Executive Summary

Twenty full-time military veterans will be engaged as AmeriCorps members leveraging a total of 1,500 (500 per grant year) community volunteers to assist in providing job skills training; services to active military personnel, veterans and their families; and capacity building services to partner organizations throughout WV. By the end of the 2013-2016 grant cycle, it is projected that at least 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive job skills training; at least 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive academic or other support to enter or complete a college degree or vocational certification program; at least 1,000 community members, employers, service providers or other stakeholders will receive veteran-centric training on supporting veterans in academic and educational settings. This project will focus on the CNCS focus areas of Economic Opportunity, Veterans and Military Families and Capacity Building. The CNCS investment of $266,000.00 will be matched at $93,459.00.

Rationale and Approach

a. Need
WV has a strong and committed history of individuals serving in the US Armed Forces. At 13.8%, the state ranks 7th in the nation in the percent of the civilian population who are veterans. According to the US Department of Military Affairs, WV is currently home to 170,783 veterans. Unfortunately, too many of the brave men and women who served in the Armed Forces face dim career prospects upon leaving the military and find themselves unemployed after deployment. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in a report "Unemployment Situation of Veterans 2011," stated that the unemployment rate for veterans who served on active duty in the US Armed Forces at any time since September 2001(Gulf War-era II veterans) was 12.1%. Young male veterans (those ages 18 to 24) who served during Gulf War-era II had an unemployment rate of 29.1%, significantly higher than that of young male nonveterans (17.6%). Recent veterans also suffer disproportionately in having disabilities, which impacts employment opportunities. Approximately 26% of Gulf War-era II veterans reported having a service-connected disability in August 2011, compared with about 14% of all veterans. Despite these tragic statistics, only 593 (3%) of West Virginia veterans are participating in vocational rehabilitation and only 8,840 (5%) are using GI Bill education benefits.
Veterans need support to secure employment when they return to civilian life. While many companies have been proactive in helping veterans, too many veterans remain unemployed or stuck in jobs with limited career potential. CareerBuilder recently surveyed veterans to better understand the struggles
they are facing as civilian job-seekers. According to the nationwide study, 56% of the veterans who returned from service over the past two years said they are currently employed full time, but 46% think they are overqualified for their current job. In a Society for Human Resource Management poll, "Employing Military Personnel and Recruiting Veterans--Attitudes and Practices," 60% of respondents indicated that translating military skills to civilian job experience was a challenge in hiring employees with military experience. Other issues included difficulty transitioning from the structure and hierarchy in the military culture to the civilian workplace culture (48%); post-traumatic stress issues or other mental health issues (46%); and combat-related physical disabilities (22%). According to the CareerBuilder survey, veterans further reported that their biggest challenges in finding work include finding a work environment in which they feel comfortable, knowing what kind of jobs to apply for, and getting people to understand how their military experience translates to civilian work. Veterans need and deserve the best supports available to help them transition back to meaningful employment opportunities.

Veterans need information, support, and guidance to help them find educational programs that fit their potential career path, enroll in academic programs, and be successful as they work towards graduation. Military undergraduates can find it difficult to finance their education, manage time constraints, transition from military life to student life, find support from other veterans, and overcome bureaucratic obstacles. This project will use the "veterans helping veterans" model recommended by the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans in an educational setting to help them achieve their academic goals.

President Obama has made the care and support of military families a top national security policy priority. Communities across the country have been challenged to support the needs of the veterans and their families that make sacrifices for the well-being of the nation. However, veterans remain unaware of the benefits they earned that are available to assist them. Veterans in the Persian Gulf War-era reported that they understand little or nothing about: health care benefits (58%); education benefits (57%); and life insurance benefits (71%). Those who served in Afghanistan and Iraq wars indicated that they understood little or nothing about health care benefits (52%); education benefits (41%); life insurance benefits (65%) (Department of Veterans Affairs National Survey of Veterans). Many nonprofit organizations and individuals are unaware of the issues many veterans face, such as benefits earned by veterans, how to access them, and how to best meet their needs. This project will help build the capacity of WV communities to help veterans thrive after they return home.

