

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Teach For America-Connecticut provides a critical source of well-trained teachers who are helping break the local cycle of educational inequity. Corps members teach for two years in low-income schools in Bridgeport, Stamford, Hartford, New Haven, and Windham, going above and beyond traditional expectations to help their students achieve at high levels. At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, 205 AmeriCorps members will have significantly improved educational outcomes for nearly 12,300 students and set in motion their own individual careers that will have a long-term impact on expanding educational opportunity for low-income students. The CNCS investment of \$819,795 will be matched with \$ 258,883.

## Rationale and Approach

A. NEED: Educational inequity is our nation's greatest injustice. The stunning reality is that today, in a nation that prides itself on equal opportunity for all, children's educational opportunities are largely determined by where they are born and the wealth of their family. The result is that millions of students are denied the educational opportunity they deserve.

By virtually every measure -- NAEP, CMT, SAT, high school graduation -- the 190,000 children growing up in poverty in the Connecticut face some of the dimmest educational prospects in the nation. Connecticut's low-income students, who are overwhelmingly children of color, graduate from high school at a rate of 60% compared to nearly 90% of their affluent peers. Approximately 60 % of our white and affluent students in the tenth grade have the math skills and knowledge expected at their grade level. Yet, the same is true of just 13% of our poor students, 12% of our Latino students and 9 % of our African- American students. Just 14.7% of Hartford fourth graders met goal on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) in math, reading, and writing. The gap widens between fourth and eighth grade as 14.4% of Hartford eighth graders met goal in all subjects on the CMT. Meanwhile, in New Canaan, CT, 81.4% of fourth graders and 82.1% of 8th graders met goal on the same assessment, and in Avon, CT, 80.7% of 4th graders and 81.5% of 8th graders met goal. Our African-American and Latino students are also suspended and expelled from school in CT at significantly higher rates than their White and Asian peers. In 2007, the suspension rate among Black K-12 students in CT was over 17%, while the suspension rate for Asian and White K-12 students was 2.4 and 4%, respectively.

We chose to serve this population because of the short and long-term repercussions of perpetuating an achievement gap between low-income students and their peers in wealthier communities. For example, a less educated person is more likely to earn less and be less civically engaged; a high school

## Narratives

dropout is five to eight times more likely to be incarcerated than a college graduate. Because African-American, Latino, and Native-American children are three times as likely to live in a low-income area, children of color are disproportionately impacted by this inequality (America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2008," Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics). B. AC MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE: While the problem is daunting, Teach For America- Connecticut (TFA-CT) addresses the achievement gap by placing members as the teacher of record in low-income classrooms. A member's typical day includes teaching a full class schedule, lesson planning, participating in professional development, and often leading extracurricular activities.

TFA-CT corps member Sam Leska's day normally starts off with a round of morning photo copies for her literature classes, followed by a quick organization of her classroom materials. She begins her 9th grade English class by marking up a specific passage of reading from the previous night. Students generate questions about story themes to help deepen their understandings of the text. This is followed by structured writing time. After lunch, she teaches 11th and 12th grade students a literature class on American Violence. Whether it be helping a student with an essay after school or meeting with parents, she always takes time after school to provide extra support to her students. Most nights she is up late reading, planning, and grading for the next day.

AmeriCorps membership is a critical component of TFA 's recruitment and expansion efforts, particularly in increasing the diversity of our corps. We have seen that when teachers share the same background as their students, they have the potential to have an additional impact because they are uniquely positioned to serve as models of the potential for success. As a result, we place a particular focus on attracting and fostering the leadership of the individuals who share the racial and/or socioeconomic backgrounds of the students we teach -- 90% of whom are African-American or Latino children living in low-income communities.

The number one barrier to applicants from low-income communities joining TFA is the financial burden, specifically mandatory certification costs, and managing student loan payments on a beginning teacher's salary. The AmeriCorps education award and loan forbearance benefits alleviate these concerns and have thus enabled thousands of outstanding corps members to serve who might not have been able to do so without AmeriCorps. These corps members have positively impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of students in low-income communities.

To continue our efforts, TFA-CT is requesting 205 full-time education award slots. Full-time enrollment in AmeriCorps accurately reflects our members' service as full-time teachers C.

## Narratives

EVIDENCE BASED: We believe that three factors come together in a cycle that perpetuates the problem of underachievement in high-poverty communities, which informs our theory of change and how we approach our work. First, corps members commit to teaching two years in low-income schools throughout Connecticut, providing a critical source of teachers who help ensure their students have the educational opportunities they deserve, despite compounding socioeconomic factors. Second, our corps members are charged with improving the academic achievement of their students. In succeeding with their students, members gain added conviction that educational inequity is a solvable problem and a grounded understanding of problem and solutions. Third, our network of more than 28,000 corps members and alumni -- work to minimize the extra challenges facing children growing up in low-income communities through their examples and their advocacy.

