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Executive Summary

More than a half million people (580,000) are living at or below federal poverty levels in the Twin Cities metro area. Thirty (30) AmeriCorps members will be trained to serve in Minnesota Opportunity Corps using the nationally recognized, research-based Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum. At the end of the 3 year grant period, members will use employment navigation strategies to serve a total of 4,500 unemployed, underemployed and low-income residents of the nine-county Twin Cities metro area to become economically self-sufficient. In addition, we will help 50% (2,250) enroll in or complete a training credential or an educational degree program. Of those who meet this target, 30% (675) will be placed in a job that relates to the skills developed and/or credentials earned, placing them on a career path intended to ultimately lead to a living-wage job and economic self-sufficiency. This project will address the CNCS focus area of Economic Opportunity and run from August 1, 2013 to July 31, 2016. The CNCS investment of \$390,000 will be matched with \$177,810 that has already been pledged.

Rationale and Approach

NEED. In the nine-country Twin Cities metro area (including Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott and western Washington counties) more than a half million people (580,000) are living at or below federal poverty levels. In the past decade (2000 to 2010), poverty increased almost 6% in Minneapolis and St. Paul, with 11% of the overall population in both cities now living in poverty (Minnesota Compass, 2010). Yet many of the poor in the Twin Cities have jobs -- they just don't earn a wage that meets the cost of living. The United Way of the Greater Twin Cities reported (Faces of Poverty, 2012) that more than half (52%) of Minnesota's poverty population in 2010 worked in the prior 12 months and that 8.3% worked full-time year-round. The United Way further reported that a family of four needs about \$60,000 in annual income to cover basic needs, yet half of the available jobs in Minnesota pay just a third of that: less than \$22,500. As defined by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) and by the Pew Research Center (2012) the working poor are most likely to be young, unmarried, not college educated, Black or Hispanic.

These workers were among the hardest hit by the recession: Minnesota's unemployment rate for Black workers in 2010 (22%) was nearly four times higher than that of White workers (6%); the Hispanic rate (12%) was double. Minnesota's unemployment rate for workers without a high school diploma now tops 19% - nearly six times the rate of those with Bachelor's degrees or better. The Minnesota Compass reports that real household incomes are down more than \$6,000 over the past

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decade, falling to income levels not seen since 1989 -- with households of color earning \$20,000 less annually than White households.

Minnesota has one of the largest skills gaps in the nation (Carnevale, et, al., 2010) and among the country's largest educational achievement gaps. The Minnesota Department of Education reports 83% of White students graduate high school in four years, vs. 47% of Blacks, 49% of Hispanics and 70% of Asian students. Only 49% of English Language Learners and 56% of low-income students graduate in four years. At the same time, local jobs are shifting from manufacturing to fields such as health care, education, and professional services that require a higher level of education and training. By 2018, 70% of jobs in the state are expected to require education beyond high school.

Research shows that employment, education, increased working hours and assistance in resolving barriers are effective means to lift thousands of unemployed, underemployed and low-income Twin Cities residents out of poverty. For 50-70% of households that escape poverty, employment gains and pay increases are the reason (Bane & Ellwood, 1986; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005). The probability of leaving poverty is 30 percentage points higher for workers with a high school diploma or more, and 12% higher if the workers can secure even an extra 1,000 hours of work per year -- about 20 hours more per week (Acs & Zimmerman, 2008)."

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) estimates that up to 50% of individuals who have the greatest difficulty transitioning from public assistance to permanent employment have multiple barriers including issues with child care, disabilities, domestic violence, emergency financial needs, housing instability, lack of health insurance, mental health, substance abuse and/or transportation (aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/isp/ancillary/multi.htm). HHS identified four effective approaches to overcome these multiple barriers to employment, all of which are incorporated into this program: Client Identification (accurate assessments); Enhanced Case Management (support and referrals to help participants overcome obstacles); Service Coordination (fostering inter-agency collaboration); and Employment Integration (integrating goal-setting, education and skills-building into employment services.)

Members Highly Effective Means to Solving Community Problems

Minnesota Opportunity Corps members will be placed at selected nonprofit organizations that assist disadvantaged, unemployed and underemployed individuals in developing job skills and improving their employment options. Host organizations / program sites will have extensive experience in working with AmeriCorps members as well as a history of providing job placement and career development services to the target population.

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Members will help these organizations provide participants with skill-building, career planning and coordination with other services that cannot otherwise be provided. Local career development organizations typically carry high caseloads (1:40 or higher), although job seekers with multiple barriers to employment often need significant levels of support. Exacerbating this are cuts to the state's Workforce Development programs of 11% in 2010 (Minnesota Budget Project, July 2011), limiting the training services available to low-income job seekers.