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

AmeriCorps members add value to communities across the state of WV. They do not replace employees, but add to the services and resources available to help those most in need. Members enable organizations to provide critical one-on-one services to help vulnerable individuals address significant issues and increase their quality of life.

Military veterans engaged as AmeriCorps members are a highly effective means of addressing the needs of community members and veterans in transition, because they are part of the communities they serve. Members understand the cultural barriers that are frequently encountered by those that need services the most. A few of these barriers include mistrust of outsiders, feeling of isolation, and sense of shame in asking for help. Members work within their communities to reduce these barriers and create bridges to help individuals and families access needed services and supports.

The benefits of an AmeriCorps program in the community are four-fold: (1) Members of the community serve their own communities; (2) Veterans have the unique ability to reach out to and earn the trust of other veterans struggling with transition, allowing programs to serve those that would otherwise not be helped; (3) through the AmeriCorps experience, members gain the personal and professional skills to go on to competitive employment; and (4) AmeriCorps members leverage their service by increasing community volunteers and a sense of civic responsibility.

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

LifeBridge Vet Corps members and leveraged volunteers will be engaged in the following interventions: providing community education on working successfully with veterans and providing job skills training to returning post 9/11 veterans, veterans who are in transition facilities, and other high risk individuals experiencing difficulties transitioning back to self sufficiency. Members will also be engaged in peer mentoring and academic support to the same target demographic to help these individuals set professional goals and pursue a course of study that will help them fulfill those goals.

Vet Corps members will assist in leading community training opportunities for employers, community service providers and other stakeholders. The purpose of these trainings is to decrease the gap between the civilian and military cultures, which is currently wider than it has ever been (Air Force Magazine, 2012). Engaging military veterans to help bridge this gap allows employers, community service providers, faculty members and other stakeholders to hear, first hand, the difficulties that veterans face when returning home and the actions others can take to best support the veterans in successful transition from military to civilian culture.

The LifeBridge Vet Corps program in cooperation with United Way of Central WV has been conducting a pilot program with these courses through workshops and scheduled trainings for
Narratives

collegiate counseling personnel. Participant evaluations indicate that the workshops were beneficial to them in working with, and supporting veterans with whom they work. To date, 100% of the participants indicate that the information presented was useful and would assist them in their work with veterans and their families.

LifeBridge Vet Corps members will be trained in using Articulation of Dependable Strengths ®. This is a non-traditional career exploration, preparation and search technique developed by Bernard Haldane in 1945 to assist veterans find jobs once they returned home. Veterans returning from World War II share similarities in that most of those veterans entered the armed service at 18 and returned home years later with only their military experience to bring to the workforce. Like today, those military experiences and skills were difficult to transfer in a way that was easily understood by civilian employers. The Dependable Strengths ® process is designed to assist participants in identifying their own core strengths and how to articulate those strengths, using their own life experiences, effectively to prospective employers (Career Planning & Adult Developmental Journal, 2005).

In November of 2012, the Vet Corps program conducted a pilot training of Dependable Strengths®. Out of the nine participants who participated in the program, five of them received immediate job offers and three of those five received multiple job offers. All nine of the participants received at least one referral to another individual in the business community who could be of assistance with the individual's job search. All participants reported increased self-esteem and, more importantly, an increased understanding of their strengths and the ability to articulate those strengths to others.

The Articulation of Dependable Strengths ® program is a complete curriculum with measurement instruments. In addition to these standard instruments, the LifeBridge Vet Corps members will provide clients with follow up support and questionnaires to determine if the client was successful in obtaining sustained employment (3 months or more) rather than continuing in a series of stop-loss jobs which makes long-term, career track employment more difficult to obtain.

LifeBridge Vet Corps makes decisions about how to serve vulnerable populations by integrating the best evidence-based practices with member expertise and the preferences of those being served. The interventions proposed for members and community volunteers have been proven to be highly effective and have measurable positive impact on those served as evidenced by documented increases in the following areas: increased academic success; increased employability; increased financial literacy; and increased access to community services and supports. As a state funded formula program, LifeBridge Vet Corps consistently meets stated performance measures and often exceed them. In the 2011-12 program year, 687 individuals worked with AmeriCorps members on hard and
Narratives

soft job skills. Of those, 99% reported an increase in job related skills. More than 95% of the host sites, polled annually, report that the community volunteers recruited and trained by AmeriCorps members assisted the organization in reaching stated goals and objectives.

