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Executive Summary

Learning to read is a critical skill: The ability to access, comprehend and apply written instructions is essential to functioning effectively in an information-based society. Yet, a mere half of MN's children are ready for Kindergarten and one in five 3rd graders are not reading at grade level. Decades of research shows that when students get off to a poor start in reading, they rarely catch up and become "in-school dropouts" as early as fourth grade. Students who do not read proficiently by Grade 3 are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). The MN Reading Corps (MRC) leverages the power of community service to improve reading levels and strengthen educational systems in local communities. As an integrated component of the state's solution to childhood illiteracy, 619 AmeriCorps members will be trained and coached by literacy experts to extend the instructional capacity of PreK programs and elementary schools in Greater MN - - the 76 counties outside of the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area. At the end of the 3-year grant period, MRC proposes to assist over 37,400 children achieve grade-level targets for reading proficiency to put them on track to pass 3rd grade standardized tests. This project will address the CNCS focus area of Education and will start August 1, 2013 and end July 31, 2016. A CNCS investment of \$6,825,000 will be matched with \$6,825,455.

Rationale and Approach

Need: Learning to read by 3rd grade is an essential skill in a 21st Century information society. From preschool through 3rd grade, children learn to read. Beyond 3rd grade, students read to learn. This time-sensitive window presents an opportunity to build a foundation of education and economic success or puts a child at risk for lifelong negative consequences associated with illiteracy. Evidence indicates that if children are not proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade, they begin to become "in-school drop outs" as early as fourth grade (Paige, 2005). They are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). Reading failure also is linked to a host of negative social outcomes, including teen pregnancy, substance abuse, delinquency and criminal activity (Talla, 2003). Research indicates that 95% of all children have the capacity to learn to read proficiently if effective interventions are provided, and nine years of impressive MRC results backing this finding, we are confident that AmeriCorps members can effectively tackle this issue.

According to the Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2011), nearly two thirds (65%) of MN students read at basic or below basic levels; just one in three (35%) read at proficient or advanced levels. MN has among the nation's largest achievement gaps: 42% of White

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students read at proficiency, more than double that of Black students at 16%, Hispanics at 12% or American Indians at 14%; only 17% of students who are free/reduced lunch eligible read at proficiency vs. 46% of those who are not eligible.

Analysis of MN's test of 3rd grade reading proficiency illustrates the magnitude of need in the 76 counties served by this project: The analysis estimates that 25,464 children in the "age 3 to grade 3" pipeline are currently on a trajectory of failing to become proficient readers by the end of 3rd grade. By expanding from 324 to 619 AmeriCorps members we are confident in setting a bold but achievable goal of moving 10,800 of these children each year from a trajectory of failure to successfully achieving reading proficiency.

This proposal aims to target schools and preschools throughout greater MN with the highest percentage of students unlikely to acquire proficient reading skills by 3rd grade without individualized intervention. For example, two schools districts that serve tribal populations have failure rates of 46 and 54% on state proficiency tests. Other examples include four districts located close to food processing plants that rely on an immigrant workforce. Large percentages of children in these communities come from low-income families where English is not the first language. These districts have not met this challenge and are experiencing 3rd grade literacy failure rates between 26 and 34%. With a rapidly diversifying population--MN's foreign-born immigration rate increased by 138% compared to 57% nationwide between 2001-2007 while its white student enrollment declined by 17% within its rural areas --towns throughout MN that 20 years ago had almost no children of color are now facing the challenge of the nation's largest academic achievement gap.

The need is especially significant on MN's reservations; several have child poverty rates above 30% vs. MN's overall rate of 12%. Among these included in this grant, the Red Lake Indian Reservation's rate of child poverty is 45% (Census, 2010). These poverty rates are compounded by unemployment that is two and three times the state average, as high as 50% on the Lower Sioux Reservation and hovering around 65% for Red Lake. MN Education Commissioner has identified MRC as part of the solution to increasing reading proficiency of Native American students in MN.

The MRC specifically targets children who are assessed as below proficiency in reading and need supplemental or Tier 2 support, according to the Response to Intervention (RtI) model (Burns, Jimerson, & Deno, 2007); that is, children whose benchmark assessments indicate a need for supplemental instruction beyond what is offered in core instruction (Tier 1). Tier 2 students have the capacity to learn to read at grade level but experience more prolonged, intense, and often permanent literacy struggles that can be corrected with timely and effective data-driven intervention.

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Unfortunately, school systems only have funding to support the lowest-scoring students and those with Individual Educational Plans. MRC's model of administering evidence-based literacy interventions addresses this gap, which traps capable children who might otherwise experience success.

