated for their work ethic and meaningful contributions.

c. EVIDENCE-BASED AND MEASUREABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT - The goal of SOH is to strengthen literacy skills for low-achieving students of color and low-income students and improve test scores in high-impact reading skill areas. Over the past 5 years SOH students receiving our model tutoring have consistently out-performed their non-tutored peers in all literacy measures. Improving literacy outcomes is a critical and well-documented step in closing the achievement gap.

SOH continues to expand and improve as the result of the foundation it has built on evidence-based practice, specifically its model of matching trained tutors 1:1 to 1:3 with identified students for at least 30 minutes a week for at least 15 sessions in alignment with classroom curriculum. Tutors focus on reading fluency and comprehension, and phonetic/phonemic awareness. SOH utilizes a purposeful constant loop of program improvement--performance assessments inform practice, which informs performance assessments, which inform practice. It conducts rigorous performance evaluations using multiple and triangulated measurements. These include test scores and quarterly report card ratings, plus qualitative measures of program impact such as surveys from teachers, volunteers and AmeriCorps members, and focus group data. SOH examines these findings for patterns that demonstrate impact. In concert with the larger research base on elementary tutoring programs, it draws upon these findings to confirm, refine and/or change the program model to increase impact. From 2011-2012 SOH engaged an external reviewer who works nationally assessing tutoring programs to conduct an in-depth, project-wide evaluation. This evaluation included analysis of student performance data and the tutoring component and feedback from school district staff, volunteer tutors, and full-time AmeriCorps members. The central task of this evaluation was to determine program quality and overall impact of the SOH Project on its multiple stakeholders

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(students, schools, districts, volunteers, and AmeriCorps members). Using qualitative and quantitative measures, the evaluation concluded that 1) SOH has a positive impact on student academic achievement in literacy; 2) SOH is aligned to the existing research base on elementary volunteer tutoring programs, and 3) stakeholders feel they experience a high-quality program. This and other SOH findings cited throughout this proposal come from the submitted "Evaluation of the Elementary Schools of Hope Project" (Good, 2012).

The 2012 evaluation documents greater growth in literacy for students receiving model SOH tutoring as compared to non-tutored peers. These outcomes are measured by 1) gains in literacy skills as measured by aggregate growth rates in a district-aligned assessment (Rigby Text Reading Level, a nationally normed and validated measure of reading achievement and instructional level) and report card ratings from fall to spring in the year students received SOH tutoring, compared to aggregate growth rates of a demographically similar comparison group of peer students that did not receive SOH; 2) teacher and volunteer survey responses, and 3) level of alignment to research-based best practices (noted above) and district curriculum (Ritter, 2009; Morris, 2006; Elbaum, 2000).

The triangulated assessment also documents the additional quality tutoring support and focused time on literacy for students of color and low-income students provided by SOH. This results in positive interactions between struggling students and caring, capable adults who help facilitate their learning, and positive engagement of the community with their public schools.

Project outcomes are further informed by evidence of 1) the focus on the achievement gap as an overarching goal (measured by the percentage of SOH students identified as students of color and/or eligible for free or reduced lunch); 2) positive adult-child interactions (measured by the level of program alignment to research-based best-practices on tutor-student rapport, as well as volunteer and AmeriCorps member surveys and focus groups), and 3) positive engagement (measured by volunteer participation levels and volunteer surveys, and principal and teacher surveys and focus groups).

The current SOH model of performance assessment shows consistently positive impact on literacy growth. One can say with confidence that these current assessments are a strong indicator of SOH's positive impact on student achievement in literacy in MMSD.

The comparative, longitudinal and triangulated data collected in MMSD is rigorous and reliable, and certainly speaks to an association between the intervention and a positive impact on achievement.

This confidence in the data is based on three primary elements: 1) Impact was measured in terms of growth within the school year when the intervention (SOH tutoring) took place; 2) Growth was measured in relation to a demographically-similar comparison group of non-SOH students, developed

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through the rigorous process of demographic matching, and 3) Growth was measured and triangulated using multiple assessments (longitudinal Text Reading Levels, annual grade reports on reading standards, and annual teacher and volunteer surveys). All three assessments showed a positive association between SOH tutoring and student growth in literacy, and were made even stronger when coupled with one another. These findings suggest impact on the achievement gap, based on two key presumptions: 1) SOH has a positive impact on growth in literacy, as evidenced by triangulated data analysis on academic achievement, and 2) SOH targets the intervention towards students of color and students living in poverty.

