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Executive Summary

Beginning in September 2013, Rochester AmeriCorps will mobilize 45 fulltime AmeriCorps members to address pressing needs in the focus area of education in the City of Rochester, NY. Serving in targeted city schools and community-based programs, members will focus on improving students' academic engagement. The program will address CNCS Strategic Plan Education Objective 2: improve educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle, and high schools; and Objective 3: improve economically disadvantaged students' preparation for, and prospects of success in, post-secondary education. Members will provide enrichment activities, mentoring, tutoring, and student support and college prep services during and after school and will engage additional community volunteers to expand the reach of this initiative. By the end of the three-year grant period members will have served over 4,300 children and at least 2,610 students will have demonstrated improved academic engagement. The annual CNCS investment of \$584,072 will be matched with \$584,072 of cash and in-kind support.

Rationale and Approach

a. **NEED** The City of Rochester, New York, struggling with population decline, job loss and violence, presents compelling needs rooted in poverty and limited economic opportunity. While the 2010 median household income in the area's seven-county region was \$51,700, it was only \$30,100 in the City of Rochester. According to 2011 US Census figures, the poverty rate for children in the City of Rochester was seventh in the nation and the highest in the state.

The Rochester City School District (RCSD) has an overwhelming concentration of low-income students, with 85% of its approximately 31,000 enrollment--and a staggering 97% within the highest-need areas of the city--eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Poverty in childhood and adolescence is associated with a higher risk for poor cognitive and academic outcomes, lower school attendance, lower reading and math test scores, increased distractibility, and higher rates of grade failure and early high school dropout (Child Trends Data Bank, 2012). Youths who do not regularly attend school are at higher risk of failing and dropping out, exhibiting delinquent behavior and engaging in various forms of risky behaviors.

Given the city's high rate of poverty, extreme performance issues in the RCSD are not surprising. In 2012 the NYS Department of Education identified the RCSD as a focus district, meaning its performance is ranked among the lowest statewide. Across all NYS standardized tests administered in grade 3, the district's pass rate is only 26%; by grade 8 that figure drops to a dismal 18%. According to

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ACT Rochester, a local data base that tracks the region's performance on key indicators of well-being, the attendance rate in Rochester secondary schools in 2010 was 86% compared to the region's 93%. Although 79% of our seven-county region's class of 2010 graduated on time, the rate in the RCSD was only 46%. Indeed, Rochester has the lowest graduation rate of the five largest school districts in the state.

Educational attainment is clearly seen as a prime vehicle for social mobility in our society. In "Realizing the Promise: Scholar Retention and Persistence in Post-Secondary Education," the Evaluation for Learning Group at the University of Pittsburgh's Learning Research and Development Center reflects that "Education can make a big difference in one's life. Those with post-secondary degrees earn significantly higher annual salaries than those who either dropped out of high school or only attained a high school diploma." The Center also reports that two-thirds of the jobs created in the US by 2018 will require some type of post-secondary education. Young people who have dropped out of school lack the necessary credential to pursue many employment options, postsecondary education, or many occupational training programs. Due to educational deficits, even those with a high school diploma are often unprepared for high-wage employment or further education; a 2011 CNN Money report indicated that as few as 9% of low income college students complete their degrees within six years of enrolling. According to the Campaign for Youth, "This pool of young talent will be needed to fuel our future economy and we can't afford to let them remain idle or slip through the cracks."

These compelling needs serve as the foundation for determining our members' activities and roles within local schools and community-based organizations. Building on our program's experience working with schools and many of the community's youth-serving organizations, it is time to sharpen our focus on the educational needs of Rochester's children.

Rochester is the only district in New York selected to participate in the TIME Collaborative, a new federal effort to lengthen the school day and add instructional and enrichment activities. This three-year pilot project is the first national effort to lengthen the school day and year in districts across the country, something education leaders say is critical to closing the achievement gaps between groups of students. New York is one of five states participating in the program. The U.S. Department of Education is collaborating with the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time and Learning (NCTL) to support the participating states and districts. Deepening student engagement through expanded schedules and an array of learning opportunities that expose students to new skills and interests and help make learning relevant is identified by NCTL as a promising practice.

According to RCSD Superintendent Bolgen Vargas, "There is a lack of opportunities for our

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students. I don't know how to give some of our students a more stable family or a more stable neighborhood. But I do know we can be giving them more opportunities in school." District officials cite affinity-based activities that engage students, such as art, music, and sports, as well as more individualized instructional support, as all contributing to this effort. Both a longer school day and provision of more intensive support and enrichment activities for students require community partnerships to succeed; Rochester AmeriCorps is in a position to make a significant contribution to this effort.

b. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS OF ADDRESSING THIS PROBLEM Our members' activities addressing the community needs identified above will focus on providing services to improve students' academic engagement; our aligned performance measure reflects this objective. To conduct these activities, Rochester AmeriCorps will place cadres of members in two or three targeted elementary schools and one secondary school plus in selected community-based pre-collegiate programs. This model allows members to assist in schools deemed to be in highest need--SIG (School Improvement Grant) or Priority Schools as defined in the performance measure materials of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)--and to build on the strengths and experience of community service providers that are already working in conjunction with our program and with city schools. It also incorporates intervention with children at an early stage of their education as well as those in the critical middle and high school years.