Effective Solution:

MRC partners with school districts to place members in PreK and K-3 classrooms. Each member provides intensive, research-based tutoring and literacy support to struggling readers. A Master Coach (literacy expert) is brought directly to the site to ensure the model is implemented with fidelity. Here is how MRC works:

1. AmeriCorps members are trained to collect benchmark data, implement research-based literacy interventions and monitor student progress toward grade-level targets for increased proficiency.
2. AmeriCorps members, along with Internal Coaches (site supervisors), receive monthly coaching from Master Coaches to tailor interventions for each child based on the data collected on key literacy measures.
3. Members work one-on-one and/or in small groups to isolate a child's specific challenges and deliver tutoring that effectively builds the skills needed to become a successful reader.
4. Children learn literacy skills at a rate to "catch-up" with their peers, graduate from MRC and then are followed to ensure that they stay on track to become successful readers by 3rd grade.
5. Once the literacy components are firmly in place at each site, members recruit and train parents and community volunteers to provide an "extra boost" to students.

*PreK Sites: In PreK settings (ages 3-5) each member is embedded into one early childhood classroom of approximately 17-20 students.

*K-3 Sites: Members provide a minimum of 100 minutes/week of individualized research-based literacy interventions and collect weekly progress monitoring data. Each FT member tutors 25-30 children per year.

*Family Engagement Strategy: MRC has created specific tools that are designed to help parents become part of their child's "instructional team":

*PreK & Kindergarten Family Tool: "Talk, Read and Write with Me" book bags serve as a way to help parents teach vocabulary and other emergent literacy skills to their children.

*Emergent Readers (2nd and 3rd grade) Family Tool: Read at Home! Read at Home! Read at Home! (RAH! RAH! RAH!) a reading binder provided for second and 3rd grade MRC participants that allows children to continue practicing their emerging reading skills at home.

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Volunteer Coordinators: Volunteer Coordinator (VC) members support the recruitment of both episodic volunteers to participate in events that promote early literacy and ongoing community volunteers who are trained in MRC interventions and deliver one-to-one tutoring.

The MRC model uses a set of tutoring strategies that are curriculum neutral and align with any research-based curriculum used by school districts. This allows the model to be easily replicated and brought to scale across multiple sites with a high degree of fidelity.

The MRC model demonstrates the unique and powerful role AmeriCorps members can play to ensure that a student's teacher has both the data they need to direct instruction, as well as the supportive human touch for a child's individualized tutoring. Members are effective because they can provide something schools cannot -- customized, research-based literacy tutoring struggling students who do not qualify for extra assistance. MRC fills this critical gap, freeing teachers to focus on core instruction for all (Tier I) and intensive instruction for those students with the greatest needs (Tier III). In this way the education system reaches all children in need of reading support. Past results demonstrate that 80% of MRC students will pass the MN Comprehensive Assessment (MCA-II) standardized reading tests, which is significant given that every child served was identified as at significant risk of failing this crucial benchmark, and the statewide pass rate for all Grade 3 students was 80%.

MRC is requesting 619 members or 525 MSYs. Of these Members, 191 members will serve PreK students, 422 members will serve K-3 students, and 6 members will serve as Volunteer Coordinators.

MRC requires 386 full-time K-3 stipend slots and 160 half-time stipend slots; half-time slots allow MRC to serve rural areas and schools whose student population is too small to support a full caseload. In addition, MRC requests 73 non-stipend pre-k slots, 45 full-time and 28 half-time. Non-stipend slots allow for early childhood programs to adopt the data based problem solving model of literacy instruction and to offer an AmeriCorps service opportunity to their teaching staff as a strategy to improve their professional credentialing. These members invest additional hours beyond their standard workday to enhance the quality of their literacy instructional skills learned by participating in MRC coaching and trainings.

Evidence-Based and Measurable Community Impact

MRC is an evidenced-based model that has demonstrated measurable community impact for nearly 75,000 students since its inception. The model has been validated by the US Department of Education (USDOE) as having demonstrated significant evidence in support of its interventions. Interventions are designed to provide additional practice, supplemental to the core reading instruction

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provided by the school. The interventions correlate to "The Big Five Ideas" reported in the National Reading Panel Report (2001) and have an extensive scientific base for their use. Vaughn et. al. (2007) described three essential elements for any model that addresses prevention and early identification of students with reading disabilities, all present in MRC:

(a) valid and reliable measures for assessing student growth: MRC Members administer benchmark assessments in the fall, winter and spring using instruments with a moderate-to-high degree of validity. These instruments are also used for regular progress monitoring of students, allowing for timely data-based instructional decisions to accelerate student progress.

(b) evidenced-based instructional interventions: Research shows that providing strong early language and literacy experiences in both the early years, as well as early intervention for any reading difficulties within these first few years of school, is the most successful method for ensuring that large numbers of children become proficient readers (Vellutino et al., 1998; Torgesen et al., 2003; Torgesen et al., 1999). A unique feature of MRC is the consistent use of research-based intervention protocols with participating students to provide this focused support - 10 research-based supplemental reading interventions in K-3 and 12 research-based supplemental reading interventions in PreK.

(c) a framework for educators to utilize data for improved instructional decision-making: The MRC model is aligned with the RtI framework to support educators in using data to best meet individual student needs. This model for intervention identifies a systematic approach to utilizing data and providing evidence-based interventions based on student response.

At the end of the three-year grant cycle, MRC will have served a minimum of 32,400 K-3 children, with a minimum of 80% of 3rd graders demonstrating proficiency on the MCA-II state reading exam. Additionally, 20,000 (65%) of students who start the program will demonstrate more than their expected amount of growth. The second outcome objective is to have served minimum of 15,000 PreK children, with a minimum of 10,594 completing the program and 9,004 demonstrating growth targets.