SOH continues to work closely with districts to systematically collect and rigorously analyze data on student growth in literacy (Text Reading Level), standardized tests, grade reports and attendance, as well as documenting tutor treatment and dosage. This infrastructure is built into SOH best practices and guides collaborative decision making and ongoing AmeriCorps training, support and supervision. This close working relationship is key to addressing our 2011-12 Performance Measure (PM), for which we met just over 95% of our targeted goal of students receiving minimum treatment and showing improvement. As part of the PM pilot program, we set ambitious but challenging goals for this measure, and were hampered by insufficient pre/post test data and ever-increasing student mobility, which reduced the number of students we could actually report on. Our 2012 evaluation has greatly informed our practice and increased the rigor of our assessments. To help ensure success with future PMs, we are 1) aligning ever more closely with evolving district testing measures so that data will be readily available; 2) fine-tuning PM goals to more closely reflect the grade levels in which SOH program treatment is most closely aligned to the skills measured by literacy assessments (a key recommendation of our 2012 external evaluator); 3) improving our systems for tracking students when they change schools, and 4) increasing AmeriCorps tutoring time. After MMSD launched a four-year-old program in fall 2011, fewer new kindergarten students qualified academically for K-Ready in summer 2012. Due to extreme heat that canceled classes and high absenteeism, fewer enrolled students took both pre and post tests. As a result, our K-Ready PMs fell short. Since the four-year-old program is continuing and the district is redesigning their assessments, we are not able to provide a K-Ready PM at the time of submitting this application; but will continue to support the program and will provide a PM in OnCorps for Serve Wisconsin.

d. RECRUITMENT - SOH has maintained a 100% AmeriCorps member enrollment rate since 2007. This is largely due to extensive and varied recruitment efforts resulting in a large pool of qualified candidates from which to choose high-caliber members, and SOH's emphasis on member professional

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growth. Because SOH has demonstrated success in addressing the achievement gap and in providing members with a productive and meaningful national service experience, we enjoy a robust response to postings for our AmeriCorps positions. Each year well over half of our team members are recruited from our local community. We will continue to use the AmeriCorps website to recruit members locally and from across the country. Area institutions of higher education readily send our information to their students. Former members enthusiastically promote SOH to their friends and family members; and as reported in both our annual Serve WI member survey and our 2012 evaluation, our AmeriCorps members unanimously agreed they would recommend SOH to others. To assure that we have diverse applicants, especially for our new bilingual positions, we will focus on connections with partners and local supporters, including our cross-sector collaborators, and build on existing ongoing communication and interaction with communities of color. Centro Hispano, our partner agency and the County's premier nonprofit serving the Latino community, will relay position postings to the community and publish them on its website, social media and in newsletters. We will work with local media that serve communities of color - The Madison Times (newspaper focusing on minority issues/events), Capital City Hues (newsmagazine by, for, and of people of color), and LaMovidia radio (serving the Latino community). We will take advantage of a variety of social media outlets - LaSup (Latino professional networking group) and Facebook. United Way's marketing department also links SOH to local media and other business partners.

The recruitment of 10 SOH minimum-time members to specifically serve as bilingual tutors is an exciting new opportunity to actively respond to the needs of Latino students. Despite our increasingly targeted volunteer recruiting efforts, we still struggle to find fluent Spanish-speaking tutors. We expect these positions to especially appeal to native Spanish speakers and/or people of color who are eager to serve their community but cannot "afford" to volunteer, such as low-income college students or others in situations that preclude volunteering their time without pay. Providing service opportunities for these underrepresented populations is a core value of SOH and whenever possible, we prioritize options for those individuals. The same will hold true during the recruitment and selection process for all new AmeriCorps members. Once enrolled, our strong staff support and ongoing system of training and professional development will ensure success for all members.

e. MEMBER TRAINING - The team of 20 full-time AmeriCorps members begin their year of service in mid-August with two weeks of orientation and training before placement at school sites. During the orientation the members engage in interactive activities designed to build team cohesion, learn about national service and prohibited activities, explore SOH past and present, understand their roles and

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expectations, discuss school culture, study school district demographics and achievement data, and receive extensive volunteer management training. As noted in our SOH evaluation, members felt the initial training on AmeriCorps structure and policies, as well as program-specific information on how to enter a school site and what to expect, was effective.

The full-time tutor coordinators receive an online and hard copy SOH binder, including forms and processes that support their volunteer coordination work, details about their benefits and SOH policies, as well as tips and resources. The two teams of minimum-time members will receive orientation in many of these same elements, with the exception of the volunteer management training. Their training will be similarly interactive and create a positive learning environment, and will focus heavily on literacy tutoring, working with children, interpersonal relations and problem solving.