A growing body of rigorous research demonstrates that TFA corps members are highly effective classroom teachers. The most rigorous studies have found that corps members' impact on student achievement exceeds that of other teachers in the same high-needs schools, including veteran teachers. ("The Effects of TFA on Students: Findings from a National Evaluation," Mathematica Policy Research, June 2004) (The Urban Institute/CALDER Research Center, 2009). Additionally, pathway studies on the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Louisiana concluded that TFA corps members are among the strongest new teachers with the greatest impact on student achievement over the course of multiple years. ("Impacts of Teacher Preparation on Student Test Scores in North Carolina: Teacher Portals," The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill/Carolina Institute for Public Policy, 2010, 2011, 2012; Report Card on the Effectiveness of Teacher Training Programs: State Board of Education and Tennessee Higher Education Commission, 2010, 2011; Noell, George, "TFA Teachers' Contribution to Student Achievement in Louisiana in Grades 4-9"). of experience (The Urban Institute/CALDER Research Center, 2009).

Our anecdotal evidence of individual corps member accomplishments in schools throughout Connecticut continues to confirm our results. For example, in 2012, Nicole Harris's 1st graders, along with two other 1st grade classrooms at her school, scored 1st in the district for reading scores. In the fall, only 50% of her students at Noah Webster Microsociety Magnet were at goal or above in reading, but by the spring, 89% were at goal or above. Her students made 1.5 years of growth on average, finishing the year at a mid-2nd grade reading level.

By the end of the three year cycle, TFA-CT aims to increase the effectiveness and impact of our corps members on student achievement and aims to foster a transformative corps member experience

## Narratives

resulting in vision driven leadership in the classroom and dramatic academic outcomes for student. For these reasons, we are opting into the following performance measures: ED2, ED5, ED12-15, ED17.

The targets for these measures were determined by reviewing past data and in alignment with TFA-CT's regional student achievement goals.

TFA measures performance based on the impact our corps members have on student achievement. This includes measuring the growth students make throughout the year and/or students' ability to demonstrate mastery of content at the end of the year. Our corps members are expected to progress their students at least a year or more of academic growth per school year. For the 2013-2014 school year, we anticipate that 70% of students will make gains of a year or more of academic growth.

Each corps member administers a diagnostic test in the beginning of the year to each student, and is then required to monitor student growth through ongoing and end-of-year assessments.

To ensure that our corps members lead their students to significant academic growth, we rely on high quality student achievement data from rigorous tests to drive program improvements and provide tailored support to corps members. Our internal student achievement measurement system focuses on a continuous measure, whereby corps members are evaluated based on the percentage of goal attained. SAMS will be used to set classroom goals, guide decision-making, assess student progress, and fuel continuous improvement. CURRENT GRANTEE: During the 2011-2012 school year, TFA-CT made progress on closing the achievement gap in Connecticut, with over 80% of our corps members leading their students to achieve 1.5 years in academic growth/80% content strand mastery. We met our goal of supporting 100% of corps members to earn the certificate required to be a licensed teacher in the state of Connecticut through Teach For America - Connecticut's ARC program. In addition, our corps members exceeded the goal of recruiting 850 community members to volunteer. However, we were only able to place 158 out of a goal of 164 highly qualified corps members, as several confirmed applicants resigned before arriving to join our corps. Unfortunately, they resigned after our final selection window. Given the intensity of our summer training and the necessity of our corps members to be fully inducted into our program and certification coursework, we could not accept additional corps members after the final selection deadline. Despite this loss, we exceeded our 90% retention target. For the 2012-2013 school year, we have set goals based on this retention data and have worked to increase and improve our outreach and support to confirmed applicants. D. MEMBER RECRUITMENT: TFA employs a rigorous recruitment campaign to develop a robust pool of candidates of top performing students who are in the top third academic cohort and high achieving professionals, who are rigorously screened for other qualities believed to be predictors

## Narratives

of successful teachers -- perseverance, ability to motivate others, passion for children, and organization and communication skills.

TFA recruits at more than 350 colleges and universities, with aggressive campaigns focused on over 200 campuses. Through this intensive targeted recruitment effort and mass marketing, more than 48,000 people applied to join the 2012 corps. Among this year's applicants to TFA were: 8% of seniors at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 6% at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, 10% at Morehouse College, 9% at the Ivy League schools, 4% at the University of Florida, and 4% at the University of California-Berkeley.

TFA-CT currently has corps members hailing from 7 different Connecticut colleges and universities, and 27% of our corps are from a Connecticut hometown. Additionally, because the regional office is deeply committed to this effort, we have been working closely to put on events that expose our potential applicants to the challenges and opportunities present in the cities that the Connecticut corps represents.

We place a particular focus on attracting and fostering the leadership of the individuals who share the racial and/or socioeconomic backgrounds of the students we teach, 90 % of whom are African-American or Hispanic children living in low-income communities. We recruit heavily at HBCU's Applicants included 10% of seniors at Morehouse College, 8% at Howard University and at the Ivy League schools, one in seven African-American seniors and one in seven Latino seniors applied. In addition, 38% of our 2012 corps are people of color and 35% received Pell Grants.

TFA also launched its first veteran recruitment initiative in 2012, recognizing veterans' desire to serve their country and their ability to operate effectively and diplomatically in high-stress situations. Currently, over 100 veteran corps members are currently leading in our nation's highest-need schools.

