

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

28 AmeriCorps Members will leverage up to 130-160 volunteers to foster independent reading, life skills, family engagement, and fitness engagement among low-income youth in grades 6 - 8 in five Boston Public Schools. At the end of the grant cycle, Tenacity students will demonstrate increased academic engagement. AmeriCorps will enable Tenacity's intensive Middle School Academy to offer daily, personalized instruction. This project focuses on CNCS area of K-12 Success (Obj. 2). The CNCS investment of \$372,389 will be matched with \$453,663.

## Rationale and Approach

### Need

Today, completion of a post-secondary program is vital to a successful transition into adulthood. National unemployment rates indicate a positive correlation between the level of post-secondary education completed and employment status (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). Addressing this problem Paul Grogan, President & CEO of the Boston Foundation, stated: "Two-thirds of all of the jobs that are created in our economy require at least some college education, yet close to half of Boston's students attending non-exam schools fail to graduate even from high school in four years--and many who do graduate are...not getting the support they need to apply to college and succeed once they are there" (Coles, "Who's Making It," 2009). While there is a 75% high school graduation rate nationally and the state of Massachusetts is 83%, Boston has only 64% ("Building a Grad Nation," 2012; BPS, "4-Year Graduation Rate by Cohort," 2012). A 50% college dropout rate among Boston Public School (BPS) high school graduates also indicates that BPS students have not been adequately prepared for post-secondary success (Boston Opportunity Agenda, 2012). These dropout rates are even higher among low-income, Black, and Latino students. Students emerging from low-income households are less likely to complete high school or college than their more affluent counterparts, a critical fact given that three-quarters of Boston Public School students are deemed low-income (Success Boston, 2011; Boston Globe, 2012; Harvard School of Public Health, Diversity Data, 2010). High school dropout rates for Black and Latino Boston students are at least three times as high as dropout rates for White and Asian students, and 50% of Asian and 44% of White Boston adults hold a bachelor's degree as compared to 20% of Black and 16% of Latino adults (Metro Boston Indicators Project, 2011).

## **Narratives**

According to experts, middle school is "a critical defining point" in preparing students for college readiness (ACT, "The Forgotten Middle," 2008). Students forge the habits crucial to high school graduation--attendance, behavior, and academic performance--beginning in middle school (PBS, "Middle School Moment," 2012). Indeed, middle school academic achievement and appropriate school behaviors are the strongest predictors of high school performance and success (ACT, "The Condition of College & Career Readiness," 2011). Due to the need for intensive intervention in middle school toward ultimately achieving post-secondary success, Tenacity's AmeriCorps program will target students in grades 6-8 through its Middle School Academy (MSA). MSA is the backbone program within Tenacity's Pathway to Post-Secondary Success, which offers programming for youth from 4th grade through post-secondary completion.

Tenacity partners with and serves students in grades 6-8 in five Title I Boston Public Schools: Jackson Mann, Irving, Dever-McCormack, Lilla G. Frederick Pilot, and Umana. Although schools may qualify for Title I funds if their student body is 40% low-income, in fact the majority of students in Tenacity's partner schools are economically disadvantaged. Overall, 75% of the students in our partner schools qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. On average, youth at our partner schools performed significantly below the district-wide average on the English Language Arts portion of the statewide Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam. These students' MCAS performance also decreased overall from the prior school year. Black and Latino students, 83% of our target population, scored significantly lower on MCAS than their Asian and White peers. Currently, three of Tenacity's partner schools are labeled by BPS as high support, indicating that they are below the district average on MCAS performance and student growth for two consecutive years. Four partners are Level 3 schools, indicating that they are among the lowest performing 20% of district schools, while the fifth partner, the Umana, is on the list of School Improvement Grant eligible schools. The Umana has a high immigrant population with nearly 75% of students of Latino origin, and over 50% of its students are designated Limited English Proficiency students.