Full-time members will acquire skills in literacy tutoring, working with children, organization, multi-tasking, time-management, interpersonal relations, public speaking, data-tracking and reporting, problem solving and a host of other professional skills. When asked in the evaluation process to identify a core set of skills they could confidently bring into their future careers because of their SOH experience, members cited 1) communication and being able to talk to very different kinds of people; 2) supervision (organization, maintaining contacts, attention to detail); 3) networking and relationship building; 4) self-worth/self-knowledge; 5) confidence, based on their work being connected to an end result, and 6) initiative and independence.

Our year-round training program is built on 15 years of experience managing SOH. Through continuous improvement informed by Project-wide assessment and member feedback, we are constantly enhancing training opportunities to assure that members are well prepared to perform all the activities in which they will engage.

In order to support all members and keep everyone actively engaged, team meetings are held every Monday morning. The weekly agenda includes a team-building activity, program updates, opportunities to address issues, and time for problem solving and answering questions. Members also attend Friday afternoon trainings focused on topics critical to their school-based responsibilities, required AmeriCorps topics, ongoing member professional development (career/academic planning) as well as personal growth topics. Core trainings provided each year include: Literacy Tutoring, OnCorps, Volunteer Database, Google Accounts, SOH Reporting (Quarterly Reports/Monthly Student Tracking), Financial Literacy, Next Steps, True Colors, Home Literacy, Poverty, Educational Policy Issues, Creative Kid Management, Conflict Resolution, Homelessness and Mobility, Personal Tax Training, Alumni Professional Panel, and Using Your Education Award. Specific trainings are added

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throughout the year based on member suggestions, relevant community issues and evolving needs. Members also participate in a CNCS Citizenship Training series based on "A Facilitator's Guide to Effective Citizenship Through AmeriCorps." This series encourages members to recognize the link between citizenship and the AmeriCorps mission. Members participate in seven modules, discussing the traits of effective citizens then researching and planning a service project with an organization that addresses one of the AmeriCorps issue areas.

The bilingual AmeriCorps team will meet bi-weekly for team meetings and ongoing training. The majority of their service will be in direct tutoring; their training will focus on working with linguistically diverse children and literacy skill building.

The summer team will participate along with our full-time members in the training provided by MMSD for all K-Ready teachers. Weekly team meetings at their school sites will allow members to share their experiences, ask questions and participate in problem solving. Additional Project-wide trainings will focus on play-based learning and behavioral management.

Prohibited activities are identified and discussed on the first day of new member orientation, as those activities are detailed in our Member Agreements. Members receive this information in both verbal and written form as part of both the SOH binder and our online Google documents. At key points during the year the topic is discussed again at team meetings (e.g. before elections, during job actions, etc.). Ongoing member supervision by staff both onsite and in weekly team meetings ensures compliance. Serve WI also provides all members with a useful wallet-sized prohibited activities list. Understanding that AmeriCorps provides a unique opportunity to direct services toward disaster recovery if a need arises, we will provide Disaster Preparedness Training for our members in conjunction with other programs engaging AmeriCorps members.

f. MEMBER SUPERVISION - Through extensive training and individualized support, SOH annually nurtures a cohort of largely young team members without significant backgrounds as educators and ensures their success in educational settings. As reported in the accompanying SOH evaluation, members report "emphatic and unanimous agreement" that the SOH administrative staff provided strong support throughout their year. This factor was also cited as a major rationale for returning by the 12 of 20 members from 2011-12 who opted to re-enroll for the 2012-13 school year.

SOH is overseen by a Coordinating Team consisting of two co-directors, one assistant director, and one program coordinator. One co-director is assigned by the MMSD superintendent, and the other is jointly selected by SOH partners. Both have yearly management plans including professional development goals. The Coordinating Team has extensive experience supervising staff and

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AmeriCorps members, and actively engages with the individual members to provide advice, guidance, and support throughout their term. The assistant director and program coordinator are AmeriCorps alumni with exceptionally keen insights in how to best support our members. Additionally, principals at each of the schools understand their role in providing oversight and support for the members. Member training, oversight and support happen through the collegial and consensus-based work the Coordinating Team does and through a budget that provides for ongoing staff training, with final decision-making authority resting with the co-directors.