MRC utilizes multiple strategies to measure effective performance including:

Benchmark assessments: Members conduct benchmark assessments 3x/year. These measures are selected for MRC because of their well-established statistical reliability and validity for screening and progress monitoring purposes, external evaluations consistently affirm their validity.

Progress Monitoring: Members conduct progress monitoring with K-3 students weekly and PreK students monthly. This assessment monitors student progress throughout the year to ensure interventions are effective and the student is on a trajectory to meet grade-level targets.

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Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation (ELLCO) (Smith, et al, 2002) -- In the fall, Master Coaches inventory classrooms and determine what is needed to design a more literacy-rich environment. The ELLCO is administered again in the spring to measure member success in implementing improvements such as adding more books or visible literacy props.

Fidelity of Implementation Checks: Master Coaches directly observe members delivering interventions or assessments to ensure integrity. Members receive feedback on the strengths of the intervention delivery and areas for improvement.

Performance Dashboard: MRC maintains a secure, web-based reporting system that tracks number of students tutored, minutes tutored, and number of tutoring sessions completed. Program staff alerts Master Coaches when integrity issues arise such as incomplete tutor logs, low student caseloads, or low tutoring minutes. Master Coaches then provide the Internal Coach and member(s) with guidance to ensure the issue is resolved.

An evaluation is conducted on an annual basis that reports MRC outcomes including growth achieved by MRC students, percentage of students who met the spring target, and percentage of 3rd grade students who were proficient on the state reading exam.

The performance measure targets are based on nine years of MRC experience and reflect input from our evaluators, master coaches, and program staff.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST OBJECTIVES: MRC met all of its performance measures: In K-3 5,976 students started the program --the goal was 4,725 students; 3,641 students completed participation in the program --the goal was 2,126 students; and 4,915 students achieved growth rates that exceeding a rate of a year's growth in one year's --the goal was 2,928 students. In PreK sites 2,712 children started the program --the goal was 2,318; 1,799 students demonstrated gains in school readiness literacy skills -the goal was 1,182; and 2,565 children completed participation-the goal was 1,391.

Performance data for our current year indicates that 4,231 K-3 students have started the program; 1,455 students have completed the program. We are on target to achieve year end objectives.

Performance data to date for our PreK students indicates that 2,892 students have started the program. In PreK our targets of completion and academic achievement are evaluated at year end.

Of the state's 26,413 Greater MN 3rd graders who took the 3rd grade MCA-II in the spring of 2012 MRC tutored a total of just over 12% or 3,348 students at some point in their schooling. Of all the students who successfully completed their tutoring, 85.4 % tested as proficient. The 2011-2012 pass rates for all 3rd graders in Greater MN was 82.06%. Given that 100% of the MRC students who took the MCA-II's were identified at significant risk of literacy failure, this program-wide pass rate

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demonstrates remarkable success for these participants.

Member Recruitment

To recruit a high-quality, diverse corps, MRC implements a comprehensive year-round member recruitment campaign. Strategies include: utilizing websites and social media; actively engaging schools and other local community organizations; generating stories in local media; extensive outreach on college campuses including websites, offices of students with disabilities and other diverse student groups; presentations to targeted audiences including: veterans, career changers, faith-based communities, and communities of color; attending career/service fairs; and establishing an alumni network.

Current members are often the program's best recruiters. All MRC members are trained in outreach. Additionally, 25-30 members participate in more in-depth outreach activities such as community presentations, guest writers in rural newspapers, or blogging.

MRC is fully committed to recruiting applicants from its local communities. In 2012-13, 19% of members heard about their positions from their local school. Each MRC site participates in a webinar to learn about the expectations and strategies for recruiting in their own communities. MRC provides a toolkit of recruitment materials to use in their own efforts, including brochures, flyers, postcards, and DVDs. Recruitment plans are supported by a centralized web-based system that tracks and communicates with prospective members from the moment they express interest, through the application and screening process, until they are selected for a site. This enables staff to monitor numbers and adjust recruitment plans as needed.

MRC has a history of including underrepresented populations as corps members. For example, in northern MN over 9% of our members identify as American Indian or Alaska Native. To continually ensure a diverse corps and culturally competent staff and members, the MRC contracts with a consulting firm to continually improve our success in recruiting members from diverse backgrounds.

Member Training: MRC members from across the state participate in a three-day training institute prior to the start of the school year. This provides members with an overview of the literacy need in MN and training on the fundamentals of reading instruction based on the recommendations of the National Reading Panel, National Research Council and National Academy of Sciences. Training also incorporates student confidentiality practices, tutoring services they will perform, and connecting with AmeriCorps Members across the state. Training is provided by Master Coaches, recognized as some of MN's leading literacy experts.

As part of this training, members receive an orientation to AmeriCorps, program expectations and

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an introduction to their communities and placement sites. In addition, each Internal Coach completes a site-based orientation checklist with their member.