AmeriCorps members can dramatically increase the capacity of these organizations by providing personalized, one-on-one coaching, employment skills training, and connections to adult education, occupational training, and supportive services that may increase the likelihood of participants' success. Members will supplement and extend the work of partners' employment counselors by providing weekly follow-up to high-need job seekers. They will help participants develop career aspirations and a career pathway, rather than just find the next job. They also will build capacity and flexibility into the host organization, which will be able to assign participants to members or employment counselors depending on the unique needs of each participant.

We are requesting 30 full time AmeriCorps members who will serve cohorts of 20-25 participants at any given time and perhaps as many as 50 participants over the program year. For each participant, members will work with professional staff to conduct assessments, create an education and career plan, lead employability skills training, follow up with participants placed in jobs to increase retention, and provide one-on-one coaching to keep participants motivated and on track to meet the benchmarks articulated in their plans.

ASSESSMENTS. Participants will complete an intake form that will be used to confirm their eligibility for the program. Eligible participants must be: (1) underemployed/unemployed; (2) economically disadvantaged; and (3) enrolled in (or have the basic skills necessary to enroll in) an education, training or credentialing program appropriate for their individual education and career plan. Individuals will be considered economically disadvantaged if they meet the income eligibility requirements to receive: Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Section 8 housing assistance OR have a poor credit score (below 620) OR are at least 60 days behind on one or more personal/family accounts.

Eligible participants will be enrolled and their skills and interests will be assessed through the nationally recognized Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) website: ISEEK.org. Assessments offered through this site include the MNCareers Interest Assessment,

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CareersOneStop Skill Profiler, and the ISEEK Skills Assessment. Participants whose interests indicate that post-secondary training is appropriate also will be assessed using the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or the ACCUPLACER suite of tests. ACCUPLACER determines whether a participant has the skills in math, reading and writing to participate in college-level courses. Participants who are English Language Learners (ELL) will complete the TOEFL iBT, a test that measures their ability to use and understand English at the university level. Participants whose scores fall below the targeted levels for either test will be recommended to Adult Basic Education (ABE) courses intended to improve their skills and, ultimately, scores. If that occurs, their education and career plan will be revised accordingly.

CREATE A PLAN. The member will work with professional staff to review the results and help the participant create an individualized education and career plan. This plan will outline goals and benchmarks (e.g. GED, certificates, increased language proficiency) needed to achieve those goals. The plan will also identify potential barriers (e.g., child care, transportation) to be addressed. Not all participants will progress at the same rate. Some may need only refresher lessons and resume updates, while those with limited work experience may need more time to learn basic jobs skills. Members will meet with participants 1:1 each week to review progress, support them in resolving problems, and recognize and reinforce milestones achieved along their education and career plan.

TRAINING AND COACHING. Weekly support will follow a schedule that the member will develop with the participant, and which will build participant skills and competencies through interactive exercises and "homework" assignments. The meetings can occur in a variety of ways (in-person, phone, web-based video chatting/Skype/Google Hangout). At each meeting, the Minnesota Opportunity Corps member and the participant will review their last meeting, go over assigned tasks, complete a work readiness or skills development activity, and set goals for the following week. These goals will be recorded in the education and career plan, which will function as an active, ever-changing document as skills are strengthened and new areas for development are uncovered. Members will facilitate monthly employment and education support groups and select the topics for discussion. Topics are intended to strengthen participants' workforce readiness skills including: building positive relationships; giving and receiving feedback; utilizing employment resources; writing resumes; and managing stress.

SERVICES. Members will help participants enroll in adult education and/or occupational training as indicated by their plan, including English as a Second Language (ESL), ABE/GED, or training leading to a certification such as Northstar Digital Literacy certification in computer usage, SafeServe

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Certification for the food service industry and Certified Nurses' Assistant (CAN) credentialing. Members will also work closely with their site supervisors to ensure that the participants in their caseload have access to all the supportive services offered by the partner organization (e.g., financial literacy, tax services and child care assistance).

Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact

Members will be trained in the nationally recognized, research-based Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum. This evidence-based curriculum has been proven effective in ensuring that those trained are prepared to help individuals with multiple barriers build skills and competencies that lead to employment. The primary focus of the program are 12 Core Competencies that have been identified by industry experts as key components that a person in this field needs to be effective: (1) Helping Skills; (2) Labor Market Information and Resources; (3) Assessment; (4) Diverse Populations; (5) Ethical and Legal Issues; (6) Career Development Models; (7) Employability Skills; (8) Training Clients and Peers; (9) Program Management/Implementation; (10) Promotion and Public Relations; (11) Technology; and (12) Consultation. Launched in 1993, the Global Career Development Facilitator training continues to be adapted to reflect changing job market conditions, most recently last summer (2012) when it was modified to reflect the increased need to integrate technology into employment preparation.