The following elements of our supervision plan are essential AmeriCorps member success: 1) Initial meeting with school principal, member and SOH staff to map out site goals via a "Letter of Agreement" that outlines partner roles. Follow-up meetings as needed with principal and member to assess progress toward goals, address any issues, and develop future goals. 2) SOH co-director meetings with district administrative and teaching staff to assess SOH goals and solicit suggestions for improving practices; follow-up discussion with team, who help design action plans. 3) Daily online availability of SOH staff to address any questions from members working at their sites. 4) SOH expectation of a 24-hour response time for phone calls, emails and other communication that is honored by staff and AmeriCorps members alike ensuring quick responses to member questions and concerns. 5) Site visits conducted by Coordinating Team in late fall to check in, review procedures, and clarify questions. 6) Individual mid-term evaluations for members with a co-director to assess program progress, set goals for the remainder of service term, and provide suggestions for program improvement. 7) Weekly Coordinating Team meetings to provide program oversight, create meeting and training agendas, and ensure timely responses to member concerns and requests. 8) Weekly team meetings with all members and staff for SOH updates and problem solving. 9) Semi-annual retreats to assess SOH goals, discuss challenges, and strategize regarding program improvements. 10) Availability of SOH coordinators to meet with individual members or groups to discuss concerns, ideas for innovations, or new opportunities. 11) Exit interviews to assess the quality of his/her experience and discuss suggestions for program improvement. This model of thoughtful, proactive participatory supervision demonstrates to all members that their professional and personal success is a deeply embedded SOH value. Members who serve with us as minimum-time members will benefit from many of these same measures of supervision including bi-weekly team meetings with the Coordinating Team, quick responses to their questions, availability of staff whenever needed, and a commitment to making sure they have a successful experience.

TUTORING: Our members serve in a tutoring program that complies with all AmeriCorps

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requirements - the selection of individuals with at least a high school degree and specialized high-quality and research-based pre-service and in-service training (described above) aligned with the language arts curricula of the participating districts. Student progress and student outcomes are assessed by Research and Evaluation staff based on standardized testing. Training modules are designed and delivered by certified teaching staff as part of a coordinated effort endorsed by district central office administrations. Members are supervised by SOH coordinators with expertise in academic tutoring with the support of local school staff, including literacy coaches.

g. MEMBER EXPERIENCE - The fact that we have maintained a 100% AmeriCorps member retention rate since 2008 reflects the impact of the member experience while on SOH. The vast majority of SOH AmeriCorps members are college graduates seeking to provide a year of service prior to graduate school and careers. They are motivated and altruistic, and are in a unique position through their commitment to volunteerism and future professional roles to positively influence change on a national and international scale. Project members have gone on to careers in education, law, medicine, social work, government, and the Foreign Service. The experience they have in the frontlines of the public schooling system has been life altering for many who have re-directed their own educational plans toward careers in teaching, school social work and nonprofit management. SOH AmeriCorps members have powerful service experiences because of a wide range of elements: 1) ongoing support and guidance from the Coordinating Team; 2) comprehensive orientation and ongoing training; 3) team cohesiveness; 4) clear expectations; 5) well-documented policies and procedures; 6) support in school settings; 7) friendly, dedicated volunteers; 8) community-wide support; 9) positive experiences working with children, and 10) public recognition for their efforts, including the Presidential Volunteer Service Awards, recommended in the State Service Plan. Most importantly, they see the change they create in children's lives. In sum, the team as a whole is empowered to elevate the level of its engagement and impact of its efforts.

Throughout the year, members formally reflect on team expectations, rewards and challenges, especially at team retreats. At mid-term evaluations they reflect on their accomplishments and set new goals for the remainder of their term. The Next Steps Career Planning and Citizenship series also provide opportunities for reflection. Finally, at the end of their term, members are asked to complete a reflection focusing on their successes, challenges faced, and skills developed that becomes part of the record co-directors use for future letters of support and college recommendations.

Project coordinators also provide systematic support for AmeriCorps members' individualized professional development plans, including career coaching, higher-education planning, assistance

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with resume writing, letters of recommendation, job shadowing and professional networking. The Coordinating Team invests considerable time helping team members with goal setting, problem solving and mapping future steps through regularly scheduled site visits, one-on-one conversations, group retreats and reflection activities.

In most cases, our members were specifically looking for an AmeriCorps experience when they found us. They proudly call themselves AmeriCorps members. They insert the AmeriCorps logo on their email signatures. They refer to SOH as the "SOH AmeriCorps Project" and they're specifically trained and eager to talk with anyone about what AmeriCorps is and why they decided to serve. At career and volunteer fairs as well as presentations throughout the community, they enthusiastically share stories of their AmeriCorps experience.

