

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Community Technology Empowerment Project (CTEP) AmeriCorps members provide technology instruction to improve the computer literacy, and ultimately the employability, of unemployed and underemployed individuals with low technology skills. CTEP serves Minnesota's Twin Cities metro area and targets individuals who are low-income, new American and/or communities of color, or have disabilities. 40 full-time members will be placed in public computer centers annually for the next three years, targeting the focus areas of Economic Opportunity and Capacity Building. From September 3, 2013 to August 31, 2016 the program will serve 6,480 participants of whom 5,280 will become certified in basic computer skills and 1,575 will obtain jobs. At the same time, members will strengthen the capacity of at least 30 community agencies, mobilizing 2,100 volunteers who will provide 36,000 hours of additional technology instruction. CNCS's investment of \$1,412,061 over three years will be matched with \$1,412,559 in local funds. Matching funds already are secured for Years One and Two through foundation support and partner site contributions.

## Rationale and Approach

### COMPELLING COMMUNITY NEED

Computer literacy is critical to securing employment and functioning effectively in the 21st Century. The US Department of Commerce (2008) reported that 95% of new jobs created require applicants to possess significant computer skills. More than 80% of Fortune 500 companies require online applications -- even for entry level or minimum wage service, sales, stock and cashier jobs at Wal-Mart or Target (Taleo Research, 2009). Pew Research (2008) found that nearly two-thirds (63%) of Americans use the Internet and email on the job. Public and private sector agencies are increasingly moving all operations online. Seniors looking for social security, pension or Medicare information are directed to government-sponsored websites. The Immigration and Naturalization Service now requires use of the Internet to set up appointments. GED testing, an employment prerequisite for individuals without a highschool diploma, will be offered only online starting in 2014.

Poverty, disability, and limited English proficiency are among the chief barriers to computer and Internet access and digital skill building. People who face these barriers are at a distinct disadvantage in finding employment, gaining an education and participating in civic life. Lack of digital skills and access contributes to under- and unemployment and the inability to access education, workforce, healthcare and government resources. Ultimately, it limits individuals' ability to obtain a job and become self-sufficient, productive citizens.

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The Twin Cities is racially diverse with 24% self-identifying as people of color. 12% of people in the Twin Cities live in poverty and 9% live with a disability (US Census, 2010). For these communities, digital skills and access to computers and the Internet are limited. The impact of the "digital divide" between those who have digital skills and access and those who don't is dramatic: nationwide, Pew Research (2011) reports that only 63% of those earning less than \$30,000 annually use the Internet, vs. 98% making more than \$75,000. Just 65% of persons identified as Latino, 66% of African Americans, 47% of Latinos who speak only Spanish, and 54% of Americans with disabilities regularly use the Internet -- compared to 72% of all Americans nationwide.

Mirroring what has found to be true nationally, 22% of Twin Cities residents do not have a computer in their home (Center for Rural Policy and Development, 2012). The majority within this group are Latino, elderly and/or low-income. In the 2012 City of Minneapolis Community Technology Survey, more than 28% of residents lack home broadband access and only 69% of those surveyed felt comfortable with searching and applying for jobs online. At the same time, the Twin Cities has the nation's highest unemployment disparity: while the overall unemployment rate is about 6%, the rate jumps to almost 10% for Latinos and 18% for African Americans (Economic Policy Institute, 2011).

For these reasons, CTEP targets unemployed or underemployed people with low technology skills who are low-income, new American and/or of color, or have disabilities. CTEP's own experience over the past 8 years serving low-income, ethnically diverse people and/or those with disabilities validates the critical need for technology literacy programming. In the last three years, the number of people assisted by our service sites has increased 40% from 3900 people served to 6500. In 2012, only 29% passed basic computer skills tests prior to instruction. It is clear that Twin Cities residents are reaching out to CTEP partner sites to learn computer-based employment skills that they cannot accomplish or afford on their own.

CTEP has consistently received more requests from partner agencies for members than we can allot, and are therefore expanding the program from 30 to 40 full time members starting in the 2013-14 program year. By increasing the number of service sites and members, CTEP will be able to better meet the increasing demand for our programming. With a special focus on employment, we anticipate that in Year One more than 1600 Twin Cities residents will become certified in basic computer skills and 500 will be verified in obtaining employment.

CTEP AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO IMPROVE DIGITAL INCLUSION

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The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), charged with creating a National Broadband Plan, singled out CTEP as a national model for community partnership in teaching technology literacy to low-income communities. In March 2010, the FCC invited a CTEP member to provide testimony before members of Congress at the Digital Inclusion Summit in Washington, DC. US Senator Amy Klobuchar has furthermore endorsed CTEP as a "vital asset" in bridging the digital divide. Inspired in part by the success of CTEP, the FCC is now considering the development of a National Digital Literacy Corps.

Minneapolis' 2012 Community Technology Survey found that one in 10 residents surveyed used public computer centers for digital literacy assistance -- yet CTEP service sites report that their centers are largely understaffed and underfunded. CTEP builds agency capacity by providing skilled service members to deliver technology instruction aligned to community needs; recruiting, training and supervising volunteers; and securing in-kind donations of hardware and software to contribute to the program's sustainability in the community.