In pursuit of our diversity vision and goals, we are implementing several important initiatives to ensure members from underrepresented populations have a positive experience. We offer and encourage staff, corps members and alumni to form resource groups to come together around common identity areas and to network, build community, strengthen skills and support one another. We recently launched a diversity and inclusiveness committee on our national board. We also incorporate diversity and inclusiveness into manager training for staff and corps member training. E. MEMBER TRAINING: The bedrock of our training and evaluation model is a framework we call Teaching As Leadership (TAL), which includes the six strategies that we have found drive effective teaching: (1) setting an ambitious vision; (2) investing students and families in that vision; (3) planning purposefully to meet ambitious goals; (4) executing plans effectively; (5) working

## Narratives

relentlessly to achieve their vision; and (6) continuously reflecting and improving. Each of these strategies corresponds to a series of 28 teacher actions, which comprise the TAL rubric. **INDUCTION-** - At the beginning of the summer, members spend a week in Connecticut learning about the communities in which they will serve. AmeriCorps pre-service orientation is conducted, so members learn about the responsibilities and benefits of AmeriCorps membership before they begin serving. **INSTITUTE** -- Next, corps members attend a rigorous five-week residential summer training institute to prepare them for teaching in a low-income classroom. Members teach as part of a four-person collaborative that is supervised and mentored by both a veteran teacher and a TFA staff member who provide regular feedback about their teaching, reflect and refine their practice to ensure that students meet summer school goals. Corps members also attend daily curriculum sessions where they gain the foundational knowledge needed to become highly effective beginning teachers. **ORIENTATION** -- After Institute, corps members return to Connecticut to create their first unit plans, assessments and tools to track their students' progress. **ONGOING SUPPORT** -- Building on the foundation received during the summer training, the TFA-CT program team provides intensive training and professional development.

Corps members are paired with a Manager of Teacher Leadership Development (MTLD). MTLDs conduct observations of the member's class, and provide corps members with feedback and support. They work with corps members to review student data to identify and find solutions to problems or gaps in student achievement. This approach builds corps members' abilities to independently evaluate student outcomes, identify causes of problems, and seek solutions. Members also meet regularly in content- or grade-level-specific learning teams led by experienced teachers to discuss ongoing challenges, share best practices, and work together on professional development. Finally, members participate in certification and/or master's degree programs designed to ensure that members meet state certification requirements.

Throughout the training and support cycle outlined above, we have imbedded several opportunities to reinforce key issues of AmeriCorps compliance. Prohibited activities are reviewed with corps members at TFA-CT's pre-service orientation to ensure that they have clear and solid understanding of their responsibilities. We continue to enforce collective compliance at monthly professional development sessions and email blasts. Individual compliance will be monitored by MTLDs who are trained annually on prohibited activities. This training includes a comprehensive explanation of the prohibited activities, examples and case studies of what these activities encompass, and how to detect and report them. Through their regular interaction with corps members, MTLDs are able to review

## Narratives

regulations with members and verify that corps members are not engaging in them.

Our placement sites will be provided with an AmeriCorps orientation guide, which includes information on AmeriCorps policies and prohibited activities. Ensuring that our principals and other school administrators are aware of these activities provides another system to ensure corps members are not engaging in these activities, as well as an on site resource, should they have any questions or want clarification or guidance on any activities in which they plan to participate in.

F. MEMBER SUPERVISION: TFA-CT's plan for supervising corps members may differ from the majority of AmeriCorps programs because we are a professional corps. All TFA corps members are college graduates who have gone through a rigorous application process that is designed, in part, to measure their ability to work effectively in a professional setting. Therefore, our supervision plan is concerned with corps member development and evaluation. Additionally, since our corps members work as full-time professional teachers, they are directly supervised by their school principal and other school administration.

As mentioned previously, every corps member is matched with a MTLT -- highly effective TFA alums who manage a cohort of current members, which provides an additional layer of support and a high level of supervision to corps members. Our MTLTs are corps members' first point of contact with TFA. They perform regular observations of member classrooms, regularly meet with corps member to review student data with a focus on progress to date, and provide strategies for overcoming current challenges. MTLTs refer corps members to targeted resources based on strengths and weaknesses. At the end of the year, MTLTs and corps members analyze student growth based on final assessments.

To be hired, MTLTs must have a demonstrated track record of success during their time in the classroom and displayed the characteristics needed to be successful in this role, such as critical thinking, influencing and motivating, and problem solving. Upon joining staff, MTLTs attend a new staff conference and independently participate in 20 hours of online modules before working with corps members. Once MTLTs complete their on-boarding process and begin working with members, they engage in the following ongoing trainings: weekly check-ins with their manager; bi-weekly group professional development and skill building sessions; and weekly individualized professional development.

TFA's mission is to build the movement to end educational inequity by enlisting our nation's most promising future leaders in the effort. Accomplishing our mission requires that we provide corps members with a powerful service experience.

## Narratives

G. MEMBER EXPERIENCE: TFA-CT works to reinforce a culture of service by providing opportunities for members to take on increased responsibility. For example, second year members have the opportunity to mentor first year members, and develop and conduct professional development sessions. Additionally, all members are encouraged to work at our summer training institute, welcome new members, and recruit at their colleges and universities. During their service, we host discussions and panels designed to help members reflect on the causes of educational inequity and fostering a sense of responsibility to address these issues.