Placement of 33 fulltime members at the selected schools will provide a concentrated and consistent presence and depth of coverage that can significantly enhance the ability of these sites to impact students showing early warning signs of school failure. Each member will work intensively with a teacher-referred caseload of 20 students to address issues including attendance, behavior, and academic performance, three of the targeted needs identified by Together for Tomorrow: Service Partnerships to Boost Attendance, a joint school improvement initiative of CNCS, the U.S. Department of Education, and the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Members will provide enrichment activities, small group work, and one-on-one attention that go beyond what school staff are able to provide. Members will also expand the services and activities offered during extended-day programming after school. Providing additional activities in response to student interests--referred to as affinity-based activities--is expected to increase participation in extended-day programs.

Placement of an additional 12 fulltime members in pre-collegiate programs that already have strong track records as Rochester AmeriCorps host sites will allow greater emphasis on college prep

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work with secondary students. Operated through area institutions of higher education and community-based organizations, programs such as Upward Bound and Liberty Partnerships have consistently met or exceeded performance measures over several years of partnership with AmeriCorps. Members' pre-collegiate programming activities addressing college access, the fourth targeted need identified by Together for Tomorrow, will provide RCSD students with information, personal support and connections to create a solid plan for college and careers. The RCSD's current counselor-to-student ratio in secondary schools at 1:281; the American School Counseling Association's recommended ratio is 1:100. Utilizing additional community resources to provide students with support services needed for them to access and succeed in post-secondary education is critical. A menu of services will include individual guidance on career opportunities, college searches and financial aid; assistance with study skills and academic assignments; college fairs and tours; workshops with business professionals and higher education personnel; and informational meetings with parents and family members. This array of services promotes a college-going culture through high expectations for students, exposure to higher education, helping students develop sense of purpose and career interests or goals, meaningful parental involvement, and lessening families' financial barriers through means such as promoting FAFSA completion and identifying additional sources of financial aid.

c. EVIDENCE-BASED/EVIDENCE-INFORMED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

According to Appleton et al. in *Psychology in the Schools*, Vol. 45(5), 2008, "...far too many students are bored, unmotivated, and uninvolved, that is, disengaged from the academic and social aspects of school life. ... (E)ngagement is malleable and relevant for predicting and preventing school dropout, as well as facilitating positive educational outcomes for all students." The concept of student engagement includes the extent to which learners are motivated and committed to learning; have a sense of belonging and accomplishment; and have relationships with adults, peers and parents that support learning. Indicators can include behaviors such as school and class attendance, active participation in class and after-school activities, homework completion, asking questions and getting extra help if needed, study habits, working well with others, and responding to constructive criticism.

Our program's model of conducting interventions with elementary and secondary school students is based on the "need for communities and schools to have strategies to respond to the dropping out process at each stage of development, rather than waiting until late manifestations of the process are evident." (Jimerson et. al., "A Prospective Longitudinal Study of High-School Dropouts, Examining Multiple Predictors Across Development," *Journal of School Psychology*, 2000) Underlying our

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members' activities is the foundation of evidence-based programs such as Check & Connect (monitoring performance indicators such as attendance, suspensions, and course grades and credits, coupled with individualized attention and the provision of ancillary services) and the NYC Success Mentor Corps. These programs incorporate what research shows are the most effective practices for engaging at-risk students and their families. They have demonstrated that sustained intervention for promoting students' engagement at school and with learning can result in outcomes including increased attendance, persistence in school, accrual of credits, and school completion rates; and decreased truancy, tardiness, behavioral referrals, and dropout rates. Successful strategies include personally greeting students in the morning to make them feel welcomed and noticed, individual attendance support, coaching, check-ins during the school day, and connecting students and families with a wide range of services to help them overcome barriers to success. Through individualized attention to a defined caseload of students, members will establish trust, serve as role models, and encourage higher academic expectations. They will coordinate and conduct affinity-based enrichment activities, provide ongoing feedback and encouragement, and emphasize the importance of staying in school.

Research is also beginning to recognize that academic preparation, while necessary, is not sufficient for college success. As explained in *Voices in Higher Education* (Fall 2012), "Both academic tenacity and college knowledge arm students with the 'soft' skills necessary to understand the process for accessing higher education and the cognitive...strategies, like persistence, that allow students to succeed in the college environment." A number of urban school districts implementing pre-collegiate programming through college prep centers have documented increased rates of graduation and college enrollment (Achieve Minneapolis Career & College Centers); have contributed to the knowledge base of how to promote college-going culture in schools (the Kalamazoo Promise); and have identified factors that can promote student retention and persistence, including developing their college knowledge, help-seeking behaviors, and study habits before they leave secondary school (The Pittsburgh Promise).