OUTCOMES: At the end of the three-year grant cycle, Minnesota Opportunity Corps intends to serve a total of 4,500 underemployed or unemployed, economically disadvantaged individuals, and to help 50% (2,250) enroll in or complete a training credential or a educational degree program. Of those who meet this target, 30% (675) will be placed in a job that relates to the skills developed and/or credentials earned, placing them on a career path intended to ultimately lead to a living-wage job and economic self-sufficiency.

To measure this, Minnesota Opportunity Corps will integrate the CNCS National Performance Measures in the area of Economic Opportunity with outcomes connected to training / education completion and credential acquisition, specifically: Output 2: Number of economically disadvantaged individuals receiving job training and other skill development services, and Outcome 10: Number of economically disadvantaged individuals placed in jobs. We also plan to track: (1) Participants' attendance at one-on-one and group meetings as evidenced by attendance logs and OnCorps. (2) Training/education completion rates as evidenced by school records, certifications or transcripts that the participants submit. (3) Number of participants placed in employment as evidenced by an employer letter or pay stub.

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Minnesota Opportunity Corps will report program performance measures annually through the use of the secure, web-based reporting system that members will update monthly. This system will track participants served; activities completed; volunteer hours completed; workshops conducted by members; workshops attended by program participants; credentials/certificates earned or education/training completion; job placement; and whether participants obtain a living wage job. The Program Director will monitor the data monthly and alert site supervisors of any data integrity issues (e.g., incomplete participant attendance logs, activities not accurately recorded, or missing feedback forms). The site supervisors will then work with their member(s) to ensure that the errors are corrected so that year-end data is accurate.

Performance measure targets were based on outcomes collected in 2011-2012 by more than 17 partner organizations, and informed by the trajectory of outcomes in the current program year. For Current Grantees and Former Grantees:

In the year before Minnesota Opportunity Corps was launched, a planning committee was formed to determine the 2011-2012 program measurements. The committee included a representative from our AmeriCorps State Commission (ServeMinnesota); the Executive Director of the ServeMinnesota Action Network; and representatives from four partner organizations who had experience managing AmeriCorps. The program targeted the focus area of Economic Opportunity and more specifically addressed Financial Literacy, Employment, and Housing. Our members supporting Housing targets were especially successful as they provided 5,009 individuals with housing support (target was 500) with 268 individuals transitioning into safe, affordable housing (target was 250). The program fell short of its Financial Literacy targets: Over the course of the year, members supported 1,422 participants who completed the required number of Financial Literacy Sessions (target was 1,500) with 1,086 improving their financial knowledge (target was 1,250). Results were mixed for Employment targets, with members providing 3,071 individuals with job placement training (target was 2,500) leading to 461 people hired in a new job (target was 700).

Some of the targets were based on performance measures collected by the largest of our partners on the planning committee; these targets could not be achieved by the smaller partners who ultimately participated. Additionally, participants had more challenges to overcome than originally anticipated, and it was determined that we should narrow our focus in 2012-2013 to address the greatest local need: living wage employment in the Twin Cities.

In response, the program was re-conceptualized to increase the employability skills and employment of our program participants. This enabled us to focus the service responsibilities and

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training of our members to increase their impact. Toward this end, we have implemented the Global Career Development Facilitator training that we believe will help Minnesota Opportunity Corps meet the targets for this year. The 2012-2103 program year began October 8, 2012, and the first quarters' data collection will be completed in February 2013. Thus far, members have provided coaching and workshops to an estimated 1052 participants, of whom 527 are enrolled in education or training and 159 have been placed in jobs.

Recruitment

Minnesota Opportunity Corps leads broad-based recruitment efforts to increase awareness and drive candidates to the organizations participating in the program. Staff also promotes service opportunities to diverse targeted media including the Spokesman, Asian Pages, Blackplanet, Asia net, La Voz, AARP, Access Press, and community-specific newspapers. All members make presentations to community and civic groups, local businesses, professors, college alumni groups, etc. and conduct outreach at local employment fairs; and connect via e-mail with colleagues, friends, or former professors. Further, our recruitment materials will promote the inclusion of applicants with disabilities by featuring stories and photos and containing a reasonable accommodation clause and a non-discrimination clause. Position descriptions will also distinguish essential from non-essential functions. We will conduct outreach with the offices of students with disabilities on college campuses to inform them of our program and the opportunities that may exist for the students they serve.