### **AmeriCorps as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems**

Tenacity collaborates with Boston Public Schools to increase academic success for low-income students, and we target the middle school years as the critical time for developing key skills leading to high school and post-secondary success. Based on Tenacity's demonstrated success in improving

## Narratives

scores on state standardized tests, we are one of six out-of-school and extended learning time providers selected to receive BPS funding in the 2012-2013 school year out of 30 candidate organizations. This support indicates the school district's desire to expand Tenacity's reach and its collaboration with BPS, as emphasized by Superintendent Carol Johnson: "It is my fervent hope that Tenacity continues to serve more students in their current 5 partner BPS schools and over the coming years, expands to partner with additional schools in our district. Tenacity's brand of whole child development is a wonderfully effective educational service within our school system and an important component of our overall district-wide school improvement strategy."

AmeriCorps Members will enable Tenacity to make a substantial impact in Boston's most challenged middle schools as essential members of the service delivery team for Tenacity's key interventions--reading, life skills development, family engagement, and tennis/fitness--through the intensive Middle School Academy (MSA). Working with small groups of students, Members will get to know each student they work with, enabling MSA to adopt an individualized approach that offers our students academic, social, behavioral, and family support. Members can devote personalized attention to small groups of students needing extra support in ways that are not feasible for either classroom teachers or Tenacity's site staff alone. Complementing our full-time staff that focuses on program development and works with students over the many years of our pathway of programs, and volunteers available for a limited time, Members, many of whom come from backgrounds similar to our students and all of whom have college degrees, will serve as role models to help invest students in their own education and Tenacity's pathway of programs. Because MSA's impact lies in its individualized support, community involvement is another integral component of Tenacity's program model. Volunteers are therefore important to our program delivery model. Members take a lead role in engaging the community more fully with MSA by recruiting, managing, and supporting volunteers.

Tenacity requests 28 full time Members to be divided among our 5 partner schools, based on the number of students served at each site. With the strong encouragement of BPS, Tenacity anticipates increasing the number of students served at our current partner schools while also partnering with 1 or 2 additional high support or Level 4 schools in the following 3 years. We will expand our volunteer base as Members redeploy their expertise to these additional sites. Members will serve for at least 40 hours per week, dividing their time between lesson delivery (12 hours/week); lesson preparation and debrief (10 hours); family engagement (4 hours); volunteer generation (5 hours); student pull-outs

## Narratives

for additional academic support (3 hours); Member professional development (4 hours); and administrative meetings with school and Tenacity staff (2 hours). Members will also take a lead role in executing a volunteer recruitment strategy to garner and support volunteers to ensure our adult-to-student ratios remain constant. Through their high dosage of student interactions, Members will provide pivotal feedback allowing program staff to develop and refine the curriculum in accordance with changing student needs. For the duration of the school year, Members will foster independent reading, important life skills, family engagement, and tennis/fitness engagement in our students.

On a typical day, all Members execute Tenacity's interventions of reading, life skills, and tennis/fitness lessons. Lesson delivery time will be evenly split between literacy and tennis/fitness sessions. Members foster reading through interactive strategies that are central to increasing student engagement ("Using Positive Student Engagement to Increase Student Achievement," 2012). Member and volunteer pairs lead groups of 8 students in each activity, which lasts for 30 minutes before students rotate. Stations are (1) group story read aloud, (2) writing, vocabulary, and reflection exercises, (3) homework help and independent reading, and (4) habits, life skills, and high school selection preparation. The reading curriculum is based on the Department of Education English Language Arts guidelines. Members deliver instruction tailored to each student's needs based on quarterly school-wide benchmark exams, yearend MCAS scores, and teacher feedback. These activities are part of a yearlong cumulative process to foster independent readers through focused and interactive small group activities. Daily life skills development will occur throughout the lesson, and aim to improve attitude toward school. Members check-in daily to review students' planners for homework assignment details and help them identify homework priorities. Members also help students identify and track short-term achievable goals, and assist our 8th graders in identifying and applying to high schools. For the tennis/fitness session, Members lead 1 of 4 stations focusing on tennis/fitness skills, strength activities, or tennis games to build confidence, motivation, and fitness. In both the literacy and tennis/fitness blocks, Members support volunteers assisting at particular stations on that day, while full time site staff orchestrates the session and moves among stations to provide supervision, feedback, and additional support. At the end of the program day, Members and site staff debrief and make program adjustments based on specific student needs.