Our program fosters a sense of connection with the AmeriCorps identity by: 1) using the AmeriCorps logo on all letterhead, brochures, displays, banners, and publicity; 2) giving members and staff an AmeriCorps lanyard and pin; 3) providing "AmeriCorps Member Serving Here" clings to each site; 4) using "AmeriCorps" in our name; 5) allowing members to purchase AmeriCorps gear of their choosing in addition to providing required items; 6) posting the logo on our website, and 7) requiring members to participate in AmeriCorps week.

We have a very intentional process of connecting our members with each other. Team-building activities are a part of every orientation day and weekly team meeting. We encourage our team to gather socially and to volunteer as a group. There are several other AmeriCorps programs in our area and we share trainings (Poverty Simulation, disaster recovery) and relay information about topics of current community interest. SOH has hosted such gatherings in the past, and last year our members created a local AmeriCorps database organized by school district to promote linkages. Our members prioritize connections with other programs and we will build in opportunities for this. They are very involved directly with other national service participants especially through the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). We have a close working relationship with RSVP and place nearly 200 of their volunteers as tutors within our program. Our members provide reporting for the RSVP staff and support their volunteers in our schools.

h. VOLUNTEER GENERATION - A work team of AmeriCorps members and Project staff recruit volunteers through [volunteeryourtime.org](http://volunteeryourtime.org) (local online volunteer clearinghouse linked to Volunteer Connection, supported by the Serve WI State Service Plan), notices to communities of faith, neighborhood newsletters, publicity from our media partners, advertising and presentations on higher education campuses, posters and flyers in businesses and libraries, recruitment at school events, and

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collaboration with business volunteer and Adopt-a-School programs. We use Facebook and professional networks to relay emerging needs. SOH has further benefited from word of mouth. Many of our 800+ volunteers are eager to invite their friends to tutor. Volunteers know that they will be well cared for, receive practical and useful training, have support from our in-school AmeriCorps coordinator, and can expect to have a good experience in working with their tutee and the classroom teacher. First and foremost, volunteers will know that they are helping to meet the community need of narrowing the achievement gap in our schools. Our SOH message is consistent and clear in all of our publicity. Each volunteer will serve as a literacy tutor for a teacher-identified student during a 30-minute session. Materials for the tutoring session are provided by the classroom teacher. We ask that volunteers commit to a minimum of one hour a week, and are therefore able to tutor two students. As a direct result of the SOH Project, thousands of area residents from diverse backgrounds have enjoyed highly engaging and meaningful volunteer service. They serve knowing that their efforts are making a measurable difference in the lives of deserving children who otherwise would not receive additional support to reach their academic potential. SOH provides the community with an efficient, user-friendly and vitally important volunteer outlet that garners high satisfaction and ranks as a perennial favorite among community members. In annual SOH surveys community residents consistently report a strong sense of purpose in their work with students. They indicate that their time with students contributes towards both academic gains and improved attitudes about reading, and that they feel supported in their efforts by their local school AmeriCorps tutor coordinators. We have conducted these annual assessments since SOH began in 1998 and have consistently seen positive responses well over 90-95% in all areas.

To assure that volunteers are well prepared for tutoring, we require that all new volunteers receive training by district staff at city-wide trainings held two to three times each year. For those who are unable to attend trainings, our AmeriCorps members provide other tutoring resources. With this proposed budget, we are planning to make available online videos of tutor training topics presented by our MMSD trainers, which will make these resources continually available to our tutors. We are also expanding our school-based training with the support of local school staff.

Our AmeriCorps members are essential to volunteer recruitment and management. SOH sets high expectations for members regarding the consistent delivery of exemplary volunteer management services. High-caliber service is assured by extensive member orientation, ongoing training, meaningful engagement, and steady support of members. The extensive volunteer management training they receive prepares them well for this role. At their sites they will first determine specific

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needs in conjunction with school staff. They will then seek out ideas for best ways to recruit within their neighborhoods. As a team they will strategize ways to send out community-wide messages about our volunteer needs. Once a volunteer responds to our recruitment efforts, members manage the process of screening and interviewing the volunteer, providing training, coordinating a placement based on requests provided by teachers, initiating regular follow ups with the volunteer and teacher to address any concerns, planning recognition activities, and conducting an annual evaluation. Members handle all related administrative tasks, including: establishing systems for reporting hours, students served, and other data needed; working closely with teachers to determine student availability and tutor session content, and ensuring good communication by all.

Because of the very specific job description designed for SOH volunteers, personalized support from members, and continuous monitoring by program and school staff, we ensure that the volunteers do not engage in prohibited or unallowable activities. Their only task will be to provide tutoring for students. They will do all of their tutoring in the school building as directed by the classroom teacher.

i. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION - Project and site use of the AmeriCorps name and logo is standard practice in all SOH communications and materials, whether electronic, print or other media, such as website, letterhead, public displays, posted AmeriCorps logos at all sites.