In addition to the three day training institute in August, members receive ongoing training throughout the year. The sequencing of training allows members to learn what they need to know, when they need to know it. All members participate in cultural competency training as preparation for working in diverse schools. PreK members attend four additional days of training on assessment, data-based decision making through an RtI framework, family engagement, and further intervention training. K-3 members attend two additional days of training on data management, data-based decision making through an RtI framework, family engagement, and further intervention training. Through quarterly trainings, Volunteer Coordinators learn additional strategies to effectively support literacy volunteer tutors. These members also attend a 12-hour volunteer impact leadership training series conducted by the MN Association for Volunteer Administration. Topics include: volunteer motivation, recruitment, conducting effective interviews, planning for retention, supervising, and measuring impact.

The skills and hand-on experience acquired in MRC are invaluable and enhance any resume. Members work closely with professionals in a school environment and develop vital skills in leadership, communications, goal-setting, service delivery, inter-cultural competency, conflict resolution and managing outcomes.

Members and volunteers receive information on prohibited activities at their respective orientations; in addition, prohibited activities are listed in member contracts and handbooks. During site visits, program staff review prohibited activities with members and coaches. Internal Coaches, who provide direct member support, will receive training on this at orientation. During the internal audit, program staff reviews timesheets to check for prohibited activities.

At the request of CNCS, MRC is participating in a multi-year research study being conducted by the University of Chicago's Opinion Research Center. The first phase of the study was a process assessment that included examining whether the AmeriCorps members are receiving appropriate training and supervision. The researchers concluded that "A considerable strength of the MRC program is that the comprehensive training, multi-layered supervisory structure, and ongoing coaching allows for effective program implementation by members from a strikingly diverse range of backgrounds."

Member Supervision: Using a multi-layered supervisory structure, each member is assigned a Master Coach, an Internal Coach and a program staff member.

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Master Coaches provide support to members and Internal Coaches through monthly meetings and regular email/phone contact. These interactions train and guide members throughout the year. Master Coaches help diagnose student skill gaps based on data, advise which interventions to use, help make decisions about intervention changes/exiting students, and ensure assessments and interventions are conducted with fidelity. Master Coaches are often former principals, district curriculum specialists, former Title I teachers, Early Childhood Literacy Specialists, or PhD students with early literacy credentials.

Internal Coaches are on-site supervisors, typically a literacy specialist employed by the school. Internal Coach responsibilities are articulated in the site agreement, signed by principals or early childhood program directors prior to member placement. To be selected, Internal Coaches commit to 6-9 hours per month per member and attend an orientation that covers an introduction to AmeriCorps and MRC, member expectations, prohibited activities, discipline management, and performance monitoring. They attend the Training Institute and ongoing trainings with their member(s) during the year. Internal Coaches receive a calendar that outlines the expectations including: 1) orienting the member to the site and the community, 2) approving timesheets, ensuring time is not being spent on prohibited activities, 3) conducting bi-monthly coaching to review student data, make decisions about intervention changes, and set goals, 4) setting the tutoring schedule, 5) completing implementation integrity checklists, 6) completing a mid-year and year-end member performance evaluation, 7) addressing any performance issues, and 8) supporting the member as needed.

MRC program staff provides ongoing support to members, Internal Coaches, and Master Coaches by monitoring program data and conducting site visits. Program staff reviews timesheets on a monthly basis ensuring each member is receiving adequate on-site support and supervision. At site visits, staff meets with the member(s) and Internal Coach to discuss program implementation and identify any issues that require additional support. Staff also provides monthly updates to members via e-mail, postings on the MRC website and are available via phone and email to problem-solve any issues.

*Tutoring Programs Only

MRC complies with AmeriCorps requirements for member tutoring qualifications: Prior to enrollment, members are screened to ensure they have necessary literacy skills and a high school diploma or its equivalent. Additionally, all members participate in high-quality, research-based pre- and in-service training to ensure they deliver data-informed, evidence-based literacy interventions

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precisely and learn how to implement all elements of the program with fidelity. Training attendance is tracked by staff to ensure 100% attendance.

MRC ensures appropriate member supervision by working with sites to select individuals with a background and experience in literacy. Internal Coaches prepare for their supervisory role with members at the Training Institute, and separately, by learning how to conduct integrity checks to assure member assessments and interventions are delivered with a high degree of fidelity.

Member Experience: Due to MRC's continuous focus on data driven outcomes, members witness their impact on individual student performance, providing them with a powerful understanding of the value of their service. In the past five years, year-end member surveys report that more than 90% of members are committed to continued community service.

MRC offers meaningful connection to other national service programs; it is housed with two other AmeriCorps programs (MN Math Corps and MN Opportunity Corps). Staff collaborates across all three programs on training, recruitment and member management. More than half of the staff has served as AmeriCorps members, providing a relevant connection for current members.

MRC fosters a strong connection among its members with AmeriCorps and its community through orientation, where all members receive AmeriCorps 101 training. MRC members provide service to their communities during out of school time, including tutoring at community-based organizations. For example, in Duluth (Northeast MN), 23 MRC members provide after-school literacy support; their knowledge and skills with reading interventions help to further support the literacy initiatives of the Duluth Public Library and the Duluth Children's Museum.