CTEP requests 40 full-time members who will serve in over 30 community-based sites in the Twin Cities. Sites include workforce centers, social service agencies, disability inclusion organizations, youth employment programs, public housing, and public libraries. CTEP AmeriCorps members strengthen communities through the direct service activities of teaching technology literacy skills (60%), and building agency capacity through program development and mobilizing volunteers (30%) as described below. The remaining 10% of service hours is devoted to member development at bi-weekly trainings.

### DIRECT SERVICE (60%)

CTEP members teach technology literacy skills to community residents to build digital literacy and job-placement skills and improve economic opportunity, as follows:

**INSTRUCTION.** Members teach technology and job-placement skills using standardized curriculum developed and tested by the St. Paul Public Library based on the five Northstar Digital Literacy Standards: Basic Computer Use, Internet, Operating Systems, Email and Word Processing. The curriculum progresses through each standard, devoting eight hours of instruction to each skill area (unit). Job-placement training is embedded in the curriculum (e.g., participants search job listings in the Internet unit and edit resumes in the Word Processing unit). Materials and instructions are delivered in the main languages used by participants: English, Spanish, Somali and Hmong. Instruction incorporates assistive technology such as screen reading software, track balls, and large

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text keyboards so as to be inclusive of persons with disabilities. Depending on the site, CTEP members instruct in a one-on-one capacity or in a classroom-type setting in formal train-to-work programs.

**CERTIFICATION THROUGH ASSESSMENTS.** Individual's skill-building progress is measured through online pre- and post- assessments specifically designed to measure proficiency in the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards. Not only do the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessments provide CTEP with an objective manner to measure increases in technology literacy, but passing the assessments also provides basic technology skill certification to participants which assists in obtaining employment. At enrollment, participants are pre-tested using the Northstar Assessments; individuals who score lower than the certification level of 85% enter the class. At the end of the class participants are post-tested using the same assessment; those receiving scores higher than 85% achieve certification in that skill area. Each CTEP member will successfully administer over 150 certifications each service year. All told, Northstar offers up to 40 hours of training to each participant. When all assessments are passed, the individual will receive 5 certificates documenting the range of digital literacy skills mastered.

**COACHING AND EMPLOYMENT.** Following certification, participants work with CTEP members one-to-one to apply these skills in real-world settings: searching for jobs and completing online job applications. Members spend an average of three hours with each participant. Members may assist individuals who progress through basic skills to develop other technological competencies for more specialized employment outcomes, such as Excel, PowerPoint, and Skype.

According to Alice Neve, site supervisor for Saint Paul Public Library, "CTEP members are often the human connection between a very formidable looking (and frightening) computer and a person with many needs who needs access to technology. They extend access through classes and one-on-one coaching and mentoring, allowing the public library staff to serve larger numbers of customers with individualized attention than would otherwise be possible."

### CAPACITY BUILDING (30%)

CTEP members begin their service year by conducting a Site Capacity Assessment to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the agency's technology literacy programming, as well as community needs related to technology. Working with site supervisors and CTEP staff, members help design programming based on the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards' curriculum and aligned to local need. Programming is assessed again at mid-year and year-end to gauge growth in capacity. CTEP partners with agencies that do not have robust technology training infrastructure; members

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seek in-kind donations to strengthen their computer labs. This usually takes the form of donated hardware and software, and often these improvements involve increasing accessibility to allow those with disabilities to better utilize the labs.

Results of capacity building have been striking. Liberty Mickelson, site supervisor for CTEP at the Employment Action Center observed that since offering Northstar certification, participants "are excited to be doing things that they've never felt they could before such as: making doctor appointments online (saving them bus fare, phone minutes, etc.), checking their children's school attendance and grades online, and scheduling interviews online. Best of all, they are able to discuss what they know in interviews, which is making them more employable! Job placement among our participants increased by 23% last year. Due to the fact that we have not changed programming in any other ways, we correlate this increase to our addition of the certifications for our job seekers."

CTEP members bring curriculum and implement a schedule of basic technology skill programming with the goal that future digital literacy instruction will be led by volunteers and staff alone. Part of building capacity at the service site is expanding the use of trained volunteers. Each CTEP member will recruit and/or manage an average of 15 volunteers during the service year. Members train volunteers and site staff in how to deliver technology instruction and proctor Northstar assessments. CTEP members will help build volunteer management infrastructure by implementing at least three effective volunteer practices during their term, including revised volunteer position descriptions, reflection sessions, and volunteer recognition. As a result, CTEP "graduates" 3-6 sites each year that demonstrate their ability to sustain quality technology instruction, and new sites are invited to apply that demonstrate greater need.

### EVIDENCE-BASED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

CTEP uses the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards as a common benchmark across all sites for demonstrating digital literacy. Because these standards were developed in consultation with local employers and workforce development institutions, Northstar Digital Literacy Certification is a credential increasingly understood and accepted by Twin Cities employers and, thus, an asset for those seeking jobs.