Corps members are provided with many opportunities throughout their service to reflect on their work in order to build a lifelong commitment to service, specifically educational equity. Corps members participate in four All-Corps Conferences throughout each year of service where they hear from local leaders, discuss the role of leadership and service, and encourage one another to stay committed to the mission of closing the achievement gap. Corps members also attend two "Town Hall" meetings each year, hosted in their city of service. These days give corps members the opportunity to interact with other service programs that work in the region. Additionally, in their second year of service, corps members attend a "What's Next" event where they can meet with industry leaders from around the region to hear about future opportunities available for staying involved in the mission.

After successfully completing their service, members become part of TFA's alumni network. We employ a two-part strategy to foster the leadership of our alumni base. First, we work to build community among our alumni and keep them connected to TFA. We host regional alumni summits and publish an alumni magazine to keep alumni engaged in our mission. Second, we support the career development of our alumni through a series of initiatives that fast track the pathway to leadership in several key sectors--school leadership, teaching leadership, political leadership, policy and advocacy leadership, and social entrepreneurship. Currently, over 570 alumni are serving as school leaders, over 5,500 are still teaching, 45 are elected officials, over 500 alumni work in public policy, and 14 are recognized as social entrepreneurs.

TFA-CT values its relationship with AmeriCorps. In instances where there are national or community service projects that bring together members of service programs across our region, we encourage our members to participate and provide support to programs. Further, through their direct access to students, our teachers provide information, encouragement, and support for students to join local youth volunteer programs, thus creating a culture and legacy of civil responsibility and service in the next generation.

## Narratives

The TFA-CT and TFA-Rhode Island regions co-hosted a Southern New England Summit in Hartford on May 19th, 2012 with the intent of further mobilizing our alumni and providing a forum for key education players across the Northeast to collaborate. We ensured that the representation on the panels was diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, large and small organizations, community leaders, and parent voices and perspectives. Our speakers included Connecticut Governor Dannel P. Malloy, the Founding Editor and Publisher of The Hartford Guardian, the Educational Issues Specialist of the Connecticut Education Association, the Chair of the Connecticut Board of Education, teachers, principals, superintendents, the founder and President of the Connecticut Parent's Union and representatives of other community organizations. Our agenda focused on reflection about one's role in education, connections and networks to others in the education arena, and exposure to the many activities and initiatives taking place around education in our communities.

Corps members in Connecticut also participate in at least two formal service events. In 2012, our corps sent 3,500 student letters to veterans through Operation Gratitude. Additionally, we had 152 corps members volunteer in the cities that they serve for MLK Day, which was a 93% participation rate. In Bridgeport and New Haven, we partnered with soup kitchens, shelters and Bridgeport University, and in Hartford we partnered with Our Piece of the Pie. Working with these organizations gave our corps members the chance to interact with each other and members of our communities outside of the classroom. Volunteering in the communities we serve helped to raise awareness about AmeriCorps and Teach For America. In Hartford, our corps members were able to meet AmeriCorps members from other programs.

TFA-CT strategically reinforces the AmeriCorps identity and brand with corps members and community members. Prior to their summer pre-service training, corps members receive written materials designed to provide foundational information and history about AmeriCorps as it relates to both TFA and the broader AmeriCorps network. These materials enable corps members to gain a basic understanding of AmeriCorps prior to the start of their term of service.

To build upon this information, all TFA-CT corps members participate in an AmeriCorps Pre-Service Orientation, led by our program staff, which familiarizes them with the benefits and responsibilities of being an AmeriCorps member. During this pre-service orientation, corps members are provided with numerous materials and resources that they can utilize to: (1) gain more information about AmeriCorps; (2) provide information to others about AmeriCorps; and (3) help them to clearly identify as an AmeriCorps member. We continue to reinforce these ideas during regular email blasts and during periodic member general meetings. Orientation sessions and ongoing discussions with

## Narratives

program staff help members develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be an AmeriCorps member, including viewing their service commitment as part of a much larger movement.

To further foster esprit de corp and a sense of connection with the AmeriCorps identity, TFA-CT has worked to increase our corps members' identification as AmeriCorps members and our community visibility as such. During induction in June, corps members participate in an AmeriCorps training session. At the end of this session, corps members make the AmeriCorps pledge and are encouraged to promote AmeriCorps and refer to themselves not only as corps members of Teach For America but also as members of AmeriCorps. All corps members received AmeriCorps lapel pins at induction and are encouraged to wear them daily in their classrooms. The theme of AmeriCorps Week inspired us to create a project that our corps members could complete in order to show their AmeriCorps pride and how AmeriCorps is impacting their lives, the lives of the children they teach and the communities in which they teach. All corps members posed with an "AmeriCorps Works!" sign either with their class or in front of their school. Then, they were given three prompts and were asked to choose one and write a brief paragraph expressing their pride in being an AmeriCorps member. Our office staff collected all of the photos and short responses and created a PowerPoint of all the projects. This PowerPoint was then shown at our March Professional Development Saturday where corps members were asked to bring a parent of one of their students, so we were able to share our AmeriCorps pride with the community. In the end, we had 157 corps members submit an AmeriCorps pride project and the feedback was very positive. Additionally this year, corps members display AmeriCorps Works and MLK Day service posters in their classrooms and share AmeriCorps bookmarks with their students. At events such as our All Corps Conference we have distributed AmeriCorps beanies, which were eagerly worn by our corps members. TFA-CT added AmeriCorps and Serve Connecticut logos to our regional website and all internal emails to corps members. This year, we've ordered AmeriCorps stickers for our corps members to wear on their MLK Day of service, and we will also be recruiting members to march under an AmeriCorps banner with other Connecticut AmeriCorps programs in our St. Patrick's Day Parade. We are also in the process of collaborating with the AmeriCorps program at the University of Connecticut to bring their students into our classrooms in Windham. H. VOL GEN: TFA-CT uses four methods to recruit volunteers to expand the impact of our program. First, we strongly encourage corps members to recruit and involve volunteers in their classrooms. Our corps members are encouraged to build relationships with their students' families and invite them to volunteer in the classroom. Many corps members also recruit and manage one-time volunteers from the community. Second, we involve volunteers through our annual Teach For America Week event. Over the course