Outcome Performance Measures

By the end of the 2013-2016 grant cycle, it is projected that at least 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive job skills training; at least 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive academic or other support to enter or complete a college degree or vocational certification program; and at least 1,000 community members, employers, service providers or other stakeholders will receive veteran-centric training on supporting veterans in academic and educational settings.

The program will measure impact through standardized questionnaires and agency records. The results will be reported to the West Virginia Commission for National and Community Service (WVCNCS) quarterly using the progress reporting system outlined by that organization. Performance measure targets were determined based on averages from the previous three-year grant cycle.

To measure the effect of services provided, the following outputs and outcomes were developed. Appropriate measures have been developed to assess client improvement throughout the year. The measures include, but are not limited to: existing agency assessments; standardized surveys; and tracking logs.

Economic Opportunity Performance Measures:

Output: 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive job training and other skill development services.

Outcome 1: 80% of clients receiving job training and other skill development services will show improvement in job skills.

Output: 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive academic or other support to enter or complete a college degree or vocational certification program;

Outcome 2: 80% of clients receiving academic or other support will successfully enter or complete a college degree or vocational certification program;

Output: 1000 community members, employers, service providers or other stakeholders will receive veteran-centric training on supporting veterans in academic and educational settings.

Outcome 3: 90% of individuals receiving veteran-centric training on supporting veterans will report that they have an increased understanding of veteran needs and ways of successfully supporting them.
Narratives

Member Performance Measures
Output: 1: 20 AmeriCorps members will participate in service duties and the member training program to increase the member's personal and work related skills.
Outcome 1: 90% of members will increase their personal and work related skills as a result of participation in service duties and the member training program.

Volunteer Generation Performance Measures
Output 1: 20 members will work individually and as part of a larger team to recruit and train 500 non-duplicated community volunteers to assist with activities and service projects.
Outcome: 90% of the host sites will report that the volunteers recruited by the AmeriCorps members had the skills, knowledge and/or experience to help them serve the community.

Previous Year's Data: The 2011-12 Vet Corps program successfully met, and in many cases, exceeded the set performance measures for the program year: 692 individuals received job skills training from Vet Corps members including targeted job search techniques, resume building, and computer skills; 324 community volunteers were recruited; 495 individuals received financial literacy training; 100% of the members improved their personal and professional work related skills.

d. Member Recruitment
LifeBridge Vet Corps will recruit the majority of its members directly from the communities being served. All agencies requesting AmeriCorps members from LifeBridge Vet Corps will be required to conduct outreach activities at Veteran-centric events; Active, Guard and Reserve Installations throughout the state; and institutions of higher education, and/or vocational schools. This direct contact promotes the use of the Education Award as a recruiting tool.
The LifeBridge program makes a concerted effort to recruit and retain members with disabilities and members from traditionally underrepresented populations. The LifeBridge program has a strong history of working successfully with these populations. A secondary goal of the LifeBridge program is to help interested members move to competitive employment in the non-profit sector. Many of the members who successfully complete the program are hired as paid staff for community organizations. Those members report that the AmeriCorps training, development and experience gave them the edge for success over other candidates.

e. Member Training
LifeBridge Vet Corps members receive approximately 200 hours of training and personal development. These trainings target AmeriCorps prohibited activities, rules and provisions as well as the following skill development in members: community leadership, problem-solving, conflict
Narratives

management, increased emotional intelligence, increased self awareness and effective communication. Members receive extensive, research-based training in providing academic support, mentoring, financial literacy services and job skills services. LifeBridge AmeriCorps will partner with community organizations including, but not limited to, WV Army National Guard, Roark Sullivan Lifeway Center, WV Public Broadcasting, community financial institutions, WV State University, United Way of Central WV, and various other community vocational organizations to provide these trainings to members.