MRC staff provides ongoing support to a cohort of members. The cohorts receive a monthly e-newsletter that spotlights member successes, professional development opportunities, opportunities to serve the community outside of the school day, and program announcements. In addition, MRC has an interactive website where members can chat with each other and post student success stories, and community events.

MRC strategically partners with the CNCS-funded Foster Grandparent program and is supporting a pilot project to extend tutoring service past 3rd grade. In the current program year, 5 Foster Grandparents were trained by the MRC Master Coaches to implement targeted interventions with fourth and fifth grade students who had progressed in reading skills as part of the MRC but had not passed the 3rd grade standardized test. The Internal Coach identifies students the Foster Grandparent serve and provides ongoing support. MRC members function as a team with the Foster Grandparent, in extending interventions for K-5 students.

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MRC also is part of a pilot project to measure the collective impact of AmeriCorps programs in one community, Duluth, who identified their falling graduation rate as a community-wide priority. The state commission, enlisted the four AmeriCorps programs serving in the Duluth Public Schools to work together to increase student achievement in reading and math and create a seamless system of educational support from age 3 through high school. By aligning AmeriCorps resources with the district's educational goals, this collective is working toward a shared measurement and reporting system, greater connectivity to enhance member experiences, strengthening schools and community organizations, and increasing communication among the programs. CNCS has asked the collaborative to chart progress and document lessons learned to contribute to the larger national conversation around strategies to achieve collective impact.

MRC members connect with other AmeriCorps and national service participants through the InterCorps Council (ICC) of MN. This peer-led group is comprised of AmeriCorps members, representing State, National, and VISTA programs, and promotes engagement, communication, collaboration, and education to empower AmeriCorps Members and communities. The ICC organizes civic engagement activities and professional development opportunities, including service projects on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, during AmeriCorps Week and throughout the year.

Members also increase their connectivity to other members through Professional Learning Groups (PLGs). The purpose of PLGs is to build camaraderie, share best practices, trouble-shoot challenges and reflect on their service. These member-led groups are comprised of 5-7 members in close geographic proximity to each other. PLG leaders are trained and prepared to facilitate meetings and discussion. Each member also creates an individual professional development plan that includes personal goals for the upcoming year and ideas for supplemental and meaningful training topics. The expectation is for groups to meet a minimum of four times per year, but the majority of groups find the small group networking time valuable and opt to meet more frequently.

Reflection: On a program-wide level, members have several opportunities to reflect on their experience. The coaching structure allows for informal reflection and sharing of best practices day-to-day and formal, structured reflection in monthly meetings. Members also complete a self-evaluation prior to their Internal Coach's evaluations at mid-year and year-end, which allows them to assess their own growth year and lessons learned. Each PLG meeting begins with a reflection component, as Members share their experiences. Members also are invited to write reflection logs a feature of our data collection system, OnCorps.

AmeriCorps Identity: As part of their pre-service orientation members participate in a 3.5 hour

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AmeriCorps 101 session where they are provided with the "big picture" of national service. This pre-service training also includes members taking their AmeriCorps pledge of service. The combination of the pledge ceremony and pre-service training fosters a sense of connection with the AmeriCorps identity.

Volunteer Generation: MRC will have 6 members serve as Volunteer Coordinators to recruit, mobilize and support a total of 450 volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring or participate in literacy events. Volunteer Coordinators expand the reach of MRC by initiating and maintaining relationships with community groups, faith-based organizations, businesses, and colleges to recruit a diverse pool of volunteers. They utilize flyers, social media, community events and presentations and place individuals at MRC sites that have a demonstrated need for additional literacy support and the capacity to incorporate volunteers.

Ongoing literacy tutoring by volunteers allows MRC to reach more students that qualify for intervention services, but are currently waitlisted due to full member caseloads. It also allows for additional one-to-one support for students who are currently receiving intervention services so that they can reach grade level targets more quickly. The Master Coach will train volunteers in two evidence-based interventions and the Internal Coach will select which students will receive tutoring.

Program staff provides clear position descriptions for MRC volunteers and will ensure that the volunteers activities do not participate in prohibited or unallowable activities.

Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: MRC is committed to branding national service. The MRC logo will be consistently used alongside the AmeriCorps logo in all promotional, instructional and training materials. All members are given AmeriCorps clothing and name badge to wear at their school to identify themselves as an AmeriCorps member.

MRC provides service sites with outreach materials including site signage, recruitment brochures, and press releases branded with the AmeriCorps logo. Orientation materials, member curriculum, and online position descriptions also are provided by MRC and include the AmeriCorps logo. MRC staff ensures all service sites display AmeriCorps signage.

Organizational Capability

Established in 2010, ServeMN Action Network (SMAN) created one organization with the necessary infrastructure to address critical state priorities. The mission of SMAN is to rapidly incubate, replicate, and scale evidence-based AmeriCorps program models. SMAN operates 3 AmeriCorps programs: MRC with 1,000 MSYs across the Metro and Greater MN programs, MN Opportunity Corps (MOC), 30 MSYs; and MN Math Corps (MMC) a program requesting to grow from 102 to 200 MSYs.