An upcoming report commissioned by the Rochester Area Community Foundation acknowledges the importance of increasing the local availability of such services and documenting their impact, including the formation of a Rochester College Access Network to promote and coordinate this work. AmeriCorps members are seen as playing a valuable role in launching and helping to build this initiative to expand current college prep services.

Performance measure targets and data collection methods and instruments for the proposed project

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have been developed in conjunction with RCSD officials, pre-collegiate program staff, and the Children's Institute (CI), a respected research-based organization that is focused on effective and efficient means to study, improve, and implement knowledge, strategies, and practices that serve children. Specific intervention activities conducted by members will be adapted in response to pre-test data, including the RCSD's Early Warning System and selected CI instruments such as the Child Rating Scale and the Associate-Child Rating Scale, both standardized on a nationally representative sample. By the end of the three-year grant period, Rochester AmeriCorps members will have worked intensively with over 4,300 RCSD students, and at least 2,610 students who completed programming will have demonstrated improvement in academic engagement as measured by pre/post tests using the above RCSD and CI instruments. This system will allow analysis of data for the students working most closely with members both during the school day and in after-school programming. Behavioral dimensions reflected in the district's Early Warning System include school attendance, suspensions, academic credits earned, and grade retention. Examples of scales used in the CI instruments include school interest, peer social skills, initiative/participation, self-confidence, task orientation, and behavior control. Additional programmatic and school records already used by participating pre-collegiate program sites to measure impact, including student surveys, on-time graduation and college application/acceptance, will also be used to measure impact. Data from each site will be compiled by the AmeriCorps office for completion of progress reports as required by the New York Commission and CNCS.

As a current grantee, Rochester AmeriCorps has had consistent success in meeting or exceeding its targeted outputs and outcomes. The program's current and previous service activities and performance measures have been broader in nature than those proposed in this application, with a focus on the provision of youth development programming and prevention/intervention services for at-risk youth as well as community-focused economic opportunity activities. During the most recent program year, members' contributions to these initiatives led to the achievement of specific child and youth outcomes at 13 sites, exceeding the targeted levels for this applicant-determined performance measure. Target outputs and outcomes set for pilot national performance measures in the areas of financial literacy and employment readiness and training were also exceeded.

Within its broader youth development focus, some of the program's recent activities have been within the context of local schools and pre-collegiate programs such as Upward Bound. An external evaluation report entitled "Rochester AmeriCorps: Adding Capacity to Educational Settings," completed earlier this year by the Center for Governmental Research (CGR), found that "[Rochester

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AmeriCorps] members add substantial capacity to sites' ability to support students.... Members bring creativity and a diversity of experience and are able to be deployed flexibly, therefore allowing expanded hours, settings and activities to engage students.... They also mobilize...community volunteers and bring a positive energy that impacts the culture of their sites and schools." The report states that member placements in elementary schools "add a good deal of value to schools and allow them to demonstrate gains in academic achievement and student engagement" and that placements in pre-collegiate programs "have demonstrable impact. It makes sense that Rochester AmeriCorps continue to place a significant number of members in these types of sites."

d. MEMBER RECRUITMENT Our program's recruitment and public awareness activities are carried out year-round through a comprehensive plan incorporating visibility on local college campuses; exposure in electronic and print media; use of the national online recruitment system; word-of-mouth; and targeting specific groups by collaborating with the faith community, ethnic organizations, job training programs, educational institutions, and service organizations. Current and former AmeriCorps members, host site personnel and advisory board members are all invaluable assets in publicizing the program and identifying potential applicants. Staff and alumni actively participate in career fairs, community events and group presentations, ensuring that a diverse group of potential candidates is aware of our program and able to access the application process.

Our selection criteria, in addition to including AmeriCorps qualifications regarding citizenship, age and education, also incorporate prior community involvement and volunteer experience, skills and interests, and the articulation of motivation to serve and commitment to personal growth. During the screening process, we discuss with applicants the reality of managing on the AmeriCorps living allowance. We also screen out candidates who are not realistic about the demands of serving on a full-time basis or exhibit a tendency to over-commit. Our application review process, along with an interview, reference checks and criminal background checks, allows us to select candidates whom we expect to make a significant contribution to the community as well as to benefit personally and professionally from their participation.

The design of our program and the make-up of our corps ensure that members will work and learn among people of diverse backgrounds. However, since proximity does not automatically result in the development of positive relationships, our program specifically promotes the appreciation of differences through diversity and cultural competency training, team building exercises and other learning activities throughout the term of service.