The standards were created by education consultants hired in 2010 by the Saint Paul Community Literacy Consortium, a group of local adult basic education providers, with funding from Otto Bremer Foundation and Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library. All consultants had advanced degrees in adult basic education and professional experience creating online learning modules.

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Research for the standards began with a scan of existing basic computer literacy standards and assessments. The Consortium identified two critical criteria as key for the local target populations: 1) the standards must be written at an appropriate literacy level and 2) the assessment must be free to the participant. Of the existing standards and assessments reviewed, including Microsoft Digital Literacy Standards, Certiport, and the European Computer Driver's License, none met the Consortium's criteria.

The Consortium then consulted the business community and workforce development agencies to identify the technology skills most essential for local jobs. The Consortium concluded that these were Basic Computer Use, Internet, Operating Systems, Email and Word Processing. As an example, Microsoft Word is an incredibly powerful program that has thousands of functions. However, the Consortium concluded the Word Processing Standard will include only the 17 functions most needed for today's jobs: how to open a document, what the difference is between "save" and "save as," how to copy and paste, etc.

The Consortium also created online assessments for each standard in the four languages most common in the Twin Cities: English, Spanish, Somali and Hmong. Assessments were designed based on research including University of New Brunswick's Dorothy MacKeracher's theories of adult learning (2009), and Sri Ananda's research at WestEd on performance-based assessments (2000). Northstar Digital Literacy Online Assessments are designed to assess: 1) behaviors in the form of simulated tasks that technologically literate people can reasonably be expected to perform; 2) knowledge that technologically literate people can reasonably be expected to answer correctly; and 3) attitudes about technology in which technologically literate people can reasonably be expected to identify appropriate use. For participants to be certified in a Standard, they must score 85% or higher on the corresponding Northstar Online Assessment.

The Consortium tested the assessments in 2011 for question validity by piloting test versions both in technologically literate and illiterate groups. Questions in each group were identical, and results were analyzed to determine questions that were not a valid assessment of technology literacy. The assessment tool can be said to be reliable in that it programmatically assesses user responses according to predetermined values in a consistent way.

CTEP provides the Northstar Curriculum, which connects to each Northstar Standard and was created and tested by the Saint Paul Public Library, ensuring that the computer literacy and job placement skills taught correlate to competencies covered by the Northstar Digital Literacy Online Assessments. CTEP staff ensures that curriculum is used with fidelity by monitoring member activities

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and providing feedback during mid- and end-of-year member performance reviews, and at three site visits throughout the service year.

While available for a little over one year, adoption of the Northstar Standards has moved beyond the CTEP network. Robbinsdale Area Schools and Normandale Community College in the Twin Cities will begin using the Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment to assess the needs of incoming students. Kit Hadley, Director of Saint Paul Public Library, reports that Northstar curriculum is being shared and adopted in libraries across the country. It is clear that the standards, curriculum and assessments are meeting a critical need on a national scale.

The CNCS investment will have significant community impact. In the next three-year cycle, 6,480 participants will receive technology training; 5,280 participants will be Northstar-certified in digital literacy, and 1,575 participants will obtain employment because of enhanced computer and job-placement skills and member coaching. Each year, a minimum of 30 agencies will receive capacity building services, and over three years members will recruit or manage 2,100 volunteers who will provide over 36,750 hours of service to the community. At least 1,050 volunteers or staff will receive training directly from CTEP members in how to better implement technology literacy programming. Finally, members will leverage more than \$43,000 of in-kind contributions, mostly in the form of donated computers and assistive technology either to their labs or directly to participants through onsite programming. As a result, 3-6 sites will graduate from CTEP each year able to deliver Northstar programming on their own. Expanding the program from 30 to 40 members will allow CTEP to serve 10 more agencies and certify an additional 350 Twin Cities residents, of which an additional 100 will be verified in obtaining employment.

Performance measures are tracked for participants through course attendance records and pre- and post-course assessment scores. Job placement is verified through a combination of pay stubs, acceptance letters, or verbal confirmation from job counselors or participant. Capacity building is documented through logs of volunteer hours and in-kind contributions. Pre, interim and post-Site Capacity Assessments also monitor growth in capacity. Results are reported using a comprehensive online database, OnCorps. Members and supervisors receive extensive training prior to the term of service to ensure that they are able to properly document and manage data generated; supervisors verify the accuracy of their member's reporting at each site prior to submission. Members and supervisors report data four times a year to CTEP staff, who in turn reports these results quarterly to our state commission, ServeMinnesota.

Performance measure targets for 2013-16 were determined by assessing previous years' data

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and assigning aggressive but attainable goals. Last year, CTEP surpassed performance targets in all areas: 30 CTEP members taught technology skills to over 6,500 participants and of those receiving job coaching 519 gained employment, exceeding performance targets of serving 2,300 participants and 315 obtaining employment. Because of our focus on basic technology skills, most jobs obtained are in the entry-level service sector, although sector-based jobs such as nursing assistants, accountants, and lab technicians also have been secured. CTEP members mobilized 758 volunteers who served 21,157 hours, exceeding our goals of 450 volunteers serving 11,000 hours. Members completed 185 capacity-building projects at 27 sites, surpassing our goal of 90 projects.