To ensure that members are recruited from the communities we intend to serve, partners and sites are actively engaged in the recruitment process by posting flyers, providing information at community events, and enlisting the personal and professional networks of their staff and current members. This year, 10 percent of our members were previously served by our partner organizations. Within a month of being awarded slots, the Program Director will contact sites to help them to develop an effective recruitment plan. This plan will detail actionable and scheduled activities to ensure that all awarded slots are filled, and will articulate member qualifications required to address specific site needs (e.g., foreign language knowledge or experience working with special populations such as ex-offenders or people with disabilities).

Applicants apply directly to Minnesota Opportunity Corps through the online application on our website. The Program Director screens qualified applicants by phone and recommends a pool of qualified candidates for on-site interviews by the host organizations that the applicants prefer. Host organizations make their selections known, and the Program Director extends the official offer. During this (2012-13) program year, the Opportunity Corps Program Director and other

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ServeMinnesota Action Network program staff will participate in Cultural Competency training and consulting intended to build capacity to recruit, manage and retain multicultural and racially diverse members and volunteers. Training will be provided by Pink Consulting, LLC, a consulting enterprise that provides intercultural competence and diversity education to educational institutions and organizations nationwide.

Orientation and Training

All members will start the program year with three full days of pre-service orientation and training in the Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum. Members will learn about the power of AmeriCorps and national service as a solution to critical community needs including Minnesota's employment crisis and growing skills gap. Members will collaborate to develop goals and plans for meeting the program requirements. In addition, small and large group discussions and activities will ensure members have a thorough understanding of the AmeriCorps regulations and prohibited activities. Each member will receive a handbook that outlines the expectations of the program that can be referenced throughout the program year.

During the second and third days of orientation, members will begin their training in the Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum. Training will help members prepare for basic career facilitating including effective intake and interviewing techniques. Orientation will end with members being assigned homework: they will be asked to make an individual work plan for the year with their site supervisor, review a website tutorial for the internal Minnesota Opportunity Corps website outlining basic information which can be found there, and complete an assignment from the Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum. Each activity will serve as a baseline to inform topics for further training and to determine member growth.

On the first day of service, the site supervisor will orient the member(s) to the site and the community. Working from a Site Orientation Checklist, the site supervisor will provide an overview of the partner organization, its culture, schedule, staffing, and the member's service responsibilities and training schedule, as well as an overview of the community, populations served and local needs. Members will be trained in data collection methods and databases, and will be provided with measurement tools (rubric), handouts, materials and online resources to assist in their work with participants and coordination with host organization staff.

Members will continue their Global Career Development Facilitator training every Wednesday for 14 weeks (October through January), totaling 120 hours. As a result of this training, members will acquire skills and competencies included in the 12 Core Competency areas, such as: administering and

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analyzing assessments; understanding labor market and occupational information and trends; being able to use labor and employment resources including websites and career development computer applications; job search strategies and job placement techniques; facilitating training workshops; understanding rules, regulations and ethics regarding employment; working effectively with consultants; understanding career development theories, models, and techniques; helping participants to develop an action plan; and knowing how to market and promote career development programs. Members also will be trained in Cultural Competency by Pink Consulting, LLC to increase their capacity to work with diverse populations, understand cultural differences and how to adapt their interviewing skills. In the spring and summer, members will plan at least two additional group meetings to focus in-depth on a topic or strategy of broad interest to the members. A member will be elected to facilitate that meeting; he or she will discuss his or her experience implementing the Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum at his or her site; identify practices or strategies that have been effective; state how the service is aligning with his or her individual career and education plan; or any other related topic. In July, members will be required to attend Life After AmeriCorps. This training will provide resources and support that members can take with them on their next step and further instill a commitment to lifelong civic engagement.

Member Supervision

Members will be managed day-to-day by site supervisors who are trained employees of the host organization/program site. Site supervisors will provide site and community orientation; assign case loads; and provide daily supervision including review of time sheets, overseeing data collection and conducting member evaluations. Site supervisors will meet formally with members at least once a week to review caseloads, participant progress, and current and planned activities.

Partner organizations will select site supervisors based on their prior supervisory experience (preferably of AmeriCorps members); ability to devote 4 to 6 hours per month per member; and capacity to support employment programming at the partner site. Knowledge of the Global Career Development Facilitator training is strongly recommended.

The site supervisor will receive the Minnesota Opportunity Corps Pre-Service Orientation and site supervisor training. In this six hour training, supervisors will be oriented to the program; roles and responsibilities for staff and participants; best practices for supervising AmeriCorps members including member evaluations, motivation and discipline; data collection process; and program processes including how to assign caseloads; monitor education and career plans; and support Global Career Development Facilitator curriculum and training. Finally, site supervisors are trained in AmeriCorps

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regulations and prohibited activities for members, so they can provide appropriate oversight during the year. Site supervisors will complete an evaluation of this training to indicate areas of strength in the training and areas that need to be improved.