Each of the past several years we have received over 300 applications for 45 available slots. Our

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focus on comprehensive recruitment efforts has resulted in 100% enrollment for our fulltime slots since 2002. Enrollment over the first two years of our current funding cycle has been ethnically diverse. Although the median age has been 24, we have enrolled a significant number of members above the age of 30. While a college degree is not required for acceptance, nearly all of our enrolled members during this period (92%) had earned a Bachelor's degree or higher. The majority of our members are Rochester residents, but 24% of this year's enrollment is from outside of the area.

e. MEMBER TRAINING Our plan for member development, training and supervision contributes to achieving targeted outcomes by preparing members for their service responsibilities and providing support and feedback throughout their term of service. Training components include orientation at the beginning of the term of service, placement-specific training, monthly Member Development Days and a mid-term retreat. The goals are to provide members with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively carry out their service activities in the community, to strengthen the ethic of service and active citizenship, and to promote personal and professional development.

A 10-day orientation and training series at the beginning of the term of service orients members to the program, builds esprit de corps and AmeriCorps identity, and provides specific training in preparation for members' site placements. Activities are organized in modules encompassing team building, AmeriCorps and civic engagement, targeted skill development, and the organizational and community contexts of service. Members receive and review a comprehensive handbook that includes their Member Contract and information about the program's mission, AmeriCorps policies and procedures, and members' rights and responsibilities. Community partners who offer specific areas of expertise relevant to members' roles supplement the training provided by AmeriCorps staff, covering content such as youth asset development, working in an educational setting, techniques for working with students in small groups, social and emotional learning, incorporating educational objectives in after-school activities, effective communication, workplace culture, and personal and workplace safety.

Throughout their term of service, members participate in monthly Member Development Days designed to further inform and build on their on-site activities. These sessions combine topic-focused training, reflection activities and continued team building. Examples of training topics include volunteer management, working with behaviorally challenging children, trauma-informed care, and life after AmeriCorps. Assessment of training takes place through written evaluations and member interviews during site visits. Finally, discussion at meetings of host site supervisors and the program's advisory board ensures that additional program stakeholders have input on training.

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Member development and support are consistently promoted at our service sites, enabling members to develop a range of skills and maximize the performance of their assigned duties. Member performance is formally assessed twice during the term of service and member feedback related to site orientation, training, access to resources and supervision is obtained through our mid-year and end-of-term surveys and member interviews during site visits.

Both member and host site contracts specify activities that are prohibited by CNCS, including requirements for non-duplication, non-displacement, and non-supplementation as well as rules on prohibited member activities. This information is covered in detail during orientation sessions with members and site supervisors and is also reflected in our program handbooks. The process of oversight and monitoring of activities includes prescreening and authorizing projects and reviewing service logs and reports throughout the term of service to ensure that members and volunteers are not engaging in prohibited activities. Staff issues reminders during the year, particularly if there are prominent events such as an election or political controversy that might lead to inappropriate activities. It is also emphasized to members, volunteers and supervisors that AmeriCorps staff should be consulted if there is any uncertainty about whether an activity is allowable.

f. MEMBER SUPERVISION In preparation for receiving AmeriCorps members, representatives of each selected service site receive an AmeriCorps handbook detailing program policies and procedures and attend an orientation session and. In addition to background about AmeriCorps and CNCS, this session addresses documentation of members' service hours, required member training, prohibited activities, tracking and reporting progress toward objectives, member supervision, communication with project staff, encouraging an esprit de corps and promoting team building, and common questions and concerns. Monitoring of projects and support to host site supervisors are accomplished throughout the year through bimonthly meetings, site visits by staff, written updates and frequent phone and email contact.

All service sites are required to provide members with an orientation to their organization, project-specific training, and on-going supervision. A specific staff person must be designated as the on-site supervisor for each assigned member. Written plans for member supervision must specify the approach to be used, including frequency of one-on-one meetings, inclusion in team meetings and staff meetings, how accomplishments will be recognized and the use of written evaluation and other forms of feedback.

On-going training to ensure that host site staff understands their roles and responsibilities in the context of the program's mission and AmeriCorps regulations is conducted at bimonthly meetings of

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supervisors. These events also offer site staff the opportunity to network and to hear about the varied activities and contributions of all members. A mid-year survey conducted in each of the last several terms documents that virtually all site supervisors feel that they were adequately oriented to the AmeriCorps program, that they have a good understanding of the mission and purpose of AmeriCorps, that staff keeps them adequately informed about the program and their responsibilities, and that they are supported by AmeriCorps staff.

A variety of member supports are also incorporated into our program structure. Staff is accessible through phone calls, site visits and emails and offers problem-solving, coaching, crisis intervention, and mediation to members. Additional support and opportunities available to members include reasonable accommodation for members with disabilities; assistance with identifying career and educational goals and opportunities; and leadership activities including service project coordination and advisory board participation.

Teambuilding activities and monthly reflection sessions promote peer support among the members themselves, a valuable asset to members who can sometimes feel that no one quite understands what their service commitment is all about and the challenges it can pose. Member satisfaction is gauged on an on-going basis through member surveys, training evaluation and site visit interviews. Members consistently have indicated high levels of satisfaction with the skills learned and opportunities available during their enrollment and are able to articulate areas of personal and professional development and skill acquisition.

g. MEMBER EXPERIENCE Throughout their term of service, indeed from as early as completing their application and interview, we expect members to articulate not just what they have to offer but also what they hope to gain by participating in AmeriCorps. We are then able to tailor training and recognition activities in ways that are most supportive, meaningful and rewarding.