### Organizational Capability

a. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING - United Way of Dane County's mission is "to unite and focus the community to create measurable results in changing people's lives and strengthening our community." The agency has raised money since 1922 to support Dane County nonprofit organizations. In 2001, the agency adopted a community impact model to address the root causes of problems and measure success by community-level outcomes. This reorganization stemmed in part from its experience with the SOH model. The agency is recognized as a "Center of Excellence" among more than 1,200 United Ways nationally, providing a blueprint for reshaping the role of the entire United Way Worldwide network.

The agency is led by a hands-on Board of Directors from all community sectors that is actively engaged in decision-making on all key policy, fiscal and program decisions. Each program area is overseen by a Community Solutions Team (CST) comprised of a diverse representation of about 20 community stakeholders in that area. SOH falls under the Growing Up, Getting Ready CST, which reviews program and community outcomes and makes annual program and financial recommendations. The Madison SOH Leadership Team is co-chaired by United Way's CEO and

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MMSD's superintendent and includes top community leaders (from county and city government, higher education, law enforcement, business, nonprofit agencies, school board, the media and communities of faith). Similar SOH Leadership Teams serve Middleton and Sun Prairie. These groups serve as the Advisory Boards for SOH and help oversee the Project.

SOH has experienced, dedicated staff who provide day-to-day management. Key program and fiscal positions include the following housed at Centro Hispano: Karen Dischler, Co-Director (program management, county site coordination, member supervision, project collaboration); Emily Greene, Assistant Director (human resources functions, member hiring/training, member professional development, project reporting); Mariah Flynn, Program Coordinator (volunteer systems coordination, member support, administration), and Chris Stevick, Financial Manager (project accounting). Our program staff person from MMSD is Kathy Price, Co-Director (evaluation and technical assistance, MMSD site coordination, professional development). Each fulfills unique niches to provide the wide variety of trainings offered to our members (noted in section 1 e). They avidly pursue ongoing professional development, tap local resources to enhance their technical skills and training expertise, and attend Serve WI and CNCS-sponsored trainings.

Kathy has served as Co-Director for SOH since its inception. She is a certified teacher in English as a Second Language, Bilingual Ed and Spanish with a Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction (focus on achievement of bilingual and low-income students) and doctoral coursework in Educational Policy Studies. As MMSD's Partnerships coordinator for the past 18 years, she also oversees first-generation college programs and home-school partnerships for bilingual and low-income families. Karen has been involved with SOH since it began, and became a co-director in 2002. She has devoted her career to working in nonprofit organizations, bringing a wealth of knowledge about volunteer management systems and nonprofit management. A guidebook she co-authored on school collaboration is distributed through CNCS' Knowledge Network. She presents workshops at local, state, and national levels on school collaboration, Baby Boomers and volunteer management, and is a certified True Colors trainer. She has served on several national initiatives, such as SaYes, EnCorps, and Temple University's Intergenerational Institute. Karen has consulted with literacy programs in 14 states seeking to replicate SOH.

After graduating from the UW-Madison, Emily served as an AmeriCorps\*VISTA on SOH for two years, as a school-based volunteer coordinator and as SOH's VISTA Leader. Before coming to SOH she served as the coordinator of a middle school tutoring program, hiring and supervising 15 local school coordinators. In 2010 she received her certificate in Non-Profit Management from the

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University of Washington. She is in her seventh year on the program staff.

Mariah is also a graduate of UW-Madison, where she earned her degree in Human Development and Family Studies in 2004. She served on SOH as a Preschools of Hope AmeriCorps\*VI STA and has been in her current capacity for five years.

Chris Stevick is a CPA with a Masters in Professional Accountancy from Indiana University. She works independently as a financial planner and tax preparer. Chris covers all accounting functions required for SOH and has been on our staff for five years.

In addition to the oversight provided by the SOH Leadership Teams, three staff from United Way directly support SOH: Kathy Hubbard, Director of Community Impact, has a Masters in Social Work and has been with United Way since 1982. She has been involved with Schools of Hope since its inception. Her responsibility will be to work with the teams of community leaders who oversee SOH for United Way and to serve as a liaison to the SOH staff. Nick Wood, Director of Finance and Grant Management, has a Bachelor's degree from UW-Whitewater in Accounting and Finance. Nick will take primary responsibility for the financial management of the grant and be supervised by Rick Spiel, the Executive Vice President. Rick has been with the organization for 30 years and has overseen the financial aspects of the AmeriCorps grant for the past six years. The agency's marketing department, Business Volunteer Network and other management staff collaborate with SOH as well.