Members will receive a site orientation during which the site supervisor reviews the service description, agency policies and procedures, the general expectations of the host site, and an orientation to the community. All members receive service-specific training to better enable them to serve the clients of the host sites more effectively.

A secondary goal of the Vet Corps program is to assist members in preparing themselves for the competitive job market after service. Therefore, program training has been designed to incorporate many of the best practices outlined in the Corporation for National and Community Service's National Service To Employment Project (NextSTEP). In addition to training to assist members in service duties, they will also receive professional development training including standardized skills and self assessments, leadership, and developing the most common soft job skills (creativity, teamwork, independence, problem solving, etc.) as outlined by Forbes Magazine (February, 2010).

f. Member Supervision

LifeBridge Vet Corps staff works diligently with site supervisors to ensure that the members have a positive and productive year of service in an environment that supports their personal and professional growth and fosters a productive work ethic. LifeBridge Vet Corps places great emphasis on member support as the key to member retention. Each member will have a site supervisor who will act as the direct supervisor for the member. The site supervisor will be responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the member, schedule the service time, and approve or deny requests for leave. Member discipline is handled jointly with the site supervisor and the Director or Associate Director of the LifeBridge Vet Corps program.

Site supervisors are selected by the host site and trained by the LifeBridge program. They are engaged in site supervisor training prior to member recruitment and are trained on member management, prohibited activities, member reflection, mediation and member selection.

Site supervisors are an integral part of the recruitment, training, supervision, assessment and improvement process. They inform Vet Corps staff of the status and development of the member and
Narratives

the program progress. Site supervisors monitor the member's service, conduct site specific trainings and conduct member meetings to ensure quality program delivery. LifeBridge Vet Corps staff conduct site visits to support both the members and the site supervisors.

AmeriCorps member activities are closely monitored by both the site supervisor and the LifeBridge Vet Corps staff to ensure that members are not engaging in prohibited activities. Any violations of prohibited activities are handled through progressive discipline as outlined in the member contract. Member activities and roles do not replace or supplant current staff activities. Program staff will conduct an internal audit of personnel files, training files and financial expenditures on a monthly basis to ensure program compliance.

Members are periodically surveyed throughout the year to gauge member satisfaction and it is formally assessed at the end of the program year. Each member is encouraged to offer suggestions for program improvement. More informal assessments are conducted throughout the year via questionnaires, personal conversations with members, program site visits and program evaluations. Every effort is made by program staff to ensure members feel supported and encouraged during their service term, as retention is our primary goal.

g. Member Experience

The LifeBridge Vet Corps program is designed to ensure members have a powerful service experience and develop a strong life-long ethic of service. Members participate in a 3 day pre-service orientation program that is highly experiential in nature. Members have the opportunity to fully explore their ethic of service and motivation for participation in the AmeriCorps program. They work with 2nd year members or alumni to set personal and professional goals for their service year. Each member works with a professional mentor from the business community throughout their service year. Members also participate in a member training program to enhance the skills necessary to be successful during service and beyond.

Every training Vet Corps members attend has a reflection component incorporated to ensure that members are making the connection between their service and community need. Site supervisors are specifically instructed to provide frequent and structured reflection opportunities for their members. LifeBridge Vet Corps understands the importance of ensuring the member base identifies with the larger AmeriCorps group at the state and national level. Each Vet Corps member receives member gear clearly displaying the AmeriCorps logo and specific instruction on how to identify themselves to the community. They also receive training on working with the media. At the end of their service year, each member is given information on the AmeriCorps Alumni Association so that they can
Narratives

LifeBridge Vet Corps members connect with other national service participants in WV in several ways. Members participate in the statewide Mountain State Leaders program on community leadership. LifeBridge members also participate in cross stream service projects with the Senior Corps programs and the VISTA program of the United Way of Central WV.

One of the primary ways that Vet Corps connects with other national service participants is through service projects. The 2012-13 Vet Corps program initiated Operation Remembrance as a 9/11 Service Project. What began as a relatively small drive for items fill care packages to send to deployed troops turned into a statewide drive which included all state government offices and many community businesses and bank franchises. Vet Corps members, working with 150 other WV AmeriCorps members, packed 500 boxes to send to troops. LifeBridge RSVP and VISTA members served with other community volunteers to collect APO/FPO addresses and fill out customs forms.