## Narratives

of two weeks in early April, TFA-CT invites community leaders to present lessons in corps member classrooms. Teach For America Week volunteers bring real world lessons into schools and encourage students to set high goals for themselves. TFA-CT has welcomed guests from The Hartford, Lincoln Financial and Comcast. Thirdly, our advisory board is a diverse volunteer body of community leaders and is responsible for advising the organization's development, program implementation and visibility initiatives. Finally, we have built significant capacity to engage our nearly 28,000 alumni in taking greater responsibility for the organization's well-being. This year, about 45% of our total alumni base contributed time or money to the organization.

Corps members provide supervision and instruction to their classroom volunteers to ensure they have clear expectations, goals are met, and that no volunteer is engaging in prohibited activities. Additionally, each corps member signs a statement on our mid and end of year surveys affirming that they have managed and supervised their recruited volunteers at a level that they can ensure that no volunteer has engaged in prohibited activities. I. ORG COMMITMENT TO AC IDENTIFICATION: TFA is undergoing an organization-wide rebranding in 2013, which will give us an opportunity to further integrate the AmeriCorps brand in national and regional marketing efforts. This will include integrating the AmeriCorps brand in marketing touch-points across social media, web, and print collateral. We believe the re-brand and the implementation of these guidelines will further strengthen the TFA brand and help increase awareness of our affiliation with AmeriCorps among our network.

To this end, TFA-CT has placed three different AmeriCorps and Serve Connecticut logos on our regional website and we have also included AmeriCorps logos on our Cvent sites for event fundraising. We have placed AmeriCorps logos on our official letterhead, which is sent to community members and donors and on signage that is visible in our office. We have made a concerted push to inform every principal at the 77 schools where our corps members serve this year of our AmeriCorps membership and have collected their signatures on our AmeriCorps orientation letters.

### Organizational Capability

A. ORG STAFFING & HISTORY: Wendy Kopp proposed the idea for Teach For America in her Princeton University undergraduate thesis in 1989. In 1990, a charter corps of 500 committed recent college graduates joined Teach For America and began fueling the movement to eliminate educational inequity. Since then, nearly 37,000 participants have reached more than 3 million children nationwide during their two-year teaching commitments.

Teach For America came to Connecticut in 2006. We placed our inaugural corps of 48 teachers primarily in New Haven schools. In 2007, we expanded and brought in 26 more teachers into

## Narratives

Hartford schools. Five years later, our Hartford teaching force has nearly tripled to 75 teachers -- reaching more than 4,000 students in Hartford-- nearly 20 % of the entire student population.

TFA has effectively managed large-scale federal grants through both AmeriCorps and the Department of Education. We have received unqualified A-133 audits every year, and have built significant internal capacity to manage both the financial and programmatic components of a national AmeriCorps program. At the national office, a number of well-qualified specialists are available to meet and guide regional staff on AmeriCorps compliance, budget creation, and general grant management. We use our Financial Edge database to help track funding streams and expenses by department and program element. Our finance team reports to the auditing and finance committees of our board, and works closely with our development team and budget trackers to coordinate cash-in and expenses throughout the organization. This structure allows for the appropriate breakdown of responsibilities and a system of checks and balances needed to ensure accurate financial accounting, coordination of fundraising and spending, and the accurate tracking of all finances. Additionally, the national team provides on-going trainings and assistance for all regional staff positions via conference calls, regional and national conferences, and on-line tutorials. The national office also includes a well-staffed technology department that is available to assist with any technical problems that should arise at the regional level.

In addition, Teach For America values research and internal and external evaluations and has a team devoted to this field of work. The purpose of our Research Partnerships team is to enable the following efforts: shape internal research agenda, field and manage external research inquiries, studies, and surveys, translate research and respond to studies and work to improve data quality. Through this focus on research, Teach For America seeks rigorous independent evaluations to measure our impact and continually improve our program.