The Minnesota Opportunity Corps Program Director will support the site supervisor through formal site visits and informal conversations. Program staff will meet with the member and site supervisor at a mid-year site visit to review the member experience, performance, program implementation and progress towards meeting performance measures. Program staff will also conduct several site visits and meetings over the course of the year and provide feedback intended to ensure effective delivery of the model and support the members in their work toward outputs and outcomes.

Additionally, Minnesota Opportunity Corps is working to identify labor market experts who will provide quarterly labor market information, caseload review and support for updating career and education plans so as to create a meaningful pathway for participants to launch careers in high-paying, high-demand industries.

Member Experience

Minnesota Opportunity Corps strives to ensure that all members have a powerful year of service through both peer networks and collaborative action that enables them to experience the impact of their service on disadvantaged populations. Members participate in Global Career Development Facilitator training in peer groups consisting of members from each host site. These professional learning networks provide structured opportunities for members to share resources and best practices during their service year. They then take these resources and strategies back to their case loads, to support their work with participants.

Minnesota Opportunity Corps has built in on-going, structured opportunities for reflection and recognition. During Orientation, members will talk about their decision to dedicate a year of their life to service and what they hope to gain from the year. Reflection also is built directly into the Global Career Development Facilitator training course; members take 15 minutes at the beginning of each session to write what they have tried since the last session and how it went. At the end of class, members are, again, given 15 minutes to record what they learned in that class and what they will try with their program participants in the coming week. Members also will write five reflections on their successes during their year of service. These reflections will provide the Program Director with valuable insights into members' experiences to be reviewed for trends to be addressed in training; to build member motivation; and to share with the media to increase awareness of AmeriCorps and the

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impact of the service provided by Minnesota Opportunity Corps members.

Minnesota Opportunity Corps creates a shared sense of AmeriCorps identity from day one: At orientation, members learn about AmeriCorps and that they are a part of a state and national vision to achieve positive social change through the power of national service. Members participate in an exercise about how to effectively talk about their year of service in which they take turns giving a two-minute description of their service through AmeriCorps. Members are provided with three items of gear and are expected to wear these regularly, particularly during community events. Each site is provided a sign designating it as a Minnesota Opportunity Corps partner site and host of AmeriCorps members. Members are further connected and recognized through our e-newsletter and on our interactive website, where members can chat with each other and share resources and events. Peer networks foster cross-program relationship with other members.

Minnesota Opportunity Corps members will be given the opportunity to participate in the InterCorps Council of Minnesota, a peer-led organization of AmeriCorps members representing State, National and VISTA programs throughout Minnesota. The vision of the Council is to promote engagement, communication, collaboration, and education to empower AmeriCorps and the Minnesota community. The InterCorps Council achieves this vision by staying in contact with national service members and inviting them to civic engagement activities and professional development opportunities. The Program Director receives updates regarding upcoming events through the Public Spirit, the ICC's monthly e-newsletter. These opportunities, as well as a link to the e-newsletter, are shared in the Minnesota Opportunity Corps monthly e-newsletter.

Volunteer Generation

Program participants will be encouraged to volunteer in their communities up to 5 -- 10 hours per month. Members match participants with volunteer opportunities that align with their career goals. Volunteer activities will help participants to improve skills, reinforce competencies they are learning, gain experience, and build a more robust resume, while helping to address community needs. For example, participants can volunteer in food assistance programs such as Second Harvest Heartland or Feed My Starving Children, and emergency housing support programs such as Bridging, Inc. The member will work with the participant to connect the volunteer service in meaningful ways to their education and career plan.

Local business people will be recruited to support program participants through mock interviews, resume reviews or just sharing their career pathway. In this way, participants will obtain real-job market feedback and much-needed practice interacting with business professionals. In return, local

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business people will gain familiarity with the program that may lead to their hiring participants in the future. Members will strategize with their site supervisor to identify and recruit potential speakers from within the partner organization's network.

All members will be trained in the volunteer mobilization requirement during orientation, with a follow-up training provided by a Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration-certified member of the ServeMinnesota Action Network staff. Training will address volunteer motivation, recruitment, effective interviews, retention, supervision, and impact measures. Members will be trained to recognize prohibited activities. They will record each of their volunteers into the OnCorps system, which the Program Director will regularly review to ensure that the volunteer activities do not fall under the prohibited activities.

Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

Minnesota Opportunity Corps intentionally chose to use the word "corps" in our name as part of our effort to brand AmeriCorps national service. All members will wear gear with AmeriCorps and Minnesota Opportunity Corps logos when they serve in the community. Members receive AmeriCorps 101 training at orientation to help them effectively speak about their year of service, training that is reinforced through reflections and additional training throughout the year.

Every partner organization and site is provided with Minnesota Opportunity Corps signage that includes the AmeriCorps and the Minnesota Opportunity Corps logo. The Program Director will ensure that the signs are appropriately displayed in each partner organization during site visits. In addition, sites are provided with a toolkit including graphics to post on their websites. Branded orientation materials, curriculum, and promotional items all are provided to the members and sites by Minnesota Opportunity Corps.

Organizational Capability

Organizational Background and Staffing

ServeMinnesota Action Network was launched by ServeMinnesota in 2010 to create one intermediary organization with the necessary infrastructure to rapidly incubate, replicate and scale evidence-based AmeriCorps program models to address critical state priorities. Our mission is to ensure the success of AmeriCorps members to address critical gaps in educational achievement and economic opportunity through literacy, math tutoring and employment navigation.

ServeMinnesota Action Network operates the Minnesota Reading Corps, a proven model for building literacy skills and reading proficiency for children age 3 to grade 3; the Minnesota Math Corps, which supports improved math skills for children in grades 4 to 8; and the Minnesota

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Opportunity Corps, which is the subject of this proposal. The Action Network staff has eight years experience administering AmeriCorps grants as a ServeMinnesota grantee.

Initial priorities for ServeMinnesota Action Network focused on the gateway skills necessary for individuals to achieve educational and economic success. In 2010, ServeMinnesota received applications from six organizations to run AmeriCorps programs focused on economic opportunity. With ServeMinnesota Action Network's track record of implementing ServeMinnesota's strategic initiatives, this provided an ideal opportunity to test the new operational structure and was the inception of the Minnesota Opportunity Corps.

With support from the six organizations that applied for and formerly hosted AmeriCorps members in the areas of Economic Opportunity, additional partners were identified and performance measures for the 2011-12 program year were set. As the year progressed, it became clear that the program needed to focus the services provided, and with technical assistance from ServeMinnesota and a review of the critical needs of the community, it was determined that employment navigation services would be the strategy and have the greatest impact on improving the economic status of program participants.

The primary contact for this grant application is Josh Lambrecht, Program Director, who will provide the direction and oversight of the Minnesota Opportunity Corps' implementation. Josh has a BA in Political Science and over five years of experience in managing nonprofit programs. He also completed two terms of service through State and National AmeriCorps programs in Minnesota. He reports to the Executive Director.

The secondary contact is Sheila Piippo, ServeMinnesota Action Network's Executive Director. She has more than six years of experience in leading AmeriCorps programs, including the Minnesota Reading Corps, which is the largest AmeriCorps*State program in the nation. As the Project Director, she will directly supervise the Program Director and provide strategic oversight and guidance for the program implementation and direction. This position is part of Administrative costs.

Finance Director Susan Saunders has over 20 years of non-profit finance and accounting experience and a BS in Accounting. Susan will provide budget oversight and ensure all fiscal responsibilities of the program are met. She reports to the Executive Director. This position is part of Administrative costs.

Senior Member Benefits and Compliance Specialist Andrea Hokeness works in the Human Resources department. She will provide the daily administration of member services, files related to their AmeriCorps service, and federal record-keeping requirements. Andrea has experience in all the

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ServeMinnesota Action Network programs: more than six years with Minnesota Reading Corps; three with Minnesota Math Corps; and one with Minnesota Opportunity Corps. She has a master's degree in English as a Second language. She also served as an AmeriCorps*VISTA and reports to the Human Resources Director.

Data Coordinator, Stephanie Hart, has over 15 years of administrative support experience, specializing in tasks requiring high attention to detail. Stephanie will be providing the Minnesota Opportunity Corps support within the OnCorps and Quickbase data collection systems and will work with the Program Director to ensure that data is completed and reported accurately. She will report to the Program Director.

Training Coordinator, Samantha Shalda, will assist in planning the logistics of trainings. She has over seven years experience coordinating training events for groups as small as 5, and as large as 4,000. She will be reporting to the Program Director.

Global Career Development Facilitator Training will be provided by Bob Schoeneberger, the Director for the Global Career Development Facilitator certification program at Normandale Community College, Continuing Education division. He is a Master Trainer who has worked both nationally and internationally. Bob will report to the Program Director. This position is part of the Global Career Development Facilitator Training in the budget.