Both our initial orientation and training and our periodic training and reflections sessions during the term of service also include a focus on the knowledge, skills and attitudes members need to be active, informed citizens. Activities providing members with background information on community service and voluntarism, CNCS, and the history and role of AmeriCorps promote a sense of AmeriCorps identity and understanding of engaged citizenship. Members learn about the community they are serving, explore how individuals can help solve community problems, and develop critical thinking skills.

Our member development component also includes the Meaning of Service, a civic reflection program of the NY Council for the Humanities. In 2006 we were the first AmeriCorps program in the

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state to participate in this program by invitation of the Council. The basis of this program is the realization that, despite increased talk about the importance of service and philanthropy in American life, people involved in civic activity rarely have a chance to think carefully about the values that drew them to the work or the choices they have made in service of those values. As part of our Member Development Day activities, we engage members in Meaning of Service discussions focused on selected text examining various aspects of service. By reading and talking together about these issues and reflecting on their underlying values and choices, members develop a richer connection to each other and to the service they have undertaken. In session evaluations members have said these discussions have challenged them to think more deeply about their impact on others, helped them examine the complexities of service and make sense of their AmeriCorps experience, and improved their ability to communicate their values and ideas to others.

A member year-end survey documents our members' perspective on their service experience. In the 2011 -- 2012 survey, members reported that they were satisfied or highly satisfied with their overall experience as a member (98%), the effect their specific service had on the community (95%), the effect the program had on their development as a person (95%), the opportunity to improve skills for a future career (95%), and the helpfulness, effectiveness, and professionalism of the program staff when they had questions or needed help (95%).

A post-service survey distributed to program alumni who completed the program in 2010 or 2011 documented the powerful experience members had in the program and the lasting impact the program had on them. Nearly all respondents reported that their AmeriCorps experience increased their skills and knowledge in areas such as leadership, problem solving, communication, conflict resolution, and team work; 93% indicated that the skills and knowledge gained as a member had been useful since completing the program. In the area of lasting civic engagement, respondents reported that, as a result of their AmeriCorps experience, they felt a stronger connection to their community (96%) and were more likely to participate in public meetings (85%), to be aware of the problems facing their community (96%), to have ideas about how they can make a difference in their community (93%), and to know whom to contact if they want to provide help in their community (93%). Without exception all respondents affirmed that as a member they felt they were making a contribution to the community and that they now feel they can help bring about change in their community; 96% indicated that their AmeriCorps experience changed some of their beliefs/attitudes in a positive manner. The words of some of these alumni vividly illustrate the impact of their experience: "This program made a huge impact on my life. Rochester AmeriCorps ... made me more

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aware of the change that I can be in my community." "I learned how to be an effective agent of change and how to work well with diverse individuals." "Nothing I had done prior to AmeriCorps connected me to the city like this experience did. While I learned great skills at my site, my knowledge about Rochester, the organizations and resources in the area and the city issues came from training, from member development days." "The positive impact it had on my life, both personally and professionally, is an experience I couldn't have gained anywhere else. Being a part of the community that is AmeriCorps ... made me a better human being."

Members' connection to the AmeriCorps identity is reinforced through the provision of service gear with the AmeriCorps logo and consistent use of AmeriCorps terminology in program materials, signage, and public documents. Service sites display AmeriCorps placards and posters provided by the program and are encouraged to promote the recognition of their members among both internal and external constituencies.

Our program maintains collaborative relationships with other local CNCS-supported programs, including other AmeriCorps grantees and VISTA sponsors and the area's Regional Volunteer Center. We often invite other programs' participants to join us for group service projects. Our program has consistently participated in events such as the NYS AmeriCorps Kick-Off and regional service projects, helping members feel part of the national service movement on a broader scale. At times one of our members serves alongside a VISTA member at a site, resulting in an advantageous pairing of indirect and direct service benefits. Representation on our advisory board has included representatives from local VISTA sites, Learn and Serve programs and Senior Volunteer programs. We have active relationships with many AmeriCorps programs in the region and across the state and on numerous occasions have provided technical assistance to staff of other programs and have shared our procedures and forms.

h. VOLUNTEER GENERATION Rochester AmeriCorps has a strong and consistent record of engaging community volunteers to expand the reach and impact of its service activities, ranging from enlisting participation in one-time projects and special events to on-going commitments such as mentoring or coaching. Members have been involved in not only recruiting and managing volunteers, but developing or improving organizational systems for volunteer management. Members' activities have increased the number and types of volunteer opportunities available, broadened and diversified the group of residents involved as community volunteers and strengthened the capacity of local organizations to mobilize and effectively utilize volunteers. In addition to increasing the level and quality of service provision, strengthening the community volunteer base increases the sustainability

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of these services.