While CTEP has always met its program targets, the demand for computer training has grown exponentially as technology has grown more sophisticated and more ubiquitous, increasing the digital divide. However, tracking success in learning technology skills without uniform criteria has been a challenge across CTEP sites. Starting in 2012, with the implementation of the standardized Northstar Assessments, we now have the ability to conduct more rigorous evaluation of participants' progress in a systematic way, focusing on skills that participants need to be successful in today's employment environment. Therefore, this year we expect our technology instruction numbers per member to be somewhat more conservative due to higher benchmarks for learning across all sites.

### MEMBER RECRUITMENT

CTEP's recruitment plan has been successful in ensuring that sites recruit high-quality members and include local residents who are culturally and linguistically representative of the communities they serve. In the last eight years, CTEP has consistently filled 100% of our slots. CTEP's staff and site supervisors start recruitment in March with outreach to the communities to be served as well as a national candidate pool. CTEP uses partner agency websites, local college and university career centers and cultural student groups, and employment websites to post available positions. Our program is well suited for members who have physical disabilities. They have life experiences that allow them to best promote and teach others about the benefits of assistive technology such as screen reading software, track balls, and large text keyboards. CTEP has successfully partnered with organizations such as State Services for the Blind and local disability services at area colleges to recruit members every year who have disabilities. Members are placed until the slots are filled which has traditionally occurred in July; the service year begins in early September.

In the current program year, over one-third of members self-identify as people of color and about the same percentage are fluent in a language other than English. Almost half the members

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grew up in the Twin Cities metro, and one-third of members applied from outside of Minnesota.

In addition to the minimum federal AmeriCorps hiring standards, CTEP requires that applicants have a basic knowledge of computer skills, and some experience working with people who are low-income, new American and/or persons of color, or have disabilities. CTEP also targets candidates who have some post-secondary education; are bilingual in a target language (Spanish, Somali or Hmong); and have experience in volunteer management. All prospective members as well as their site supervisors must pass state background checks, a national sex offender check, and a fingerprint FBI background check prior to service.

### MEMBER TRAINING

CTEP AmeriCorps members begin their service year with a mandatory week-long Pre-Service Orientation that includes an introduction to AmeriCorps and National Service, CTEP program goals, different streams of national service, values of AmeriCorps, service year expectations, training on direct service and reporting, and stages of the AmeriCorps member experience. CTEP's plan for member development, training, and supervision is designed to ensure that members understand the terms of their contracts as AmeriCorps members.

During the Pre-Service Orientation, members and supervisors are informed about prohibited service activities and are given explicit instructions about how to avoid such activities within their term. Members and site supervisors must pass an assessment during orientation ensuring that they understand prohibited activities. Sites must sign off that they agree to all terms in their partnership application and Host Site Agreement every year. CTEP verifies that CTEP members and the volunteers they recruit and manage are not engaged in prohibited activities through a Site Visit Review Tool completed at site visits three times a year.

CTEP staff send a site checklist to supervisors to ensure that they provide an extensive site orientation for their member; this checklist must be signed and returned to CTEP staff. Checklist details include: understanding the mission of the host organization, meeting other staff, orientation to the local community, limits of AmeriCorps service, access to resources, site policies, service schedule, dress code, and complaints procedure. At the end of the orientation week, supervisors, members and CTEP staff gather for a retreat to build momentum around the digital literacy services that members will provide in the coming year.

While CTEP members enter the program already proficient in basic technology skills, representatives from the Saint Paul Community Literacy Consortium train members in teaching the

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Northstar Digital Literacy Standards and Curriculum as well as in delivering the Online Assessments with fidelity in a proctored environment. CTEP members then take a test to ascertain their mastery of the material. Consortium representatives return to Corps Days on an as-needed basis throughout the year to help resolve challenges the members are facing with the basic technology skills instruction and assessment proctoring. Other essential topics taught within first month of service are In-Depth Reporting; Job Placement Training (Minnesota Workforce Center); How to Conduct Site Capacity Assessment; Managing Difficult Situations and Lab Management; and Cultural Diversity Training and Orientation to Communities Served (Neighborhood House Curricula).

To ensure CTEP members are well trained for their service, CTEP staff conducts site visits two months into the service term and then two other times in the year. Site visits consist of meeting with the AmeriCorps member and site supervisor, directly monitoring service in the classroom, review of capacity building projects, and review of reporting to ensure that members are performing their service with fidelity. Members are asked whether supervision is adequate and CTEP staff take appropriate measures to correct any problems. Members also are encouraged to contact CTEP staff any time if a conflict or question may arise.