In addition to those working directly on the program, the ServeMinnesota Action Network has identified a Management Team that meets weekly to ensure operational excellence in each of the three programs it hosts. This team consists of Executive Director (Sheila Piippo), Finance Director (Susan Saunders), Program Directors for each program, the Human Resources Director (and direct supervisor of the Member Benefits and Compliance Specialist), and Director of Organizational Support Services.

The Board of Directors for Serve Minnesota Action Network currently includes three original incorporators and operates as part of a collaboration between ServeMinnesota's governor-appointed Board of Directors and the ServeMinnesota Education Foundation Board. Members of these three boards represent 40 business, legislative, and community leaders and are dedicated to the success of all ServeMinnesota Action Network programs. This collaborative leadership model supports the acceleration of the "research-to-practice" capacity of each program, guarantees state-of-the-art business practices consistent with scaling evidence-based solutions, and ensures the needed legislative and philanthropic support.

Financial and programmatic orientation and training will be provided in an annual two-day staff

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retreat; quarterly all-day trainings; and weekly Management Team meetings. Training will cover program operating policies and procedures, Minnesota Opportunity Corps databases and dashboard management systems, personnel policies, and program -specific responsibilities. The Minnesota Opportunity Corps Program Director will attend quarterly ServeMinnesota meetings to remain current on AmeriCorps regulations. The Data Coordinator and Program Director regularly monitor the web-based reporting systems to ensure program documentation.

Minnesota Opportunity Corps will convene an advisory committee comprised of workforce and economic development professionals from the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Governors' Workforce Development Council (GWDC), Hennepin / Ramsey County, Chamber of Commerce, Minnesota State College and Universities system (MnSCU). In quarterly meetings, the advisory committee will share information regarding economic trends, employment issues and best practices, and will make recommendations to improve our program delivery and impact.

ServeMinnesota Action Network programs, including Minnesota Reading Corps and Minnesota Math Corps, use internal and external evaluations extensively to inform and improve their programs. Likewise, Minnesota Opportunity Corps has budgeted the necessary funding to ensure the success of the proposed evaluation. The Executive Director and the Program Director plan to meet with the evaluator in April 2013 to discuss the evaluation design and in the fall to ensure data collection systems are in place and appropriately used. We then meet again in the spring of 2014 to ensure all the data collections systems are complete and accurate. During the fall of 2014, we will discuss the findings of the evaluation report results which inform future evaluation questions.

For Current Grantees Only

ServeMinnesota Action Network infrastructure ensures effective compliance with ServeMinnesota's monitoring and technical assistance system. ServeMinnesota implements a risk mitigation plan that includes two site visits, a first quarter review of required documentation, a third quarter financial review and an ongoing review of Program Operating Procedures to ensure continuous improvement and compliance with federal regulations throughout the service year. Minnesota Opportunity Corps has always been timely in meeting deadlines, had outstanding site visits, and no significant findings.

Sustainability

Partner organizations contribute a site fee of \$4,500 per member and make a substantial in-kind contribution by providing a site supervisor and office space to host the program. Partner organizations (2012-2013) include: AccessAbility, Inc., Amicus, Inc., Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis,

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CommonBond Communities, Emerge Community Development, International Institute of Minnesota, Karen Organization of Minnesota, Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota, Lifetrack Resources, Lutheran Social Service of MN, Minnesota Council of Churches -- Refugee Services program, Project for Pride in Living, Inc., Resource, Inc. -- Employment Action Center, and Rise, Inc. In 2013-2014 we seek to expand partners, and are in discussions with workforce centers and community and technical colleges.

The remainder of the match will be provided through the ServeMinnesota Innovation Fund, a state appropriation secured by ServeMinnesota. Additional support from the Greater Twin Cities United Way will provide our members with the Global Career Development Facilitator training. The Rose and Jay Phillips Family Foundation also expressed significant interest in supporting our program.

Compliance and Accountability

Opportunity Corps uses a "Dashboard" management system to identify and problem-solve challenges as they occur and will meet weekly with the Program Director to review and discuss. ServeMinnesota's Controller and Director of Programs provide ongoing financial technical assistance to ensure that Minnesota Opportunity Corps complies with AmeriCorps regulations and standard accounting requirements. The Director of Programs also provides assistance regarding programmatic requirements. In addition, the Opportunity Corps Program Director attends quarterly ServeMinnesota meetings to remain current on AmeriCorps regulations.

Minnesota Opportunity Corps requires partners to sign annual site agreements outlining program expectations, prohibited activities, and AmeriCorps regulations related to site compliance. Terms and expectations for compliance are reinforced in a pre-service orientation for site staff led by the Program Director and in pre-service training for site supervisors.