In addition to daily activities, Members will participate in family visits and family workshops throughout the year, and then take the lead on regular follow-up with specific subsets of families to

## Narratives

keep them engaged. Workshop topics include study skills, goal-setting, social competence, and teen risk factors. Each Member will be in touch with an assigned number of families on a weekly basis to give parents a status on their child's week and get input from the parents on how things are going at home with skills taught in the Tenacity workshops. Throughout the year, Members take additional time 2 to 3 times per month to host groups of students on field trips outside of program time. Field trips serve as opportunities for rewarding students for their dedicated efforts in school, motivating them to continue to do well, and enriching them by introducing them to new activities and experiences. Fridays are devoted to site team professional development meetings as well as some activities exclusively for Members.

### Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact

To date, Tenacity has a high school graduation rate of 95% and 80% college matriculation rate, and 75% of our Pathway's high school graduates have either completed or are currently enrolled in a post-secondary program. MCAS results of Tenacity's 8th grade students highlight the success of Middle School Academy. By the third year in Middle School Academy, 8th graders had 35% higher proficiency levels than their BPS counterparts, and also outpaced their peers in terms of year-to-year MCAS gains. Tenacity relies on a model of longevity: sustained mentoring relationships combined with intensive academic support to enable our students to acquire skills essential for ongoing success. While our students in MSA outperform their peers in our partner schools and BPS on MCAS in each grade, the margin of difference is substantially greater by 8th grade. Tenacity's interventions of reading, life skills development, family engagement, and fitness aim to enhance academic engagement and are proven to be effective in laying the foundation for academic success in middle school and beyond.

### Value of Extended Learning Time and After School:

Our program model incorporates a number of research-based effective practices, including partnering with schools as an Extended Learning Time (ELT) or after-school service provider, depending on the structure of each partner school. Both approaches enable outside providers to complement the traditional school curriculum and further enrich students because of additional time for academic instruction and the opportunity for more personalized lessons ("Massachusetts ELT Initiative," 2012 & "Adolescent Literacy Development in Out of School Time," 2010).

## Narratives

### Value of Small Instructor-to-Student Ratios:

In working with middle school students, Tenacity maintains a small instructor-to-student ratio. The best study to date on small group ratios, the Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio Project, demonstrates that small class sizes enable students to perform better in school, complete high school, avoid being left back, and avoid truancy (Coffins Education Center, "Smaller Class Sizes," 2010). Tenacity's adult-to-student ratio of 1:4 in reading lessons falls in the range of effective ratios for delivering the personalized attention necessary in small groups (MENTOR, "Mentoring in America," 2005). Tenacity's site teams are composed of professional site staff as well as trained and supervised AmeriCorps Members and community volunteers to enable high program quality and the ideal instructor-to-student ratios, while serving a much larger number of students more deeply than staff capacity alone would allow.

### Value of Fostering Independent Reading:

Studies indicate a correlation between increased independent reading and academic achievement, as well as between high school dropout rates and lower levels of reading proficiency (National Endowment for the Arts, "To Read or Not to Read," 2007). Students entering middle school with low reading proficiency often lack the additional support they need to bring their reading level up to standards, and engagement with reading is directly correlated with reading proficiency (Irvin, "Taking Action on Adolescent Literacy," 2012). Reading achievement by 8th grade accounts for 60%--the largest category--of factors contributing to college readiness (ACT, "The Forgotten Middle," 2008). In keeping with this evidence, fostering independent reading is a major focus of Tenacity's literacy program throughout the three years of middle school. Studies indicate that effective reading instruction includes vocabulary lessons, discussion of the text, personal reflection, and writing exercises ("Improving Literacy Instruction in Middle & High Schools," 2007). These are all elements of Tenacity's approach.

### Value of Life Skills Development:

Tenacity teaches middle school youth life skills such as organization and goal-setting. Organizational skills enhance school success by promoting school work completion and quality, as well as enabling a student to more effectively meet school task goals ("The Impact of Study Skills and Organizational Methods on Student Achievement," 2008). Goal-setting is linked to academic success by enabling students to focus their efforts on their goals and practice self-discipline in working toward them,

## **Narratives**

ultimately increasing the quality of work (Morisano, American Psychological Association, 2010).