With a sharpened focus on education, our program will build on past experience and continue to incorporate volunteer involvement as a way of enhancing and expanding members' activities. A prime example is members' involvement in recruiting and coordinating volunteers, many of them college students, to provide after-school tutoring and mentoring within pre-collegiate programs. While the school district encourages volunteer involvement, staff may not be available to channel interested community members into meaningful activities. As part of their role, members placed within district schools can help implement procedures for volunteer recruitment and utilization. In particular these efforts will be needed to supplement district resources with those from the community to offer a range of affinity-based after-school programming. Site staff, members, and volunteers will be provided with information detailing CNCS prohibited activities, and volunteer roles will be reviewed by AmeriCorps staff to ensure compliance.

i. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION Our extensive history operating an AmeriCorps program has resulted in widespread recognition of the brand within our grantee organization, particularly at its urban campus where our office is located; among our many partner organizations; on area college campuses; and within local government. The AmeriCorps logo is used on the program's web site and in public materials such as brochures and other documents. The program uses branded display items as a recruitment and publicity tool and provides all service sites with AmeriCorps placards to be displayed wherever members are serving. At their sites members will wear service gear with the program's name and AmeriCorps logo so that national service branding is highly visible to students, family members, staff, and community partners.

Organizational Capability

a. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING The mission of our grantee organization, Monroe Community College (MCC), is to educate and prepare diverse learners to achieve scholarly, professional, and individual success within a local and global context. The College serves as a catalyst for innovation, economic development, lifelong learning, and civic engagement. MCC offers over 90 degree, transfer and certificate programs enrolling over 35,000 full and part-time students for credit and non-credit courses each year.

Since its founding in 1961, MCC has made a significant impact on the Greater Rochester region. A leading resource in innovative education and training, MCC is ranked among the top 15 associate degree granting institutions in the country and is the college of choice for over 27% of local graduating

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high school seniors. Local businesses, schools, nonprofit organizations, government and public agencies receive specialized training through the Office of Workforce Development, the Public Safety Training Facility, the Homeland Security Management Institute and the Agriculture and Life Sciences Institute.

An active member of the Community College National Center for Community Engagement and New York State Campus Compact, MCC offers an extensive range of service learning courses. Students have the opportunity to receive a diploma distinction for completing 200 service-learning hours. In recognition of the college's exemplary civic engagement and service learning, CNCS has named MCC to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. An MCC initiative in partnership with the RCSD recently was one of 24 programs recognized in the 2012 Together for Tomorrow Challenge, an initiative of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the US Department of Education, and CNCS.

MCC's grant-funded programs are coordinated through its Grants Office. Fiscal control of all federal funds is governed by and administered in compliance with applicable federal laws, regulations, state budget policies and OMB circulars. Compliance is ensured by annual audit performed by the college's external audit firm in accordance with the Single Audit Act. Institutional grants management procedures include strict prohibitions regarding the use of federal funds to supplant institutional monies or services.

Staffing for Rochester AmeriCorps consists of two fulltime positions, both of which are 100% dedicated to the AmeriCorps grant. This structure provides well-defined roles for each position while allowing for a team approach. Director Rachael Tachco, an alumna of Rochester AmeriCorps, brings a member perspective and professional experience to the program. Nearing completion of a Master's in Public Administration, she has a total of six years of AmeriCorps experience and both direct service and administrative experience in youth-serving organizations. Her primary responsibilities include program development and implementation, fiscal management, program reporting and evaluation, public relations, and the selection, training, and monitoring of host sites and projects. Coordinator Garth Freeman, also an alumnus of the program, holds a Bachelor and Master of Fine Arts and has experience coordinating a youth service grants program and local emergency housing services. He is responsible for developing and implementing appropriate structures, systems and activities for member recruitment, selection, training, placement, supervision, evaluation and recognition.

The AmeriCorps staff is well-versed in the intricacies of the program's operation and CNCS policies and regulations. They keep abreast of changes and updates through the NY Commission, CNCS email

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notifications and listservs, on-line resources such as the National Service Knowledge Network, and training opportunities at the local, regional, and national level. In addition, MCC provides extensive training and technical assistance in fiscal management, the use of technology, and topics such as sexual harassment and affirmative action. Services available through the college and its many community partners give the program access to a wide range of resources for staff and member training, program evaluation, and program administration.

MCC successfully oversees the administration of a variety of state and federal grant-funded programs in addition to AmeriCorps, including the Liberty Partnerships Program, Upward Bound and the Science and Technology Entry Program. The college has been a sub-grantee of the Community College National Center for Community Engagement's Learn and Serve Higher Education grant, serving as a national trainer and best-practice model in the area of homeland security and domestic preparedness. These programs all contribute to the college's focus on community collaboration and are evidence of its ability to administer grant funding and comply with associated requirements.

Administrative offices that work with the AmeriCorps program include the Grants Office, which provides oversight of program reporting and recordkeeping; the Controller's Office, which provides oversight of all fiscal expenditures and reporting; and the Human Resources Office, which provides personnel services for program staff and processes member paperwork related to living allowance payments.