The Program Director ensures compliance by visiting sites at least three times per year; observing implementation and record keeping; providing feedback throughout the service year; and giving formal status reports in February and June. Where variances are identified, the Program Director immediately addresses this per a correction plan established in the agreement and program manual; corrective actions may include monitoring the site more closely, transferring the member from the site, or termination of the site at the end of the service year.

Members also are required to sign a contract that articulates their term of service, responsibilities, prohibited activities, grievance procedures, non-displacement policy, equal opportunity employment and non-discrimination statement, inclusive environment statement, and drug-free workplace. Site supervisors monitor their actions day-to-day to ensure they are effectively implementing the program

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with fidelity, and are not engaging in prohibited activities.

During training, the Program Director monitors member service activities to be assured that prohibited activities are not occurring. These trainings also include time for members to ask questions and get clarifications around any other program expectations such as volunteer mobilization or data collection.

In-person organization-wide staff meetings are held quarterly. At this time the Senior Member Benefits and Compliance Specialist will review new AmeriCorps regulations and address any compliance issues (e.g., eligibility documentation, background checks, time tracking, or member performance evaluation). New staff hires will complete orientation activities with his or her direct supervisor and the Member Specialist to ensure a firm understanding of AmeriCorps regulations and Minnesota Opportunity Corps program expectations.

To ensure that staff is following these regulations and expectations, the Member Benefits and Compliance Specialist will review 100% of the member files to ensure accuracy and file completeness in November. The Program Team (consisting of Directors from Minnesota Opportunity Corps, Minnesota Reading Corps, and Minnesota Math Corps) conduct a second internal audit in March, when 20% of member files are randomly selected and reviewed. If any omissions or errors are found, all files will be audited. The internal audit also includes visiting 10% of sites to review site supervisor and member activities for compliance; confirm program policies and procedures are followed; and confirm the presence of AmeriCorps signage.

Identified instances of risk or noncompliance issues will be addressed immediately. The site may be monitored for improvement or, depending on the severity of the issue; Minnesota Opportunity Corps reserves the right to transfer the member to another site. If the issue is not remedied, the site will not be awarded members for the next program year.

For current Grantees and Former Grantees

In the 2011-12 program year, Minnesota Opportunity Corps had 100% enrollment and an 88% member retention rate. In reviewing why eight members were exited without award, we found that five left because of financial hardship and /or the member leaving to take full-time paid employment. In the current year, we added a personal budgeting exercise to the member application process. Members are asked to complete a budgeting tool that lays out their bi-weekly stipend on an after-tax basis and allows them to enter their anticipated expenses (e.g. housing, transportation, meals). As part of the interview, the Program Director reviews whether a year of service is financially feasible given the applicant's financial obligations. We found this tool to be critical in helping applicants plan

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appropriately so as to afford a year of service. Further, we have tried to foster greater cohesion among members to allow them to discuss challenges and provide support, leveraging the peer network components of the Global Career Development Facilitator training.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

Cost Effectiveness

The Minnesota Opportunity Corps cost per MSY is \$13,000, which is about 2.5% less than the allowable federal cost of \$13,300. The total non-CNCS resources required to implement Minnesota Opportunity Corps is \$177,810. Sites will contribute \$135,000 (\$4,500 for each full-time member awarded). In addition to the site fees, an additional \$42,810 will be covered by the ServeMinnesota Innovation Fund, a state appropriation.

In 2012-13, 1,252 AmeriCorps members served with ServeMinnesota Action Network. ServeMinnesota Action Network has a current organizational budget of \$26,059,895; some 46% of this is CNCS funding. Minnesota Opportunity Corps is 3% of the total Action Network budget; a total of 19% of the Minnesota Opportunity Corps' funding is from CNCS. The remaining funding comes from the site fee of \$4,500 per member as well as the ServeMinnesota Innovation Fund and the Greater Twin Cities United Way. Minnesota Opportunity Corps currently receives a grant of \$114,510 through ServeMN's formula award from CNCS.

In the past five years, ServeMinnesota Action Network has received two competitive grants each year for Minnesota Reading Corps and formula funding since 2010 for Minnesota Math Corps. Minnesota Opportunity Corps has received formula funding for the past two years.

Budget Adequacy

Minnesota Opportunity Corps has a total budget of \$605,608. This includes a federal share of \$390,000 and a grantee share of \$215,608. The budget provides adequate support, ensuring the appropriate mix of senior leadership combined with direct program staff to ensure effective program implementation. It also includes carefully crafted estimates of the amount for training expenses and evaluation costs that are required to achieve the desired outcomes for underemployed and unemployed participants. The cost of criminal history and FBI checks are included in the budget.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

Amendment Justification

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N/A

Clarification Summary

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A