### **Value of Family Engagement:**

Research shows that middle school students depend most on family for planning their academic trajectory, and that low-income families tend to be the least likely to participate in post-secondary planning (ACT, "College Readiness Begins in Middle School"). A recent study indicates that parental involvement is more powerful in enabling student success than the schools themselves; children who see their parents value school will reflect that value themselves (Dufur, Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 2012). A new component in the Middle School Academy, Member roles in family engagement will focus on increasing parental investment in the value of school and encouraging them to communicate that value to their children.

### **Value of Sports and Fitness:**

Tenacity's model uniquely uses a tennis-based fitness program to reinforce academic engagement by promoting physical activity and life skills like commitment, self-discipline, and goal-setting. The program incorporates aerobic and strength building activities, tennis instruction, and game play. Our fitness program aligns with the BPS Acceleration Agenda goal of intensifying the link between academics and athletics. Sport is correlated with development of skills including interpersonal skills, confidence, discipline, perseverance, and motivation (President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, 2009). Studies also indicate the important role of the sports instructor toward positive youth development, by way of their feedback and reinforcement (President's Council). The selection of tennis as a vehicle for engaging youth was inspired by the personal experience of Tenacity's founder and president, Ned Eames, for whom the life skills learned through this sport made a deep and lasting impact on his high school and post-secondary success. Though not part of our performance measures for this grant, Tenacity staff tracks and measures student fitness outcomes because of their importance to whole child development, and we have demonstrated improved outcomes.

### **Anticipated Outcomes and Impact:**

Tenacity's goal is to increase academic engagement among Boston Public School 6th through 8th graders. Over a three-year grant period, we will serve 500 distinct students, and 450 (90%) distinct students will complete 300 hours of Tenacity's Middle School Academy. 340 students (75.5% of those completing the program) will demonstrate increased academic engagement as measured by

## Narratives

homework completion and quality, goal-setting, and interest in school. Because MSA supports students for three consecutive years in middle school, each year we will serve a new group of 6th graders and continue serving 7th and 8th graders we served in the previous year. As a result, the number of unduplicated students reflected in our 3-year target is smaller than triple the number of students served annually. Performance measures for Year 1 are: 225 students (90%) will complete at least 300 hours of MSA, and 170 (75.5%) of those completing the program will demonstrate increased academic engagement. With over a decade of experience in executing and developing MSA to best meet the needs of the students we serve, Tenacity's performance measure targets are based on our analysis of related past outcomes, as well as an initial conversation with our external program evaluator. The AmeriCorps Director will complete all required performance measure reports with the support of MSA site teams.

Tenacity's objectives during our last full year of program operation were to enhance literacy and fitness among the youth we serve. We achieved both outcomes, but faced a challenge in successfully reporting on CNCS literacy-based performance targets due to changes within Boston Public Schools after the school year commenced. Difficulties arose due to reliance on a BPS-wide reading comprehension test, the GRADE, which was discontinued by the district in the middle of the last grant cycle, affecting Tenacity's ability to administer the test effectively and obtain reliable performance measurement data. In this gap year in AmeriCorps participation, Tenacity gathered data on student academic performance and best practices in order to develop an evaluation approach aligned with CNCS Performance Measure ED27.

### Member Recruitment

Member recruitment occurs throughout the year through common search engines, relationships with colleges, and lasting relationships with Tenacity program participants. The AmeriCorps Director reaches Boston's extensive college population through meetings and fairs to identify and recruit diverse, qualified candidates. With a goal to create an AmeriCorps group reflective of the students we serve, the candidates gathered in anticipation of the 2012-13 AmeriCorps slots were 40% individuals of color, and 30% of those were Boston natives. Tenacity also participated in the May 2011 Massachusetts Service Alliance Inclusive AmeriCorps Shadow Day--a day bringing youth with disabilities into programs for a taste of AmeriCorps service.