Regionally, TFA-CT employs 15 full-staff members that work directly in the region to handle the day-to-day programming and operational responsibilities. TFA-CT's 15 Advisory Board members serve as internal advisers to the Executive Director and other senior-level staff. Nate Snow (Executive Director) oversees the region's programmatic and development efforts and forges new partnerships to strengthen the region. Nate became Executive Director in January of 2012, but first joined staff in 2009 as the region's Director of Individual Giving. In 2010, Nate transitioned into the Managing Director of Development. As a corps member he taught 7th and 8th grade English in Bridgeport. Meredith Burdick (Managing Director of Teacher Leadership and Development) works to ensure that the region reaches its ambitious student achievement goals. As a 2004 New York

## Narratives

Teaching Fellow in the South Bronx, she taught fourth and fifth grade for four years. Reid Hickman (Director of Classroom Turnaround and Culture) works to ensure that all classrooms have a culture that fosters learning. Previously, he taught 7th and 8th grade math. Ellie Webb (Director of Teacher Leadership and Development) cultivates the leadership of teachers. She was a corps member in Hartford where she taught 3rd and 4th grade for 3 years. Michelle Szykowitz, Christine English, Miles Hodge, Samantha Gorley, Jodi Thompson (Manager of Teacher Leadership and Development) supports corps members to reach ambitious academic achievement goals with their students. All MTLDs were former teachers with a successful track record of student achievement.

As outlined above, our regional and national staff capacity is such that it enables us to provide each Teach For America corps member comprehensive training. Each corps member completes a 5-6 week intensive training program prior to entering the classroom. This training program is designed to give corps members hands on experience by actually teaching in a classroom, as well as to learn the skills and values that will prepare them to be leaders and excel in the classroom. Once in the region, each corps member is assigned an MTLD--a one-on-one coach--who works closely with corps members to further develop teaching and leadership development. In addition, corps members also attend TFA led professional development opportunities throughout the year, many of which are specific to the content and grade level that they teach.

As a recipient of AmeriCorps funding since 1994, TFA has built the systems and tools to successfully manage AmeriCorps grants and ensure compliance. Additionally, TFA receives other federal sources of funding and continuously updates our systems accordingly to successfully manage these grants.

CURRENT GRANTEE: Teach For America - Connecticut deeply values its relationship with AmeriCorps, and has a national AmeriCorps team that works with the Connecticut regional office to support compliance and grant management. In addition, TFA-Connecticut has worked to maintain a strong relationship with the Connecticut Commission on Community Service and promote our AmeriCorps status within our community. TFA-CT attends all trainings hosted by the commission and communicates regularly with commission staff to ensure that requirements are met and quarterly and annual reports are submitted on time. In the 2011-2012 grant year, TFA-CT met 2 out of our 3 performance measures.

B. SUSTAINABILITY TFA -Connecticut has had significant experience raising the necessary resources to run our program from a variety of sources: foundations, corporations, individual donors, and public sources. We actively seek to grow funding across all sources going forward and expanding across Connecticut where both funding and placement opportunities exist.

## **Narratives**

In FY 2013, we aim for 9% of support to come from corporations, 18% through foundations, 64% from individual gifts, and 9 % from state AmeriCorps funding. Historically, we have also raised approximately 12% of our budget from school placement fees. Additionally, this year our Teach For America - Connecticut Golf Outing raised approximately \$180,000. Our 2012 Benefit Dinner raised close to \$1,000,000 and our goal for next year's event is to raise at least 1.2 million. We plan on hosting events through the next fiscal year to meet our fundraising goals.

Collaboration with our placement partners is essential to our success and sustainability. Our collaboration with school leaders and professional development teams in our placement districts and charter schools have led us to better align the training and professional development we provide with the professional development provided by the schools and districts. For example, our Program Directors are invited to attend and participate in all professional development workshops conducted by Hartford Public Schools alongside their cohort of corps members, and during the year we invited non-TFA teachers in Bridgeport to attend and participate in our Professional Development Saturday workshops. At the school level, our Program Directors work closely with school leaders to ensure corps members at their school have the training and support they need in order to be effective teachers. Program Directors communicate regularly with school leaders to check in on corps member performance, and when needed they work together to identify areas for improvement and opportunities for skill development. This has ensured that our corps members are well trained and integrated into their school communities.

We are also working to increase our presence in our communities and strengthen relationships with our school principals and parents. This year we are holding two significant community days or town halls; one which occurred in the fall and one in the spring. These town halls are regional events in Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, Stamford and Windham. During our October 2012 town hall all corps members were asked to bring a parent. Managers of Teacher Leadership facilitated a "Pathways to Opportunity Fair" where a number of local organizations and afterschool programs conducted workshops or set up tables to provide information to corps members and parents on various programs that are available in their city.

Additionally, in order to more deeply invest the communities that we serve, our Teacher Development Leadership team is launching a student survey to assess classroom culture and satisfaction with Teach For America corps members. We will use the data to inform our future investment strategies so that 80 % of students will feel that we have a strong classroom culture and are satisfied with Teach For America teachers.

## Narratives

Finally, the Achievement First (AF) charter school network and ConnCAN, our partners in the statewide education reform movement, are also deeply committed to our ongoing presence in the state. Their support has continued, expanded and diversified over the past 5 years. This partnership supports us by hiring our corps members in their schools, partnering with us on professional development workshops, and helping us secure free or affordable local space for our conferences, events and other activities. Additionally, they support our efforts to secure legislation critical to our continued growth and impact and have helped connect us with potential donors interested in supporting us financially.

C. COMPLIANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY: As a long time AmeriCorps grantee, Teach For America has developed strong systems to ensure grant compliance internally, with corps members, and at their placement sites. Teach For America's national AmeriCorps Team will provide training and technical assistance to all regions, which includes ongoing technical assistance and communications around AmeriCorps rules and regulations including those related to prohibited activities. TFA-CT will also check-in with the national team regularly to norm on all member service activities. To ensure compliance at our placement sites, TFA-CT will provide extensive pre-service and ongoing training to both corps members and school administrators. These trainings will be designed to communicate AmeriCorps rules and regulations, as well as assist corps members and site supervisors make well informed decisions regarding the members' activities to successfully maintain compliance. Additionally, TFA-CT's program team will be trained on both acceptable and prohibited AmeriCorps activities so they are equipped to reinforce these ideas to corps members, as well as monitor member activities.

Through site visits, corps member classroom observations, and regular communication with site supervisors, our Managers of Teacher Leadership Development (MTLDs) will provide strict oversight of corps members and the activities that they engage in. Due to the frequency of interactions that MTLDs have with members and their in depth knowledge of the prohibited activities, they will be able to detect if members are in violation of AmeriCorps regulations.

If an MTLD or school administrator suspects that a member is engaging in prohibited activities, they will notify our regional leadership team. Partnering with our national legal counsel and the state commission as needed, the regional leadership team will assess the suspected violation and determine next steps. CURRENT GRANTEE: AmeriCorps co-branding has become a priority for Teach For America- Connecticut. We have taken all of the feedback the state commission provided and have used it to inform our website improvements. Since regional Teach For America websites, including our

## Narratives

Connecticut website, are developed and maintained by a national team of web developers, we are working with them in order to properly represent AmeriCorps on our website. We recognized that we needed to do a better job of promoting ourselves as a Serve Connecticut program and providing AmeriCorps information online to our partners and members and worked with our web development to update our website. We were able to add links to the Corporation and the state service commission on the bottom of the page and there is an interview with the Executive Director of the state service commission, accompanied by the AmeriCorps logo.

We also revised the national Teach For America press kit for 2012 with increased visibility to our AmeriCorps partnership. Here in Connecticut, we revised our organization boilerplate to include increased visibility about our partnership. Additionally, we include AmeriCorps language in the body of all of our own Connecticut news releases. We revised our meeting packets and include the logo on all meeting materials distributed externally. We created a Connecticut specific press kit that leads with the identification of Teach For America as an AmeriCorps program. ENROLLMENT: In the last completed program year (2011-2012), Teach For America filled 96% of the slots on our state grant, demonstrating an improvement over the previous program year. Due to the timing of AmeriCorps application deadlines as compared to our admissions cycle, we are never certain of our final corps size at the time of application. Due to the nature of our professional corps, with centralized admissions and intensive training required prior to service, we are unable to fill additional slots after awards have been announced. Therefore, our request for MSYs is always based on our best estimate of the number of slots we will need.

The high enrollment rate cited above demonstrates Teach For America's accuracy in projecting our need, indicating tight internal systems and expertise in the midst of many moving parts. We expect that our current request will have an even higher level of accuracy, leading to a higher rate of enrollment.

RETENTION: Teach For America's retention rate for the 2011-12 school year was 96%; a rate markedly higher than the estimated average retention for first-year teachers in low-income communities in general (82 %) and the overall average for all first-year teachers regardless of school setting (86 %) ("No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children" (2003) National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. Washington, D.C.). This also represents an 8% improvement over the previous year's results.

As full time teachers in high-need schools, our corps members work long hours in highly stressful situations both in and outside of school. Our corps members combat the myriad of problems facing

## Narratives

under served schools, operating with a strong sense of possibility and energy to succeed despite many obstacles.

Although Teach For America's retention rate is higher than the national average, we are constantly working to improve our program and thus our retention rates. We work vigorously to improve our selection process to make sure we are selecting members who will relentlessly pursue our mission in the face of steep odds. Additionally, we regularly survey our members as to their satisfaction with their initial training as well as the support they receive regionally throughout the year. OPERATING SITES: We begin meeting with district officials to identify the highest need schools and teaching positions in Connecticut in advance of placing members. Corps members interview at the school site and compete for open positions along with other new teachers.

TFA-CT has partnered with Hartford Public Schools, New Haven Public Schools, Bridgeport Public Schools, Windham Public Schools, Achievement First Public Charter Schools, Domus Kids, Capital Region Education Council, Jumoke Academy and New Beginnings Family Academy to meet the needs of low-income students by providing highly qualified teachers to assist in their efforts to close the achievement gap. We work closely with our partners throughout the year to align our pre-service training and ongoing support with district needs, and engage in an ongoing dialogue with school leadership to ensure they are satisfied with our teachers' performance.

Currently, all 189 TFA-CT corps members are teaching in low-income schools across the state, as defined by free and reduced lunch rates. 45 corps members teach in Bridgeport, 77 in Hartford, 47 in New Haven, and 4 in Stamford. Additionally, we built a new relationship and secured placement commitments with Windham Public Schools for the 2012-2013 school year, and currently have 16 teachers in this district. For the 2013-2014 school year, corps member training and preparation will begin in January. Hiring starts with our charter partners in late February, and hiring at district schools will continue through August and into September.

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

A. COST EFFECTIVENESS: TFA-CT is requesting 205 full time member slots at \$3,999/MSY through a reimbursable grant. The \$3,999 cost per MSY is far less than the maximum amount that can be requested for a professional corps reimbursable grant. A reimbursable grant, combined with commitments, will allow us to continue and further our work in Connecticut.