The project also enabled the LifeBridge Vet Corps program to develop additional national partners. Military Missions, Inc. offered to assist with the mailing of almost 200 boxes and the costs for an additional 300 boxes were underwritten by Ford and American Autoworkers. In total, approximately 1000 deployed personnel in all branches of military service received care packages from Operation Remembrance.

h. Volunteer Generation

LifeBridge Vet Corps will engage a wide range of community partners and individuals throughout the program year. As part of the pre-service orientation, members will be trained in best practices of effective volunteer management and support. All members and host sites will be encouraged to provide volunteer recognition as a method to recruit and retain volunteers.

Each year, each AmeriCorps member will recruit and train a minimum of 25 non-duplicated volunteers, which will result in 500 volunteers engaged in communities across WV. As a formula program, the host sites consistently report that volunteers recruited by AmeriCorps members continue to volunteer after working with the members, which helps build sustainability for the organization. All members will be encouraged to recruit a diverse pool of volunteers to engage youth and adult volunteers—with a special emphasis on baby boomers.

In addition to personal contact with community members, members will recruit volunteers using the State Commission’s statewide web-based data system that matches volunteers by skill and interest levels (www.volunteerwv.org), United Way Information and Referral volunteer registry, Community Services Advisory Board, University of Charleston, Marshall University, WV State University, service-
Narratives

sites and community based publications and newsletters prepared by service sites and members. The emphasis on volunteer recruitment efforts helps to ensure that the community itself has a vested interest in, and knowledge of, the services provided by the AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps members will create a volunteer recruitment and management plan specific to their community needs. That plan will remain with the host sites once AmeriCorps support has ended to help the community develop and maintain needed projects. AmeriCorps members will be a bridge for interagency communication within communities which will strengthen the infrastructure of support and increase the capacity of communities to better serve and support residents.

i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

LifeBridge Vet Corps understands the importance of ensuring the member base identifies with AmeriCorps at the national and state levels. Each Vet Corps member receives member gear clearly displaying the AmeriCorps logo. All members receive specific instruction on how to identify themselves to the community and when working with the media. At the end of their service year, each member is given a Presidential Service Award, an AmeriCorps Alum pin and information on the AmeriCorps Alumni Association so that they can broaden their professional network with other AmeriCorps Alumni after service.

Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing
The mission of United Way of Central WV is to identify needs, develop and mobilize resources and implement programs in a manner that models shared leadership, enhances organizational capacity and builds better communities. In 1994, the first AmeriCorps grant was awarded to the organization for 18 members to serve 4 counties. In 1998, the program expanded to 33 members serving 14 counties. Today, 80 members in two programs (LifeBridge AmeriCorps and LifeBridge Vet Corps) serve in counties with clearly identified needs in education, job skills training and health and human services.

While the LifeBridge Vet Corps program is a relatively young program, the Traditional LifeBridge program has 70 members serving statewide in West Virginia and is one of the oldest competitively funded programs in the United States. The United Way of Central WV and the Vet Corps staff are well versed in managing multiple and/or rural sites and understand the budgetary requirements of running a statewide program. Throughout its existence, the LifeBridge Vet Corps program has consistently met or exceeded its stated outcomes. The program has consistently raised the required match funds through donations made from the communities and agencies it supports.
Narratives

As a sister program to the oldest and largest full-time AmeriCorps program in WV, the State Corporation Office and the WV Commission for National and Community Service often requests that the LifeBridge Vet Corps program be a host for various national and state organizations to learn about National Service programs. The programs also serve as peer support for new AmeriCorps applicants and programs.

United Way of Central WV is experienced in successfully managing federal funds and national service programs. In addition to the LifeBridge programs, the organization also manages Foster Grandparents, RSVP and VISTA programs. Approximately $1,972,844.00 comes directly from CNCS to support these national service programs, with $915,768.00 non-federal dollars are used as match for these programs.