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The staff who administered the MMC, the MN Opportunity Corps and MRC at other organizations were transitioned to SMAN when it formed, bringing 9 years of operational experience and a demonstrated track record of implementing effective AmeriCorps programs. The staffing structure ensures that all programs are administered effectively and cost effective. Staffing for the MRC includes:

*Sheila Piippo (Executive Director); BA-Psychology, M.Ed. She has over 16 years of experience in school-based programming and youth development and led the MRC for 6 years, including statewide expansion efforts. Sheila is the primary contact for this grant. This position is included as part of administrative costs.

*Susan Saunders (Finance Director); BS in Accounting, over 20 years of nonprofit finance and accounting experience and has managed federal grants from CNCS, Dept. of Health and Human Services, Dept of Justice and the National Institutes of Health. Susan is the secondary contact for this grant. This position is part of administrative costs.

*Kari Gjerde (Greater MN Program Director); BA-Journalism; M.Ed., 6 years experience as a classroom teacher and 3 years of experience managing the MRC program, served as an AmeriCorps member with College Possible and Teach for America.

*Eight (8) Program Managers manage member and site recruitment and cultivate community partnerships. Designated staff has over 65 years of combined experience in AmeriCorps programming and K-12 education. Their qualifications include experience in program management and demonstrated effectiveness in implementing AmeriCorps programs.

*Anna Peters (Recruitment and Outreach Manager); BA-Psychology, in this position over 4 years, responsible for recruiting over 2,500 AmeriCorps members.

*Ashley Beatty (Operations Manager); Masters-Nonprofit Management, prior to joining the staff served as a MRC member.

*Three (3) Program Assistants handle member and site paperwork and help with trainings in their respective regions.

*Christine Fankhanel (Senior Program Director); BA-English, provides statewide leadership and supervision, over 7 years managing the MRC program. She served for two years as an AmeriCorps*VISTA.

*Andrea Hokeness (Member Benefits & Compliance Specialist); MA-English as a Second Language, over 6 years experience maintaining compliance with member eligibility, timesheets and other federal requirements. She also served as an AmeriCorps*VISTA .

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*Alison Jirik (Special Projects Manager); BA-Sociology and Communications, over 6 years experience working with MRC and provides project coordination for special initiatives. She also served as an AmeriCorps*VISTA.

*Samantha Shalda (Training Coordinator) BA- History, has over seven years experience coordinating training events and will assist in planning logistics of trainings.

*Stephanie Hart (Data Coordinator); BA-Theology has over 15 years administrative experience and ensures data is completed and reported accurately.

*The Recruitment Coordinator is a new position; desired qualifications include demonstrated success recruiting AmeriCorps Members and volunteers and strong communication and marketing skills.

*Member Placement Coordinator is currently vacant. The desired qualifications include experience in recruitment, strong interpersonal skills, ability to handle multiple projects, and ability to evaluate interview and placement systems.

*Internal Coaches are employees of the schools and provide direct supervision and literacy coaching to members. Their salaries are an in-kind contribution.

*Literacy and Data Analysis expertise is provided through four contract positions that are included in the coaching expenses of the budget:

*Kate Horst (PreK Master Coach Coordinator); BA-Elementary Ed. and author/trainer of SEEDS of Emergent Literacy for PreK Educators. Kate recruits, trains and oversees PreK Master Coaches.

*Cheryl Reid (K-3 Master Coach Coordinator); nationally certified School Psychologist; worked for 15+ years in the Minneapolis Public Schools; oversees consultation, intervention and assessment for K-3 sites.

*Lorien Parson (Training & Development Coordinator); Ph.D.-School Psychology, co-authored the journal article, Practical Applications of Response-to-Intervention Research.

*Kerry Bollman (MRC Evaluation Director) Masters in School Psychology & is Nationally Certified School Psychologist, Reading Center Director and Academic Collaborative Planner.

All new hires receive an orientation to program operating policies and procedures, AmeriCorps regulations, MRC IT systems, personnel policies, and other job-specific responsibilities. Staff receive ongoing training and technical assistance including: 1) bi-weekly meetings with their supervisor, 2) weekly updates and department meetings, 3) quarterly all-staff meetings, 5) annual staff retreat, and 6) quarterly meetings conducted by the state service commission.

SMAN's cadre of Master and Internal Literacy coaches provides the necessary infrastructure to ensure members are well trained and prepared for their service.

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MRC has participated in two rigorous, independent, external evaluations over our nine year history and is currently participating in a multi-year impact evaluation commissioned by CNCS and conducted by the University of Chicago's Opinion Research Center. External evaluators have been complimentary of our program's ability to support a rigorous evaluation including our work with sites to collaborate with principal investigators to address any data collection challenges.

The management team has over nine years of administering AmeriCorps grants and is made up of the Executive Director, Finance Director, Senior Program Director, Program Director- Greater MN, Human Resources Director, and the Operations Manager. This group meets weekly to ensure operational excellence and utilizes a dashboard reporting system to monitor program performance.