## Narratives

Based on prior years, we expect well over 100 applications. The AmeriCorps Director first conducts an interview with select applicants. Successful candidates possess a college degree, service ethic, belief in combining academics with physical activity, and experience working with urban youth. Candidates qualifying for a second round interview go through a situational interview with Site Directors, who base their evaluation on the candidate's interest in and goals for serving with Tenacity, prior experiences, ability to work in challenging circumstances, communication skills, and ideal working relationship with a supervisor. Site staff returns feedback to the Director who then requests two letters of recommendation before making offers to selected candidates. All applicant materials are maintained in the candidate's file, and criminal offender, sexual offender, and FBI background checks are performed as required.

### Member Training

Yearlong training starts with two weeks designed specifically for Members. Week 1 focuses on AmeriCorps expectations, regulations, and prohibited activities, as well as organizational policies, and an introduction to Tenacity's approach to academic engagement, classroom and behavior management, diversity, neighborhood resources, and Tenacity's school partnerships. At the end of Week 1, the AmeriCorps Director and Associate MSA Program Directors build balanced site teams based on Site Director and Member input, skills, and demographics. In Week 2, Members engage in team building exercises with their site teams and begin volunteer recruitment training. During this week, Members learn about the dynamics of their particular sites and conduct detailed site planning exercises, which include program simulation, curriculum development, and site visits to observe their schools and the neighborhoods in which they reside. Members will be made aware of the rules regarding prohibited activities for themselves and their generated volunteers at the initial orientation, and monitored throughout their service.

Throughout the year, Members meet with their Site Directors and team daily to review and prepare lessons. The AmeriCorps Director meets with each Member monthly, and leads semi-monthly AmeriCorps group meetings for reflection, team building, and professional development. The training program builds throughout the year, beginning with Tenacity's approach to academic engagement, classroom and behavior management, tennis/fitness instruction, and goal-setting for their Tenacity

## Narratives

experience, as well as a review of the history and current state of urban education. In the second month, Members train in curriculum development, time management, and advanced classroom management. Halfway through the year, training goes into greater depth on past trainings, and Members also explore project management, leadership, and discussion on their professional life after Tenacity. In early spring, Members begin to explore their roles for the summer, and continue to hone their management abilities. They complete their service through leadership roles in Tenacity's summer program offering free, fun daily tennis and reading time for any Boston youth ages 6-16. Members run a summer site, supervise volunteers, and oversee program delivery. This capstone experience enables Members to bring together the leadership and teaching skills honed during the school year.

### Member Supervision

Tenacity's full-time Site Directors oversee Members' daily activities, and the two Associate MSA Directors give the overall direction to the site teams. The AmeriCorps Director oversees the overall integration of the AmeriCorps program, and intervenes should any performance challenges arise to discuss a solution with site staff and/or Members. The Site Director hosts one-on-one meetings with all site staff at least once a month, which dovetail with the AmeriCorps Director's monthly meetings. Site Directors are selected through a rigorous 3-stage interview process, in which candidates first meet with both Associate MSA Directors, then return for a second-round situational interview in which they simulate lesson delivery. Finally, candidates meet with the President & Founder for final selection. All Site Directors receive three weeks of initial training, which includes AmeriCorps regulations and prohibited activities. Site Directors benefit from weekly professional development sessions, to which Members are also often invited, focusing on such topics as program delivery, supervision, evaluation and best practice sharing. While in service, Members support site teams, and volunteers aid both.

### Member Experience

From the outset, Members will be steeped in both the critical role they are destined to play in creating the foundation for Tenacity's students on our Pathway, and the first steps they are making on their own path of lifelong civic engagement. Through service, Members will get first-hand experience with underserved communities. During their on-going training, they will explore the widespread reasons for the entrenched academic problems that poverty creates. Throughout, Tenacity will emphasize that

## Narratives

Member contribution is part of a long-term effort to support underserved communities and as such, they will emerge at the very least lifelong advocates for educational justice. The roles they will assume and the process of coming to understand the nature of the crisis in urban education will be challenging; therefore, monthly meetings with the AmeriCorps Director will provide many opportunities for discussion and reflection. An important source of support and inspiration will be knowledge of and exposure to the efforts of other AmeriCorps Members and the vast network to which they are connected beyond their immediate surroundings. Our Members will fully participate in AmeriCorps Opening Day, which offers a rich opportunity to meet other Members and learn about the breadth of service activities across Massachusetts. It is after this event of inspiration and service that the Director finds that Members more fully understand the power of AmeriCorps and national service. From this point on, the Director will capitalize on the awareness by sharing with Members news about AmeriCorps Alumni organizations and their dedication to lifelong service.