In addition to the college's administrative and fiscal procedures, MCC has in place extensive systems, forms and procedures for operating its AmeriCorps program. A comprehensive record-keeping system using both program-developed and CNCS forms ensures the collection of data needed for member selection and enrollment, project monitoring, and reporting processes. A detailed system of documenting service hours, monitoring members' progress toward fulfilling their AmeriCorps commitment, and ensuring compliance with regulatory limits is already in place.

MCC's Board of Trustees, made up of nine active community members, assists the President in oversight of college operations. Organizationally the AmeriCorps program is situated in the office of the Vice President for Academic Services and is directly supervised by the Academic Dean of the Damon City Campus. MCC supports AmeriCorps programming by providing resources needed to ensure the success of the program, including office, training and meeting space; administrative and support services; and links to a variety of community stakeholders.

Rochester AmeriCorps has a consistent record of sound program management evidenced by a lack of compliance issues or findings on programmatic and fiscal audits. Staff is familiar with and follows

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established procedures for meeting regulatory requirements, such as 30-day compliance on member status in eGrants, timely fiscal and programmatic reporting, and performing all mandated background checks. The NY Commission promotes Rochester AmeriCorps as a model for member and site selection and matching. The program has shared many of its forms and procedures through statewide training, site visits by staff from other programs, and informal consultation and technical assistance.

The CGR evaluation report cited earlier in this narrative stated that the program "has a very strong reputation for being well-run, responsive and consistently attracting quality members." Among its findings, the report stated that "(s)atisfaction with Rochester AmeriCorps is high, both among site supervisors and among members. Nearly glowing reports about the dependability, responsiveness and quality were the norm." The report also found that "Based on the strength of its current placements in two elementary schools and several pre-collegiate programs, Rochester AmeriCorps is well positioned to focus more narrowly on educational focus areas in the future."

b. SUSTAINABILITY The recognized value of AmeriCorps members and the relationships built within the local community have enabled the development of a sustainable system for providing the resources necessary for program implementation and meeting the required match. A combination of host site cash and in-kind contributions, grantee in-kind contributions and local cash support from private sources such as the Rochester Area Community Foundation has enabled the program to meet its funding needs and minimize reliance on federal funds. The fact that the level of community commitment and support has increased over the history of the program in Rochester to its current level of 50% of total program costs is evidence of the high value placed on AmeriCorps service by a variety of community stakeholders.

Our program's model allows a range of service sites to benefit from the impact that AmeriCorps members can have on an organization's capacity to provide meaningful service to the community. This model increases the likelihood that program partners, having seen the impact of their new, expanded or enhanced services, will be committed to increasing their own investment in these services to keep them alive. Indeed, numerous program alumni are now employed by their former service sites; many were hired for newly-created staff positions that are clear evidence of their sites' recognition of the value of continuing the members' involvement.

The sustainability of members' activities is also supported by the extensive use of volunteers. At a number of host sites, members have been involved in not only recruiting and coordinating volunteers, but also in developing or improving systems for volunteer management. These contributions, such as

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procedures for volunteer training and recognition, live on beyond the members' term of service and continue to strengthen the organizations' capacity to meet community needs.

A wide range of stakeholders have been involved in needs identification, planning and program implementation through three primary channels: community-based initiatives, our program's advisory board and our scattered site model. As a prime example, MCC, United Way of Greater Rochester, and the Rochester City School District have played lead roles in the formation of ROC the Future, a new community-based initiative to support area students. The framework of this effort is built on several core principles: shared community vision, evidence-based decision-making, collaborative action, investment, and sustainability. The ROC the Future network has more than three dozen partners, including Rochester AmeriCorps as well as a number of our service sites and other community partners. Our program's focus on enhancing the local educational system is consistent with and builds on the efforts of this community-based initiative.

Reflective of Rochester AmeriCorps' long-time focus on children and youth, members of the program's advisory board have included representatives of the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau, the Rochester City School District, and a variety of local youth-serving organizations. The Mayor's Office, MCC, the Rochester Area Community Foundation, and the United Way of Greater Rochester have also been active participants. As board members, representatives of these organizations, along with AmeriCorps member and alumni representatives, support and promote the program's mission. With the proposed narrowing of the program's focus on education, additional representation from constituencies such as area colleges and the school district's parent council will be sought.

Our program places a great deal of emphasis on enhancing collaborative relationships and building support among community-based service providers, educational institutions, local government, AmeriCorps members and community residents. A variety of member projects have involved multiple agencies working collaboratively to address identified needs. Members and supervisors have used networking opportunities such as supervisors' meetings and Member Development Days to identify shared needs, discuss best practice and develop linkages between programs. Many of these organizations do not otherwise routinely interact with each other or share resources and information. As a result, the community's capacity to support and sustain service activities is strengthened by the breadth of community involvement and sharing of resources, strategies, and success stories.

c. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY As an intermediary organization utilizing a scattered site model, Rochester AmeriCorps is responsible for selecting, supporting and overseeing multiple

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service sites. Use of established systems and procedures allows us to collect the information and documentation needed both to comply with AmeriCorps regulations and to continually review areas of operation that may need improvement.