During the past year SOH has worked with a variety of external evaluation and assessment processes. Dr. Annalee Good, a researcher on national tutoring, conducted a comprehensive literature review and thoroughly reviewed program design, student data, and stakeholder support. United Way initiated a review led by the former CEO of American Family Insurance that analyzed the organizational structure of SOH and documented strengths in volunteer management and support for AmeriCorps members. The third study is an ongoing doctoral dissertation by a Ph.D. student at Walden University who is exploring the impact of SOH as a community initiative. In all cases the SOH staff cooperated fully and enthusiastically, providing the necessary data, reports and requested information in order to assure systematic and timely evaluations.

A current grantee, SOH is a signature initiative of United Way's work to end the racial/ethnic and economic achievement gap. SOH has been recognized as being a successful, well-managed program that has a superb record of compliance and responsiveness, and 100% enrollment and retention rates. Most recently it was featured in "Transforming Communities Through Service: A Collection of 52 of the Most Innovative AmeriCorps Programs in the United States." It has been honored at a White House event, used as a case study in the White House Call to Service, described in a keynote at the

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national conference, and featured in the 2009 Congressional budget justification.

b. **SUSTAINABILITY** - United Way has steadfastly supported SOH, significantly increasing its dollar match over time as the primary funder. The agency's total annual campaign has grown from \$8 million in the late 1990s to 2012's total of \$17.6 million; its commitment to SOH has grown from \$30,000 in 2001 to a projected \$284,000 in 2013. These donations include corporate gifts, employee campaigns, direct mail and leadership giving, and leverage significant in-kind contributions for SOH in school district staff time, office and training space, and materials.

As a top priority and aligned priority for United Way, SOH has been assured continued match funding as it continues to meet its goals. United Way is committed to helping identify long-term new sources of funding for this work beyond campaign funding.

The infrastructure integral to SOH's success includes stakeholders such as local school districts, the media and nonprofit partners. School districts offer board of director endorsement, direct access to students, strong working relationships with staff, and training expertise. Media partners heighten awareness of the achievement gap and provide community-wide distribution of information about volunteer needs and trainings. Community-wide stakeholder support is strong, as evidenced by the 800+ volunteers matched with students and dozens of community leaders who actively participate on the SOH Leadership Teams (see section 2a) in each community. SOH is housed at Centro Hispano in the heart of South Madison. Centro fully embraces SOH as a program partner, serving as its fiscal agent and linking SOH resources to the Latino community.

SOH constantly builds infrastructure which would be capable of being used to sustain the program once AmeriCorps funding is no longer possible. Many dedicated volunteers would still want to tutor children. What would be missing is a staff position dedicated to serving volunteers. It's widely understood that school staffs are already stretched due to budget cuts and staff reductions, and wouldn't be able to provide a staff person to support the volunteers. It is very likely that the caliber of support to volunteers, the communication between volunteers and school staff, and overall effectiveness of tutor treatment would suffer without the services of the AmeriCorps coordinators. However, there is broad community support from leaders and volunteers themselves that could be directed toward future academic support for students, albeit at a reduced level of intensity.

c. **COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY** - SOH is demanding when it comes to compliance and accountability. Co-directors meet regularly with central office administrators to ensure broad district understanding and reinforcement of SOH parameters. They conduct site monitoring visits, where principal and teacher letters of agreement are signed annually. These letters clearly state site duties

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and expectations for all aspects of program operation, including prohibited activities for AmeriCorps members and volunteers. Members are well versed in prohibited activities and report any concerns to SOH staff immediately. Regular check-ins at weekly SOH team meetings and periodic site visits help assure compliance, as does the overall member supervision plan outlined in section 1 f.

The SOH Coordinating Team meets weekly to plan and coordinate all Project operations. Any emerging compliance issues are handled swiftly and proactively. If questions or challenging situations arise, SOH relies on the excellent technical assistance provided by Serve WI and close working relationships with school district administrators. Because of these well-established lines of communication, there is a high level of accountability and transparency throughout SOH.

Additionally, SOH regularly provides detailed reports on student performance, volunteer participation, program updates and Project budget to all partners, beyond its required reporting to Serve WI.

Throughout the last grant cycle SOH met all reporting deadlines, responded promptly to requests from the Commission office, had no compliance issues or identified areas of weakness or risk, and maintained 100% enrollment and retention rates.