Ongoing member training is designed to assist members in achieving outcomes including project management, volunteer mobilization, reporting, and civic engagement. For ongoing training, CTEP staff holds all-day Corps Training Days twice a month. The training venue rotates between partner sites to familiarize members with different agencies within our network. Trainings are typically conducted by staff from CTEP and/or community partners. CTEP aims to provide trainings that are inclusive to all members by giving members a stake in planning and providing feedback for trainings through an online bi-weekly reflection. Ongoing skills that the members acquire include:

- \*OCT- Volunteer Recruitment and Management (HandsOn Twin Cities curriculum)
- \*NOV- Fundraising for Technology Programming at Site
- \*DEC- Assistive Technology for Those with Disabilities (PACER Center curriculum)
- \*JAN- MLK Jr. Day of Service Learning experience
- \*FEB- Media Production for Outreach and Awareness
- \*MAR- Communication Skills; Talking Effectively about your Service Year
- \*APR- Life After AmeriCorps: Alumni Panel and Informational Interviewing
- \*MAY- Facilitation and Presentation Skills
- \*JUNE- Member-led Community Open House on Digital Literacy (host sites represented)
- \*JULY- Life after AmeriCorps: Resume Workshop and Job Search after Service

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\*AUG - Civic Engagement Public Presentations

\*ONGOING- Civic engagement (University of Minnesota Public Achievement curriculum).

CTEP uniquely requires all members to participate in a 75-hour group civic engagement project intended to build capacity and remove barriers to digital inclusion in targeted communities. CTEP uses internationally recognized curriculum from the Public Achievement program of the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs. Public Achievement is used in schools and communities in several states and around the world, and in 2007 was recognized by the Bertelsmann Stiftung Foundation as one of the best citizenship education efforts globally, giving participants skills around how to widen perspective, work better as a team, and take responsibility for solving community problems. CTEP staff has been trained by the University of Minnesota to deliver training to members using the Public Achievement model.

Each CTEP member participates in a member-driven small (3-5 members) group project that focuses on addressing a specific community need or barrier related to digital inclusion. During the first three months of service, members gain skills in planning a project, considering issues such as sustainability, feasibility, community impact, community buy-in and cost. Then members create an action plan that they implement during the next eight months. Past projects have included working with local health providers to assist community members in accessing online health information, creating resources to increase Internet security and reduce cyberbullying, and distributing refurbished computers to low-income families. Members culminate their work by holding public presentations on their projects and writing a group reflection considering their accomplishments: did they achieve their goals, what stumbling blocks were encountered, what opportunities exist for continuing the project into the future, and what they learned about civic engagement from the experience.

### MEMBER SUPERVISION

Site supervisors oversee day-to-day member activities and ensure that they have adequate support and guidance throughout their terms. In the yearly host site application, the site proposes a site supervisor and must demonstrate that the proposed supervisor has sufficient supervisory experience and capacity, which is a criteria for site selection. Supervisors are typically agency managers who preside over the programming area that relates to the member. In addition to providing informal support, site supervisors meet with their member(s) for an hour each week to review program progress, provide feedback and address questions. They also conduct formal mid- and end-of-year performance evaluations to provide feedback to their members.

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Training for site supervisors is provided through a pre-service orientation to familiarize site supervisors with AmeriCorps regulations and procedures and how to monitor Northstar standards instruction and proctoring as well as how to guide members in their capacity building efforts. Supervisors then attend three trainings during the program year in which they receive program updates, share successes and challenges, and collaborate with other supervisors. CTEP staff responds immediately to questions from supervisors, and meet individually with each supervisor three times a year as part of site visits to ensure supervisors are successful. In feedback sessions, 100% of supervisors in the past three years have reported that CTEP staff has supported them sufficiently during the program year.

### MEMBER EXPERIENCE

CTEP's track record of 100% enrollment and retention for the past three years demonstrates that our program provides a positive and powerful experience for our members. The supportive relationships that exist between members and supervisors, members and CTEP staff, and supervisors and CTEP staff all help ensure that issues are caught early and addressed completely. Every two weeks, CTEP members submit online reflections to CTEP staff reflecting on their successes and challenges, as well as their plan to address challenges. Time is incorporated into each member training for members to share these items with each other and brainstorm solutions with CTEP staff.

CTEP strives to instill a lifelong ethic of service and responsibility. Five civic engagement trainings are scheduled each service year. These trainings include an introduction to active citizenship, an exploration of what it means to be civically engaged, and participation in service projects in the community. Activities include educational visits with elected officials, a tour of the State Capitol, and attending public forums about democracy and citizen participation. These activities, along with the 75-hour civic engagement project described above, provide great opportunities for members to experience different forms of service beyond the obligations of their service site. Members complete a reflection for each activity in order to accrue service hours, where they consider what they accomplished and learned from the experience.

CTEP has a long history of working with other CNCS programs to strengthen a larger AmeriCorps identity, share best practices and collaborate toward reaching mutual goals. CTEP members often collaborate with members from other CNCS streams, including AmeriCorps VISTA, Senior Corps, and other State and National members at many CTEP service sites. CTEP plans service projects and trainings every year that involve multiple AmeriCorps programs, such as participating in

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MLK Jr. Day of Service, National AmeriCorps week and the 9/11 Day of Service. CTEP members are selected each year to represent our program in a state-wide InterCorps Council that provides trainings and service opportunities across all streams of service.