As a professional corps, our members are provided salaries and benefits from the school districts. Therefore, our costs relate solely to training and supporting our members. These expenses are directly linked to outputs and outcomes -- the AmeriCorps grant will cover a percentage of the costs that

## Narratives

enable TFA to recruit, place and support corps members so that they are prepared to make academic gains with their students and engage community members in their classrooms. Our 2013 fiscal year budget is \$3,276,000; with \$3,999/MSY, we depend on other funding sources to raise the additional funding necessary to support our corps members.

In total, we raised a cash-in amount of \$5,450,720 in FY 12, which comprised of dollars from: FOUNDATIONS: In FY 12, we raised \$891,500 from foundations, or 16% of all funds raised. We continue to build awareness and cultivate champions at the foundation level. CORPORATIONS: Last year, we raised \$710,946 from Connecticut corporations, which comprised 13% of our regional budget. INDIVIDUALS: In FY 12, we were able to raise \$2,723,732 from individuals in the Connecticut area, which was nearly 50% of all funds raised. In addition, we have recently launched a new Sponsor Engagement and Community Leadership campaign to engage our individual donors in collaborative events with corps members across the state. SCHOOL PARTNERS: In addition to our fundraising efforts noted above, we secured \$548,500 from our school partners to help offset the training and recruitment costs of the TFA-CT teachers working in their schools.

Finally, TFA-CT was awarded a state AmeriCorps grant, totaling \$658,762 for 2012-2013. TFA has been an AmeriCorps program since 1994. In 2006, Teach For America began placing corps members in Connecticut, and in 2010 we were granted an AmeriCorps state grant.

We are confident that we will be able to raise total program costs. In fact, TFA is recognized by outside groups for its efficiency. In 2009, Worth Magazine named TFA one of the 10 most cost effective charities in the country.

TFA-CT has already built a solid foundation of diverse funders from both inside and outside Connecticut. In addition to our school district partners, our current donors include individuals, foundations, and corporations based in Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Missouri, Nevada, and New Jersey, as well as one foundation in Switzerland. We continue to deepen and broaden our prospect research to identify new champions for our work.

In FY 12, TFA-CT surpassed its fundraising goal of \$5.2 million, securing commitments for over \$6.5 million, and collecting \$5.45 million of those funds by the year end. For FY13 (October 1, 2012 -- May 31, 2013) fundraising, we are already 63% to goal.

As a low-cost professional corps program, TFA's program design is a particularly cost effective model for increasing student achievement and closing the achievement gap. First, we provide school districts who serve predominantly low-income students with a pool of highly successful candidates who exhibit the traits of highly effective teachers. Research consistently demonstrates that high-quality

## Narratives

teaching is the most important factor in student learning; yet, low-income students are far less likely to get effective teachers than their wealthier peers. As part of TFA's program model, our intense recruitment process selects individuals with a strong sense of civic duty and record of high achievement, who consistently demonstrate the characteristics that have been found in successful teachers. Second, our corps members commit to teach for at least two years and many remain in education as teachers or school leaders for a third year following their AmeriCorps commitment. School districts who serve predominantly low-income students often face high teacher turn over annually. Thus, TFA not only provides a strong candidate pool of highly effective teachers, but also a more stable pool of candidates to our districts. This drastically decreases the amount of resources they spend annually to recruit teachers and attracts high level talent that they may not otherwise attract. Finally, in addition to providing pre-service training, we are one of the few teacher providers in the country who continue to give on-going support to teachers throughout their two year commitment. Because of our rigorous selection model and student achievement focused training, TFA corps members are consistently reviewed as the strongest new teachers with the greatest impact on student achievement in every state that runs the data and in the most rigorous independent studies.

**CURRENT GRANTEE:** As part of our 5-year plan, TFA-CT strives to increase both the depth and breadth of our impact. As we grow our corps to scale while continually improving our program's effectiveness, we are taking on much larger fundraising goals. We are requesting an expansion to 205 slots without an increased cost per MSY, which will allow us to serve more students than ever before. In addition, consolidating our corps members onto one grant will increase the efficiency of program staff by alleviating the need to monitor the separation of multiple grant awards. This expansion will also increase our corps members' sense of connection to AmeriCorps in the state of Connecticut, as all corps members will be under the commission's portfolio, which will increase our ability to partner with other AmeriCorps programs. Greater opportunity for partnership with other AmeriCorps programs will expand our impact by increasing the resources that we are able to offer our students and corps members.

**B. BUDGET ADEQUACY:** Our budget is designed to adequately support our program and to align with our mission. 70% of our budget represents costs directly related to corps member development and support-- which includes costs related to personnel, trainings, and corps member meetings. These allocations are reflective of our program's needs for ongoing support and professional development, which enables them to lead their students to make significant academic gains. The remaining portion of our budget is allocated for placement and services. Expenses within this

## **Narratives**

allocation are associated with management, operations, and development of our regional office and ensuring all staff are continually developed and highly effective.

TFA has budgeted AmeriCorps funds to cover the costs of the national service criminal history checks.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

TFA-CT has sent a copy of our evaluation to the state commission.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A