United Way of Central WV has the necessary administrative capabilities to manage the AmeriCorps program, complying with all federal rules and regulations. The organization is comprised of three divisions: Internal Operations, Resource Development, and Community Services. LifeBridge AmeriCorps, LifeBridge Vet Corps, Senior Corps, and AmeriCorps*VISTA programs are under the direction of the Community Services Division. United Way of Central WV is acutely aware of the need to demonstrate transparency as stewards of public funds. An internal control system is in place to record, track and ensure that revenues and expenses are properly documented and credited to the correct account line items. A local certified public accounting firm conducts an A-133 audit annually. Also, the WV Commission for National and Community Service conducts a financial compliance review of each AmeriCorps program six months into the program year. The LifeBridge program is consistently found to be in compliance with all federal and AmeriCorps specific regulations and provisions. LifeBridge AmeriCorps is required to report outcome measures quarterly to the WV Commission for National and Community Service.

Program staff for LifeBridge AmeriCorps includes a part-time Community Services Division Director, AmeriCorps Director, Program Associate Director and a Programs Coordinator.

Lisa Hudnall is the Community Services Division Director. She has over 25 years of experience in non-profit program and fiscal management. Lisa is the direct supervisor of the Director of the AmeriCorps Program. Lisa is the secondary contact for the grant.

Elizabeth Southall, Director of LifeBridge Programs, is responsible for developing and monitoring goals and objectives of the program, completing and submitting financial and programmatic reports, training members and site supervisors, developing partnerships and program sustainability, and managing the day-to-day operations of the LifeBridge AmeriCorps program. She holds a master's
Narratives

degree in non-profit administration and has completed considerable research and work in the areas of: serving Veterans, military personnel and their dependents; organizational leadership; assisting vulnerable and at risk individuals move to self sufficiency; volunteer management; and managing multigenerational teams. She is a certified facilitator of the Dependable Strengths ® curriculum and is certified to administer personality and skills assessments.

Elizabeth has extensive experience working with vulnerable and at-risk populations including veterans, persons from underrepresented populations, and persons with disabilities. Elizabeth has attended the American Express Leadership Academy sponsored by CNCS and other Corporation sponsored trainings. She has made many program and policy changes based on the best practices and recommendations learned at these trainings with a goal of ensuring the LifeBridge program continues to grow to meet the most challenging and critical needs of WV’s citizens. Elizabeth is the primary contact for the grant.

Darnitta Elswick, Program Associate Director, is responsible for site management, member management and training, and tracking the activities of the programs. Darnitta was a national service participant for seven years, serving one year with AmeriCorps State and 6 years with AmeriCorps*VISTA.

The Programs Assistant is responsible for site visits, coordinating events and member training, ensuring member data/file compliance and evaluation of member collected data. This position assists the Director on an as-needed basis with other program tasks and events.

United Way of Central WV provides additional accounting, marketing, and administrative staff support to the LifeBridge AmeriCorps program as needed.

Program staff members are paid from a variety of sources, with all time charged to all grants and contracts properly documented on time sheets.

b. Sustainability

The LifeBridge Vet Corps program recognizes the need for long-term sustainability to ensure the program’s impact will last beyond the AmeriCorps presence in that community.

For the past 3 years, the program has been successful in expanding partnerships while maintaining longstanding partners. In addition, several short-term grants and endowments have helped sustain the program until additional committed partners were recruited. All of the partners have provided contact resources for additional partnership development. The staff will continue to develop new funding sources for contributions, endowments, and in-kind. All partners are committed to supporting this AmeriCorps program grant and have provided in-kind resources including: trainers; statewide
Narratives

training; office space; supplies; telephone services; copier; fax; and computer/printer access.
LifeBridge Vet Corps has a vast network of partners throughout WV to engage the community in the project: WV State University; WV University; United Ways of WV; Kanawha Valley Community and Technical College; EnAct; WV Commission for National and Community Service; CharacterEthics; WVU Extension Services; WV Army National Guard; WV 133rd Air Guard; Covenant House; Mary Weir Public Library; Roark Sullivan Lifeway Center; Red Cross, and Canaan Methodist Church. While this list is representative of the kinds of relationships developed, it is not all inclusive.
LifeBridge Vet Corps has been fortunate enough to establish strong partnerships throughout the nation as well. LifeBridge Vet Corps regularly works with Washington State Vet Corps; Center for Dependable Strengths; Washington State Department of Rehabilitation and Vocational Services and the American Legion to discuss best practices and develop innovative and evidence based approaches to better serving active military personnel, veterans and at risk individuals ensure economic security for themselves and their families.