Monitoring of site compliance with all requirements is carried out through site visits, review of reports and other records, and completion of a site compliance tracking form. Thorough review by program staff of the activities descriptions on members' service record forms provides assurance that members are adhering to the responsibilities reflected in their position description and are not engaging in prohibited activities. Site progress reports provide additional documentation of the members' activities. Member feedback about various aspects of their experience at their site, including adequacy of training and supervision, provision of materials needed to perform their responsibilities, and site adherence to the specified goals and tasks approved for their position, is gathered through mid-year and exit surveys, a host site feedback form, site visits, reflection sessions, and informal discussion.

The site compliance tracking form allows staff to detect and respond to any gaps in site performance or issues with adherence to program requirements. Follow-up with sites and members in instances where programmatic adjustment or corrective action is required is determined on a case-by-case basis depending on the specific situation. Responses could range from clarification of requirements to additional training to removal of a member from the site. In any instance involving a serious violation of regulations, staff will notify the State Commission Office.

The New York Commission has not identified any compliance issues or areas of weakness/risk during Rochester AmeriCorps' current grant cycle. Final progress report feedback from the Commission for 2011 -- 2012 indicated there were no compliance issues and cited a strong member recruitment program, compliance with all AmeriCorps Portal requirements, member training that was conducted consistent with plans, and attainment of targeted outputs and outcomes.

Enrollment: As a result of comprehensive recruitment efforts and a proven member selection process, Rochester AmeriCorps has consistently achieved 100% enrollment of awarded fulltime slots since 2002.

Retention: For the current three-year funding cycle of 2010 -- 2012, 93% of the program's total enrollment of 135 members either earned an education award or are currently serving. Our strategy to maximize retention focuses on providing the best service experience we can and continually analyzing the factors that may contribute to unexpected problematic performance or a member's decision to leave the program prior to completion. We will continue to examine and improve the

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programmatic elements that we see as vital to full enrollment and the highest possible retention: careful screening and selection of members, cultivation of appropriate service sites that are supportive and provide opportunities for growth and meaningful service, and an overall programmatic structure that is responsive to member needs while ensuring accountability.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. **COST EFFECTIVENESS** This proposal's budget reflects a CNCS cost per MSY of \$12,979, below the maximum of \$13,300 and lower than the average annual cost per MSY of \$13,683 during the program's current three-year grant cycle. A slight increase in overall cost per MSY from the current level of \$12,894 reflects an increase in member training costs associated with the sharper focus on impacting educational outcomes among Rochester's neediest children. This shift in focus requires additional skill development and training for members to ensure their effectiveness in addressing these needs. With partner organizations providing some of this specialized member training as an in-kind contribution, only a small increase in member training costs has been added to the CNCS share of the budget.

MCC's total budget of \$122,309,000 is generated through a combination of state and county aid, tuition and fees, grants, fundraising, and fee-for-service activities. The proposed AmeriCorps project represents under one-half of one percent of the college's budget. The college has received CNCS support for its AmeriCorps program annually since 1994.

Having a diverse and sustainable base of non-federal support, coupled with operating efficiencies, allows this program to contain CNCS costs. As detailed in our grantee budget, the combination of host site cash and in-kind contributions, grantee in-kind contributions and local cash support enables our program to meet its funding needs and minimize reliance on federal funds. Indeed, strong local support has allowed us to increase our resources over time to the current level of 50% match. We believe our success stems from the wide-spread recognition of the value of AmeriCorps, cost effectiveness, and our record of demonstrating significant and lasting community outcomes.

A host site cost-sharing system in place since 1998 provides a sustainable source of non-federal cash to support program operation. This system has met with such success that it now supplies a stable source of funds sufficient to cover approximately half of the program's member support costs. In addition, the Rochester Area Community Foundation has provided funding each year of our operation and is expected to continue that commitment. Beyond this cash support, the extent of documented in-kind goods and services contributed to Rochester AmeriCorps is further evidence of the program's support from various segments of the community. These contributions come from the grantee (space,

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administrative support) and host site organizations (supervisory time, space, supplies, and member training and travel). Our diverse support base results in a proportionately lower level of dependence on federal funds, with 50% of our proposed total cost covered by non-CNCS support.

b. BUDGET ADEQUACY This application's budget narrative reflects and supports our program's goals, structure and activities that will lead to targeted outputs and outcomes. Specified levels of expenditures for program staff and site supervisors; supplies; member training and support; criminal history checks and FBI checks for members, staff and supervisors as required by regulation; staff training; administrative functions; and operating costs such as telephone service and postage are an accurate reflection of the resources required to operate a high quality AmeriCorps program using a scattered site model. High levels of non-federal support, both cash and in-kind, allow us to include vital programmatic components such as member support and training at an optimal level that would not be possible using only federal resources.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

NA

Amendment Justification

NA

Clarification Summary

NA

Continuation Changes

NA