### VOLUNTEER GENERATION

During their term of service, CTEP members help sites build a sustainable volunteer base by recruiting, managing and recognizing volunteers committed to long-term placement rather than one-time opportunities. Since the inception of CTEP in 2004, members have mobilized over 2,700 volunteers who have given over 77,000 hours of service to the community. This is the equivalent of hours served by 40 full-time AmeriCorps members in one full year, substantially adding to the program's value.

CTEP gives priority to partner sites that express a commitment to mobilizing community volunteers as a part of their sustainability plan. At partner sites, CTEP members recruit and manage volunteers with high technology competency as well as those fluent in languages of the new American populations served. Volunteers assist with technology literacy programming, teaching classes or assisting clients one-on-one with Northstar curriculum implemented by CTEP AmeriCorps members. CTEP members train and monitor all volunteers to ensure they are not engaged in prohibited activities, which is verified by CTEP staff on monitoring visits.

CTEP service sites utilize a program model that encourages their participants to give back, and become community volunteers once they graduate from the program. Since AmeriCorps projects are temporary, strengthening volunteer networks at service sites is a key way that CTEP makes a lasting impact. Over 60% of the volunteers mobilized during a program year continue volunteering after the CTEP member's term is completed.

CTEP also chooses service sites that can capitalize on unique volunteer pools. The Neighborhood Learning Community, for example, is a program connected to both the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College, and Dayton's Bluff Library is housed within Metropolitan State University. Each year, CTEP members recruit volunteers and develop relationships within the education, social work and computer science departments at these and other institutions. CTEP also has enjoyed corporate volunteer resources from Cummins Inc. and IBM, as well as through the Greater Twin Cities United Way.

Every service year, CTEP staff organizes training on volunteer mobilization for members, led by professional volunteer coordinators from HandsOn Twin Cities. In these trainings, members gain

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the skills for recruitment, recognition, creating volunteer position descriptions, and building infrastructure at their service site to strengthen the use of volunteers. CTEP members then support volunteers through orientation, connecting volunteers with resources they need to make an impact, managing volunteer databases, and ensuring open communication between the volunteer and the site. CTEP members help to orchestrate volunteer celebrations at their service site as a way to recognize volunteer contributions.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION**

CTEP promotes the AmeriCorps brand by requiring that partner sites display signs indicating that an AmeriCorps member serves there. CTEP's Host Site Application form and Host Site agreement, website, monitoring forms and other official forms all use the AmeriCorps logo. Site supervisors and members are trained at the beginning of the year in the use of AmeriCorps-specific language when referring to their service year. CTEP members wear AmeriCorps service gear at public service events. To ensure that members can articulate their experience, members practice elevator speeches during trainings, learning to quickly describe AmeriCorps to someone unfamiliar with the program, and to speak about the impact of both CTEP and AmeriCorps nationally. The accomplishments of CTEP members are routinely highlighted in local newspapers and blogs, and CTEP staff trains members to ensure that CTEP is described publicly as an AmeriCorps program. Every year, up to three CTEP members may self-elect to become AmeriCorps ambassadors, who spend additional time talking about AmeriCorps at colleges and recruitment fairs to reach targeted populations.

### **Organizational Capability**

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING**

CTEP functions as a program of our fiscal agent, Saint Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN). Founded in 1984 as a nonprofit community media training center, SPNN works through community partnerships with nonprofits and governmental entities to increase digital and media literacy and to better educate the community. In 2004, it became a lead partner in CTEP, expanding its community education efforts to include information and communications technologies in the greater Twin Cities metro area. SPNN's existing partnerships with many social service organizations provides a strong training network for CTEP members. SPNN has been awarded four previous federal grants from CNCS for the CTEP program: a three year competitive grant of \$888,207 in 2004, another 3 year competitive grant of \$944,700 in 2007, \$65,500 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds in 2009, and \$1,169,973 for another three years of competitive funding in 2010.

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CTEP staff participates in staff meetings and visioning retreats led by SPNN's Board of Directors. The Board dedicates one meeting annually to review CTEP, directing the Executive Director to consider improvements when appropriate. Through eight years of managing the CTEP AmeriCorps program, SPNN has demonstrated its capacity to manage a federal grant, improve performance and efficiency over time, and successfully manage multiple service sites. Independent audits of the organization are conducted annually to ensure appropriate financial management and controls. CTEP maintains a low-risk designation with our state commission based on consecutive years of compliance, meeting performance targets, and high member retention and satisfaction.

SPNN Executive Director Mike Wassenaar has provided administrative and strategic direction for CTEP since 2004. He is supported by Administrative Assistant Sor Thao, who has worked with CTEP since 2006. Mr. Wassenaar creates and oversees the CNCS budget and meets with CTEP Program Directors twice a month. Ms. Thao handles payroll, health insurance, reimbursements, and other HR-related functions. Both Ms. Thao and Mr. Wassenaar have participated in financial training for management of AmeriCorps programs from ServeMinnesota.

Two full-time Program Directors share site and member management responsibilities. Joel Krogstad has a Masters degree in Work, Community and Family Education, and served two years as an AmeriCorps member before joining SPNN in 2006. Desiree Culpitt has a Masters degree in Public Policy with a concentration in Public and Nonprofit Leadership and Management. She served two years as an AmeriCorps VISTA member prior to joining SPNN in 2011. Mr. Krogstad is the primary contact for this application, and Ms. Culpitt is the secondary contact. The Program Directors share responsibility equally: one is the lead for east metro sites and the other is the lead for west metro sites.