c. Compliance and Accountability

LifeBridge Vet Corps staff has been consistent for more than 5 years and is well versed in the AmeriCorps rules and regulations. To ensure full compliance, the program undergoes at least one full review of program policies and procedures from the WV Commission for National and Community Service (WVCNCS). Program staff will attend State Commission and CNCS sponsored meetings and trainings to ensure the program has the most up-to-date information on provisions, rules and regulations.
To ensure compliance at the service site location, LifeBridge has a mandatory training for all host sites prior to the beginning of the program year. All pertinent rules and regulations are covered at this training and LifeBridge conducts at least one site visit each year to further ensure compliance.
LifeBridge Vet Corps believes that clear and consistent communication between the members, the host sites and program staff is the key to assuring compliance. As part of the Member Agreement, members are required to report any concerns they have regarding their service activities to the Director or Associate Director. Program staff will immediately initiate an investigation and take appropriate action if necessary. Host sites are also required, as a part of the site agreement, to report any concerns with the member service or program requirements to LifeBridge staff. All concerns will be investigated and addressed in a timely fashion and program staff will solicit assistance from the WV Commission for National and Community Service as needed.
In the event that instances of risk or noncompliance are identified, the program or host sites will
Narratives

create a plan of action to rectify the situation. The LifeBridge program has a strong working relationship with the WV Commission for National and Community Service and does its due diligence to bring any problems or potential problems to the Commission’s attention so that the situation can be dealt with in a transparent and effective fashion.

Performance Targets and Demonstrated Compliance
Throughout the last 3 years, the LifeBridge Vet Corps program has not only met its outlined performance measures, but in many cases it has exceeded them. The dire economic situation in WV led to a sharp increase in the need for the services provided by the LifeBridge Vet Corps program. With this in mind, several targets for the performance measures have been increased for the 2013-16 grant cycle.

The compliance reviews and the A-133 audit for the last full year of program operation did not identify any compliance issues or areas of risk. The LifeBridge Vet Corps program has a strong commitment to be good stewards of federal funds.

Operating Sites and Member Service Sites
LifeBridge Vet Corps has not yet identified all of the service sites for the 2013-14 program year. West Virginia State University, Roark Sullivan Lifeway Center and the LifeBridge programs of United Way of Central WV will be sites for approximately half of the slots. Additional sites will begin applying in February 2013 through a competitive process. Sites requesting AmeriCorps slot(s) must complete an application stating how they will use the AmeriCorps member, and describe how their mission aligns with the priority areas of the Vet Corps program. Current sites must show how they will use the AmeriCorps members in a new or expanded program. This ensures that AmeriCorps members are being used in innovative ways to establish or expand programs until other community supports can be put in place to ensure long term project sustainability.

The applications are reviewed by program staff and a small committee of stakeholders to choose the sites most likely to ensure the greatest impact of Vet Corps members in the communities served.

Current Grantees: Enrollment and Retention
Enrollment: In the 2012-13 program year, the program had 100% recruitment of 10 members.
Retention: In the 2012-13 program year 10 members are still serving. During the 2011-12 program year, 14 members were recruited and 4 members were released for violations of the member contract. The Vet Corps program intentionally targets only Veterans to serve as members. Veterans remain a high risk population for alcohol and other substance abuse issues. The 4 members were released because of issues related to substance abuse. The program offered these members appropriate
Narratives

referrals to community and VA resources to assist them in regaining control of their lives. While this is unfortunate, the program remains steadfast in its belief that two of the primary tenets of the AmeriCorps program are to be good stewards of federal funds and to maintain the public confidence in the AmeriCorps program as a whole.

Retaining members who violate the member contract undermines our ability to uphold either of these principles. LifeBridge Vet Corps staff made every attempt to assist these members in correcting their behavior and completing their service hours. While this commitment to enforce the member contract and other program policies caused the retention rate of the program to drop, it was necessary to ensure that the program would operate more effectively in the future and federal funds would be spent prudently and responsibly.