SOH staff stay current with AmeriCorps requirements through attendance at state and national conferences, including grants management, and participation in online CNCS sessions. They practice strict attention to detail and continuous improvement in program management.

Finally, United Way's expertise in grants management guarantees comprehensive program oversight. The agency's monitoring systems and ongoing guidance to its projects mean that all AmeriCorps and partner requirements will be scrutinized and met. It maintains a rigorous schedule of organizational self-assessment and improvement that includes strategic planning, staff review and goal setting.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

a. COST EFFECTIVENESS - The current budget represents a cost per MSY of just \$12,785, which is below the maximum allowed and is lower than our cost per MSY from the previous grant cycle. This was possible through careful planning, an increase in United Way support, and growing diversification of funding.

The proposed SOH budget incorporates significant non-federal funding for program implementation and sustainability from United Way. The percentage of match far exceeds that required by the Corporation for local dollar support and is a clear indication of the community's significant endorsement of SOH. These local community dollars are allocated by the agency on the basis of its funding decisions, which prioritize school readiness and academic achievement. This request equals 1.56% of United Way's current operating budget.

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Since 2001 agency support has grown from \$30,000 to a projected \$284,000 for 2013. Part of this funding comes from the Women's Leadership Council which adopted SOH as its fundraising focus. For the past 12 years they have provided between \$20,000 and \$30,000 for SOH annually. Additionally, their donors have the option of growing a fund in the United Way Foundation that benefits SOH. SPASD contributes \$10,000 each year for SOH. Additional support from MMSD comes in the form of substantial in-kind resources (over \$60,000) provided through supervisory staffing and consulting (40% of the MMSD co-director), training expertise, and space for member offices and training workshops. SPASD and MCPASD have also made ongoing commitments to support the work of volunteer coordination through in-kind support.

SOH maximizes its return on investment and is cost effective. In addition to the volume of in-kind resources leveraged by this Project, SOH generates over 30,000 hours of volunteer and AmeriCorps tutoring time focused on improving literacy skills per year. This is the equivalent of nearly \$660,000 at an hourly volunteer rate of \$22 (Independent Sector), an amount that would be virtually impossible for school districts to provide for this purpose. Far beyond the dollar value, however, the social benefit of volunteer tutoring represents an incalculable investment of time and care by engaged community members matched with deserving children in need of help.

Because of the long-term commitments made by these partners, particularly United Way's financial assurances, fiscal stewardship and strong Board endorsement, this budget reflects a dollar match of 52% of the proposed Project's total cost. United Way has guaranteed this level of support for at least the next five years contingent upon continued annual campaign success. United Way has received \$1,721,949 from CNCS in the past five years.

b. BUDGET ADEQUACY - SOH's proposed budget success depends on the incorporation of strong members who enjoy the support, direction and mentorship of skilled coordinators and who can take full advantage of high quality in-service training and opportunities for professional development. SOH staffing and training budgets are designed to maximize such support, and to ensure that members are motivated to perform at consistently high levels with the tools they need to accomplish SOH goals. Similarly, SOH seeks to provide its community volunteers with ample ongoing training opportunities and on-site support in their work, and has anticipated needed school-based member assignments on that basis. All key activities in the program design are supported by specific line items in the SOH budget and demonstrate how AmeriCorps member support has been prioritized in the allotment of budget dollars in order to help ensure their success. In addition to all the required Member Costs specified by the Corporation, designated SOH personnel, training, supplies, and transportation

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expenditures are directly linked to the SOH goals of utilizing AmeriCorps members to actively engage volunteers and address the achievement of students of color and those from low-income families. The proposed SOH budget is based on nine years of experience engaging AmeriCorps\*VISTAs and six years engaging AmeriCorps members in the work of incorporating community volunteers to address academic achievement issues. SOH has successfully leveraged community resources to keep operational costs as low as possible, and can count on ongoing working relationships with partner organizations that provide consulting, training expertise, donations of books and educational materials, and other in-kind contributions to assist SOH over the course of this grant period. The percent of the budget going toward direct support for members (e.g. supervision, support, training, professional development, living allowances and benefits) is 96% of the total SOH budget. Additionally, 52% of the current total SOH budget is coming from sources other than the Corporation, which is well beyond the CNCS required match of 38% and is a strong indicator of sustainability and SOH's likelihood of continued success at leveraging community dollars and other resources.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

From 2011-2012 SOH engaged an external reviewer to conduct an in-depth, project-wide evaluation. Dr. Annalee Good's 2012 "Evaluation of the Elementary Schools of Hope Project" concluded that SOH has a positive impact on student literacy achievement. Please see submitted evaluation.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A