Mr. Krogstad also has a Masters Minor in Program Evaluation, and leads evaluation efforts. In 2012-13, CTEP will convene 3 separate focus group sessions during the program year between creators of the Northstar Online Assessments and CTEP staff, members and supervisors to ensure that assessments are adequately measuring the standards for all of the target populations that CTEP serves. For 2013, SPNN has budgeted \$5400 for testing and maintenance of Northstar online digital assessments to ensure that tests remain valid into the future as technology such as word processing programs and operating systems continue to evolve. CTEP also is currently collecting information about the types of jobs participants secure, rate of pay, and length of employment retention so that CTEP can provide a more detailed picture about overall return on investment for the program.

Fifteen programmatic systems such as site partner management, continuous improvement, and member supervision are documented and submitted to our state commission annually to ensure

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that program operations are standardized. These systems descriptions also become the basis for a week long "how to" training orientation for all new CTEP staff joining the program.

### SUSTAINABILITY

In 2009, SPNN implemented a strategic plan that addressed the need to build relationships with potential funders, both institutional and individual. Since then, its Development Department has raised \$1,066,000 from 547 donors, a significant percentage of which was raised in support of CTEP, already securing match for Years One and Two of this proposal. Match sources include ADC Foundation support at \$50,000 a year and partner fees from 30 agencies totaling \$240,000 each year. CTEP agency partners have increased their financial support to CTEP to decrease reliance on CNCS funds, demonstrating the high value that sites place on CTEP members. This support has increased from \$2,500 per full-time CTEP member in 2004 to \$6,000 currently. To ensure long-term sustainability, SPNN's Development Director will build on current relationships with additional funders such as Otto Bremer and the Minneapolis Foundation to secure match contributions for Year Three and beyond.

Sustainability is built into the CTEP program model through capacity-building activities at service sites, and fundraising and partnership building by SPNN. In the Host Site Application, potential partners are required to include a plan for future technology skills training without CTEP AmeriCorps members so that programmatic development will be long-term and not CTEP-dependent. Members build agency capacity by providing a site assessment and developing a plan to deliver technology instruction aligned to community needs; recruiting, training and supervising volunteers for long-term assignments; performing a community service project intended to overcome barriers to program effectiveness; and securing in-kind donations including hardware and software to contribute to the program's sustainability in the community. In this way, partner sites build experience, strengthen staffing and facilities, and remove key barriers to sustainability. CTEP graduates 3-6 sites each year that demonstrate their ability to sustain quality technology instruction, and new sites are invited to apply that demonstrate greater need.

As a multi-site program, CTEP supervisors, members, volunteers and staff form an important "peer" network which is integral to sustainability. CTEP views service sites as stakeholders in determining the focus and scope of the program. Through site visit feedback, partners assist CTEP in refining member activities to best meet programmatic outcomes each year. Partner agencies' ongoing responsibilities include helping recruit members from within their communities, helping CTEP identify

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and respond to demographic shifts in the community, providing financial and in-kind resources, and assisting CTEP staff in member training.

During the past five years, this peer network has evolved into the Technology Literacy Collaborative (TLC), a roundtable of community agencies and volunteers who are interested in advancing common local strategies toward digital inclusion. TLC has recently received over \$30,000 in grants to formalize and expand its impact. Through TLC, CTEP alumni and other community leaders involved in closing the digital divide are building a resource sharing website and organizing technology literacy curricula much as they did when they were members. While CTEP is affiliated with TLC, its monthly meetings are organized by other community agencies, meaning that this network has an excellent chance of succeeding as a standalone network.

CTEP's strong and deep relationship with partner agencies, donors and city government provide a platform for future private-public collaboration. Over the past four years, CTEP members assisted the City of Minneapolis in getting feedback from area residents about the City's plans for a high-speed broadband Internet network that now covers the entire city--Wireless Minneapolis. As a result of these efforts, the City agreed to establish a new Digital Inclusion Fund with half a million dollars contributed by the service provider, US Internet, to help agencies support volunteerism and digital literacy efforts. The long-term impact of this cross-sector partnership will be that fewer government funds will be needed to support local digital inclusion efforts.

### COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

CTEP ensures compliance with AmeriCorps regulations and prohibited activities through extensive orientation for program staff, site supervisors and members. Since the beginning of the program, CTEP staff has never had to release a member due to violation of prohibited activities. CTEP partner sites sign Host Site Agreements, and members sign Service Contracts at the beginning of the program year outlining these regulations and their agreement to comply.

Site supervisors ensure day-to-day program compliance through their weekly meetings and direct monitoring. They are checked by CTEP Program Directors, who monitor compliance through site visits three times a year. During these visits site monitoring checklists are completed, which detect issues and/or non-compliance.