MRC staff has monthly conference calls and quarterly meetings to review program objectives and strategize for the upcoming program year. In addition, Program Managers meet regularly with the Master Coaches to identify any fidelity issues. MRC also maintains a formal advisory board consisting of academic experts and practitioners who meet on a monthly basis.

Each spring, SMAN hosts a statewide meeting of program staff and Master Coaches to analyze preliminary results from the current program year, discuss program improvements, and solidify the training plans for members and Internal Coaches.

*For Current Grantees Only: SMAN integrates key AmeriCorps initiatives in education and economic opportunity to effectively leverage internal resources, human capital and best practices. Our compliance efforts are aligned to ServeMN's monitoring and technical assistance system to ensure quality and compliance. ServeMN 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. MRC has consistently achieved nearly 100% on site audits for compliance and has been timely in meeting deadlines.

Sustainability: ServeMN has built a strong base of legislative and philanthropic champions that contribute to the long term financial sustainability of MRC. The model was launched in 2003 with a \$150,000 annual state appropriation and \$70,000 from private sources. Since that time, state support has grown to \$4.1 million and private support to \$2.5 million. Currently, our Greater MN program receives private support from three greater MN foundations: Blandin, Lloyd K. Johnson, and Bernick.

MRC has collaborated with local businesses and other community partners to create a corps of volunteers modeled after the MRC program. This requires a higher level of training and commitment,

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as each volunteer has a caseload of students to provide selected interventions to active MRC participants and students on the waiting list. Successful examples include Rush City (East Central MN) with Horizon Milling, Grand Rapids State Bank (North Central MN), and a collaboration with community members in Albert Lea (Southeast MN).

We also seek sustainability through the potential for scale and replication. MRC is a highly replicable model, as validated by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (January 2013). Because of MRC's success in MN, replication in 8 other states is being supported by United Ways and other private philanthropic supporters and by Target in Denver, Colorado.

MRC is designed to be a cost-effective strategy to expand the instructional capacity of schools. The average federal share of each child served by MRC is estimated at \$632- a remarkable return on investment considering the potential to launch a child on a trajectory of education and economic success. MRC staff and Master Coaches build relationships at each site to ensure integration of MRC practices, and demonstration of impact beyond the grant period. For example, the Chisholm Public Schools superintendent stated that MRC had a significant impact on their district's Annual Yearly Progress gains in the 2011-12 school year.

MRC has been identified as a strategic partner for the MDE. Commissioner Cassellius states, "MRC will be an essential component of our strategy to support Priority and Focus Schools. Their track record of improving literacy outcomes for struggling readers is exactly the type of partnership that will help these schools meet their growth and proficiency targets." MRC has established strong working relationships with school district leadership in planning and implementing the program to best meet the needs of their respective students (e.g., prioritizing the grade level of students who will receive MRC). Principals are vocal champions and lead their staff in planning for MRC -- informing staff about the expectations of participation, organizing student schedules to accommodate MRC service delivery, and identifying the Internal Coach to support program implementation. These relationships mean that the MRC can call on state and local champions to be advocates for the program with state and federal legislators and private philanthropic supporters.

Compliance and Accountability: The MRC system for providing ongoing monitoring uses a quality control/multiple site management system that addresses recruitment, selection and renewal; site agreements; observation checklists; and assessments. It provides support for member management including protocols for recruitment, outreach, orientation, training, performance evaluation, and service requirements. A web-based reporting system provides staff and Coaches with real-time performance data at the student, member, site, district and city-wide levels to facilitate

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accountability monitoring. The staff conducts a minimum of two site visits per year to meet with the Internal Coach and members to monitor service activities on-site, including prohibited activities. A standardized Site Compliance Checklist will be used during the visits. The staff also will conduct internal audits of member files (2x year) and member timesheets (monthly) to monitor for prohibited activities.

The Program Director will be responsible for the structure and corresponding systems that both mandate and monitor compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. He or she also will ensure the Internal Coach is properly trained and prepared to provide daily oversight to the members in compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. Compliance strategies include:

Prevention: 1) Site agreement: sites are required to have a signed site agreement that clearly outlines rules and regulations, including prohibited activities. 2) Member contract: Before they can begin their year of service, members are required to sign a contract that clearly outlines the term of service, responsibilities of the position, prohibited activities, grievance procedures, non-displacement policy, equal opportunity employment and non-discrimination statement, inclusive environment statement, and drug-free work place. 3) Training: Members and Internal Coaches review the rules and regulations (including prohibited activities) outlined in their training manuals and member contracts. 4) Ongoing communication: Reminders about rules and regulations, including prohibited activities, are emailed and communicated during site visits.

Detection: The Master Coach is on-site each month for observations and meetings with the Member and Internal Coach; he or she is responsible for communicating any red flags to the Program Director immediately. The Program Director completes an annual internal audit of 20% of member files to ensure compliance to all regulations, including checking timesheets to ensure hours were not spent on prohibited activities.