Due to these concerns, prior to the start of the 2012-13 program year, program staff was very proactive in reaching out nationally to other groups which work successfully with the Veteran population. Staff received training from evidence based programs and learned best practices from other veteran-centric programs across the nation including training in military cultural competence, assisting veterans in successful vocational reintegration and working successfully with veterans with disabilities.

LifeBridge Vet Corps staff attended the 2012 National Service Inclusion Project Conference in Washington D.C. to learn best practices in recruiting and retaining veterans and wounded warriors into national service programs as well as program recruitment and retention strategies that follow best practices from the Corporation for National and Community Services National Service To Employment Project (NextSTEP). As a result, the Vet Corps member application process now includes questionnaires to assist member candidates assess their interest in national service and the types of service for which they feel best suited. The goal of these questionnaires is to help ensure a better fit for the individual and their service assignment.

The program graduated one site which was unsuccessful in retaining members because of organizational instability at the management level.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

The LifeBridge Vet Corps program is entering its 4th year of service. During its years of service to WV citizens, hundreds of individuals and families have had their lives changed for the better. Hundreds of clients have pursued gainful employment and moved to self-sufficiency. Many of the Vet Corps members now work in both the non-profit and community service sector.

As previously described, the proposed budget meets the expectations of CNCS AmeriCorps programs
Narratives

and has been developed to be as efficient as possible. While the LifeBridge Vet Corps program is a relatively young program, the Traditional LifeBridge program has 70 members serving statewide in West Virginia and is one of the oldest programs in the United States. The United Way of Central WV and the Vet Corps staff are well versed in managing multiple and/or rural sites and understand the budgetary requirements of running a statewide program.

The program utilizes its financial resources prudently and effectively. The budget supports appropriate levels of staffing and adequate staff compensation. The line items are appropriate to meet the needs of the program. The proposed budget includes member support for ongoing personal and professional development. The proposed budget does not exceed the maximum cost per Member Service Year (MSY) of $13,300. LifeBridge is requesting the maximum cost per MSY to cover the increases in member travel and costs associated with trainings (meals, facility costs, etc). LifeBridge AmeriCorps will continue to pursue grants from public and private sources to help support the program.

Current Grantees Only

In accordance with CNCS regulations, the LifeBridge program continues to raise its match responsibilities each program year. In the first year of the 2013-16 proposed budget, the program match will be 26%.

Success in Securing Match Resources

Cash match funding will continue from established partners. The cash match assists in meeting the cost of personnel, benefits, supplies, contracts, training for staff and members, program evaluation, and other general operating costs. The cash match donation is not a fee for service. In addition to the cash match, partners will supply a significant amount of in-kind contributions as explained in the sustainability section.

Special Circumstances

All of the counties served by LifeBridge Vet Corps are considered rural in nature and more than 25% of the counties served can be considered remote in nature because of the limited economic, medical, and social service resources. These remote counties are also difficult to access because of limited transportation infrastructure. The proposed budget for member travel and staff travel are based on the previous year's average and are necessary given the rural nature of the state.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Each year, LifeBridge AmeriCorps will contract with an external consultant for a program evaluation. The consultant will assist staff in developing measurement tools, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting progress towards the outcomes. Each evaluation is submitted to CNCS through the WV
Narratives

Commission for National and Community Service.

The LifeBridge Programs Advisory Committee will provide program support and advice on an ongoing basis. This committee, in cooperation with representatives from the host site agencies and communities served, will conduct a mid-year and end-of-year review of the program to assess the program’s progress towards meeting performance measures, and offer recommendations to help strengthen the program. The results of these reviews will be shared with site supervisors and members and used to facilitate future program planning and improvement.

Prior to the beginning of each program year, host site representatives and the staff of LifeBridge AmeriCorps meet to discuss and evaluate the program to determine changes needed for continued growth. These meetings are held in each of the 5 regions of the state. The geography and population varies greatly and each region has unique needs. Each program year is tailored to meet the most critical needs of the state in the focus areas of education and economic opportunity.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A