Supervisors and members are trained during the Pre-Service Orientation to inform CTEP staff as soon as possible if there is a compliance issue. The Host Site Agreement and Member Contract clearly outline a process for immediately dealing with noncompliance up to and including release of

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member for cause, and/or immediate site partnership termination. CTEP staff, in turn, demonstrates accountability on an annual basis to SPNN's Executive Director and to ServeMinnesota who conducts yearly visits and audits of CTEP. In the past eight years, ServeMinnesota has found no compliance findings or member files issues.

CTEP has enrolled and retained 100% of members for the past three years straight. We attribute this significant accomplishment to strong member and site supervisor training, support, and oversight of site placements.

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

#### COST EFFECTIVENESS

SPNN is requesting \$11,767 per Member Service Year (MSY), about 11% below the Corporation's cost limit of \$13,300 per MSY. This figure has decreased from our request of \$13,300 in previous years. SPNN will generate \$470,853 in local funds for the program during 2013, an increase of 4% from the previous year, meeting the 50% local match requirement. The 2013 local match is already met through a \$50,000 ADC Foundation grant (year one of a two year \$100,00 grant), \$240,000 in partnership fees, \$160,000 in in-kind contributions from partner sites in supervisory labor; and \$20,000 in ServeMinnesota Innovation Funds. Partner sites will ensure that local matching funds are derived from non-federal sources as required by the host site agreement.

SPNN is funded by corporate, local government, private foundations and individual donor sources and non-profit fees for service. SPNN has received competitive CNCS funds in each of the last 5 years to operate the CTEP program. The proposed 2013-14 CNCS grant would represent 20.8% of the total \$2.263 million operating budget. Over the years, SPNN has consistently generated ample local matching funds and in-kind contributions by soliciting contributions from community and corporate foundations that support the mission of CTEP, working with a diverse set of community agencies that provide a partnership fee to support the program, and receiving in-kind contributions of supervisory labor. Selecting diverse non-governmental agencies from different parts of the social service sector as partners has ensured sustainability of non-federal match sources in the past eight years, even during the recent economic downturn.

In a similar fashion, CTEP has relied upon a diverse group of private funders to ensure it is not over-reliant on one philanthropic source of funds. Among those who have provided financial support are: Best Buy Children's Foundation, IBM, ADC Foundation, Minneapolis Foundation, and Otto Bremer Foundation. Their combined support for CTEP has exceeded \$390,000 since the start of the program, and it is from this pool that SPNN will secure the final \$51,000 for Year 3 of the grant.

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CTEP offers a more cost effective means for certification in digital literacy skills than competing models. Indeed, the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards and Assessments were created because alternatives were too expensive to be utilized by low-income individuals. The most comparable certification is the IC3 certification offered by CertiPort, a private company that offers testing and instruction services for basic technology skills. CertiPort's exam costs \$35 for each exam and an average of \$300 for in-person IC3 instruction. Our program targets individuals who cannot afford such expenses.

CTEP's goal for Year One is that 2,000 community members will pass 6,000 assessments, representing a total value of \$2.01 million (\$335 for exam and instruction x 6,000). The total cash cost of our program for 2013-14 is \$761,540, which includes federal and local money. Therefore, for the certification element of our program alone, it can be said that for every \$1 invested in CTEP, the benefit to the community is \$2.63. As CTEP collects more refined data on the types of jobs that community members receive due to instruction and certification, and how long they remain in the those jobs, this return on investment figure will no doubt increase dramatically.

### BUDGET ADEQUACY

The proposed budget adequately covers the costs of implementing a high-quality program that will meet the desired program outputs and outcomes. For the previous 8 years, CTEP has completed each service year within budget. This financial history allows our program to create a very realistic picture of costs for the coming years.

CTEP is confident that current staffing levels do not need to be increased to administer the 10 member expansion. Staffing costs will provide for two full-time Program Directors who will ensure the training, recruitment and management of 40 AmeriCorps members at a minimum of 30 service agencies. SPNN's Executive Director and Administrative Assistant are paid out of internal administrative funds and are not included in this budget. The in-kind staffing figure is derived from previous data where site supervisors calculated the value of one hour of their supervisory time, and then documented volunteering for CTEP a minimum of 15 hours a month. CTEP staff verify that site fees and in-kind support do not come from federal sources.

The budget also provides adequate member costs for 40 MSY, including health care, workers' compensation insurance and health insurance, FBI background check costs and other supporting costs for program operation to support 40 full-time members. A high level of the member training budget is provided to CTEP for free or below cost due to CTEP's extensive partnership network who

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see the value in our work.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

An 11 page Evaluation Report was submitted with this application. CTEP will focus in the 2013-14 program year on ensuring that the Northstar Online Digital Literacy Assessments continue to function effectively, sending out surveys to members specifically asking about ease of implementation, affect on programming, and test content itself. CTEP staff will hold focus groups three times a year to better inform and educate the proctors of the assessments (CTEP members) and the assessment creators from the Consortium. CTEP will also focus on improving calculations on return on investment to incorporate the benefit of employment, the benefit of increased capacity at service sites, the benefit of the program to the CTEP members themselves, and the benefit of 3-6 sites graduating from the CTEP program each year able to deliver Northstar programming on their own.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A