At the service site level, MRC ensures compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations through the site agreement that clearly articulates rules and regulations. MRC has an established Internal Auditing Procedure that ensures continued compliance. As part of this procedure, the Program Director sends written communication to every site about the possibility of being selected for a Program Compliance Visit. The communication will outline the elements that are reviewed in monitoring compliance, specifically prohibited activities and emphasize the importance of all sites being in compliance with federal regulations. The Program Director will conduct random site visits to ensure that the program is operating in compliance. The visit includes interviews with relevant school staff and members serving at the site, to review rules and regulations related to prohibited activities.

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MRC sends a mid-year and end-of-year Site Status Report, which details the site's adherence to program expectations.

At the commission level, ServeMN's Controller provides ongoing financial technical assistance to ensure MRC complies with AmeriCorps regulations and standard accounting requirements. ServeMN staff also provides ongoing programmatic assistance. In addition, MRC Regional Program Directors attend quarterly meetings conducted by ServeMN to remain current on AmeriCorps regulations. MRC staff regularly monitors reporting systems to ensure program documentation and in-kind documentation is accurately collected, reported and verifiable.

The Member Benefit and Compliance Specialist updates staff on new AmeriCorps regulations, and addresses any compliance issues that need attention such as eligibility documentation, background checks, time tracking, or member performance evaluation. New hires complete orientation activities with both their direct supervisor and the Member Benefit and Compliance Specialist to ensure their understanding of AmeriCorps regulations and MRC program expectations. The member specialist reviews 100% of member files within the first quarter and again at year end. Program staff conduct member timesheet audits four times per year. Staff reviews timesheets to ensure activities are appropriately recorded. In addition, staff meet with Internal Coaches regarding prohibited activities to ensure they have a clear understanding of what service hours are allowed.

Staff immediately addresses any risk or noncompliance issues identified during the program year. Depending on the severity of the issue, MRC reserves the right to transfer the member to another site, terminate the relationship or monitor the site for improvement. If the issue is not remedied, the site will not be awarded MRC Members for the next school year. Key factors in the site selection process include site compliance and implementation fidelity.

*For Current Grantees and Former Grantees Only: Audits completed by ServeMN and the auditing firm for SMAN did not result in audit findings. MRC reached 100% enrollment and a 92% retention rate during the 2011-12 program year. Staff is implementing new strategies to further decrease early exits including additional screening procedures to ensure that members thoroughly understand their service commitment prior to enrolling.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

MRC is a cost-effective program that addresses MN's achievement gap, which is the largest in the nation. MRC enables struggling readers to "catch up" to their peers within one academic year at a per-pupil cost of just \$632. The schools report they could not provide the high-quality supplemental services that MRC provides at that price. Additionally, MRC's proven model provides members with

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valuable career skills while deepening their connection to their communities and national service, and builds school capacity to use data-informed instruction, assessment and evidence-based literacy interventions in support of student achievement.

Included in the per-pupil price of just \$632 are comprehensive services including benchmark assessments, tutoring, research-based literacy interventions and outcome monitoring for at-risk children who would not otherwise receive services. The MRC model is aligned to current economic thought advanced by the Federal Reserve (2006) that investments made in quality early education provide the greatest return to individual students and families, schools and communities -- in excess of 10% annually. In fact, the MRC creates real-dollar savings in the education system through early intervention -- MRC students are three times less likely to be referred to special education than students not receiving MRC services, a savings estimated to exceed \$9 million a year in MN alone (Heistad, 2011).

The MRC model provides proven literacy interventions at a pivotal point, when a correction can most cost-effectively prevent a persistent skills gap. At \$632 per student, MRC represents a significant cost-savings to the community compared to the \$1,800 per student average cost for delivering supplemental instruction with paid tutors.

MRC administers our program at \$13,000 per MSY -- \$300 per MSY less than the CNCS allowable cost. SMAN is supported by a diverse source of non-federal funds that are leveraged by ServeMN, including state, corporate and foundation funding.

Our current operating budget of \$26,022,216; some 46% of which currently is funded by CNCS. This proposed project represents 52% of the total organizational budget. A CNCS investment of \$6,825,000 will be matched with \$6,825,455 in funding from diversified sources. To date, MRC has secured \$2,985,885 of support from a state appropriation; \$3,839,560 of in-kind support from the sites through contributions of materials and space, and assignment of one Internal Coach per site to provide supervision and coaching to the members; and \$12,000 in private funds from the Bernick Foundation; leaving a balance yet to be secured \$288,000. This funding gap is projected to be covered by proposals pending with the United Way of Central MN, United Way of Olmstead County, the Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation, and the Blandin Foundation.

During each of the past five years, MRC has received two competitive grants from CNCS: one for our program in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro region (Twin Cities) and one for greater MN.

* For Current Grantees Only: MRC now provides a dollar for dollar match to federal funds and this proposal represents an expanded impact across MN without a commensurate increase in federal

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funds.

Budget Adequacy: MRC has constructed a budget that fully supports the proposed program design. The budget provides for 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 of training and master coaching time, curriculum expenses, and evaluation costs that are required to achieve the desired outcomes for students. The cost of criminal history and FBI checks also are included in the budget.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Evaluation Report has been submitted.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A