Tenacity has been very proud to be an AmeriCorps program and shares our collaboration broadly. For example, our annual Gala attracts hundreds of community members from various backgrounds, and Members are recognized as part of the evening's program. We also feature the AmeriCorps Members' activities in the Tenacity newsletters, highlighting the powerful impact of their service for an audience of thousands of community members and Tenacity supporters, including other nonprofit organizations, Boston Public Schools, school administrators, government officials, foundations, and private companies.

### Volunteer Generation

Volunteers are vital to our program delivery by supporting Members and staff in offering customized, small group attention by assisting Members in either the literacy or fitness rotation stations. Members recruit and manage volunteers only for direct service roles, which do not involve prohibited activities. Members guide volunteers in making meaningful contributions, and the presence of volunteers gives Members the opportunity to go deeper by allowing them to focus their attention on specific student challenges that arise. Members play a key role in helping to recruit the 130-160 volunteers needed from areas around their sites. Members and site teams can find volunteers who are often more representative of the community served. All volunteers are screened and cleared by the Human Resources Department, and then assigned to partner sites. Volunteers receive an orientation prior to

## **Narratives**

service on our program components, behavior management, and a review of prohibited activities. More specific training occurs at each site overseen by a Member using a centrally prepared method. Members act as coaches to volunteers and Site Directors directly supervise volunteers.

### Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

Tenacity has always been proud of its relationship with AmeriCorps. Branding the Massachusetts Service Alliance and AmeriCorps logos will occur through our website, newsletters, and all marketing materials that permit logos. Tenacity publishes and sends a variety of marketing materials throughout the year that reach thousands of people. Members wear an ID badge that includes the AmeriCorps logo at all times while they are in service. All materials for Members feature the Massachusetts Service Alliance and AmeriCorps logos.

## **Organizational Capability**

### Organizational Background and Staffing

Founded in 1999 and inspired by President & Founder Ned Eames' belief in the power of tennis to catalyze youth development and school success, Tenacity's mission is to improve the scholastic, character, and physical development of urban youth through a combination of academic support and tennis/fitness instruction with a focus on life skills and family engagement. During his middle school and teen years, Ned resided in a low-income housing project when he was introduced to and fully engaged with the sport of tennis. It was this opportunity during his youth that provided him with the feeling of belonging, the development of important life-skills, and the confidence and drive to persist in school despite his circumstances. Thus Tenacity's Middle School Academy launched, serving 40 BPS youth. In 2007, Tenacity added College Prep to continue its services in high school, supporting MSA graduates academically and socially to ensure graduation. In 2011, the Elementary School Program launched for 4th & 5th graders. Today, our Pathway to Post-Secondary Success programs serve 1,100 BPS students. Tenacity's long-term goal is to increase the number of at-risk youth that complete post-secondary programs.

Tenacity has over a decade of experience in implementing MSA and demonstrable student outcomes. We have a dedicated full time site staff at each of our sites, in turn overseen by our two Associate Middle School Academy Program Directors. Site staff is responsible for the day-to-day program

## Narratives

delivery at their specific sites, while the Associate Program Directors oversee the overall curriculum structure, site performance, and program operations. The Operations Department also supports MSA, and provides human resources, logistical assistance, financial support and analysis, and maintains and analyzes all program-related data and metrics.

AmeriCorps Director Paula Coyle will oversee AmeriCorps. Prior to joining Tenacity, Paula managed the AmeriCorps Program at Citizen Schools, where she significantly raised the AmeriCorps Program retention rate to 90%--a rate she has sustained during her time at Tenacity. Prior to Citizen Schools, Paula founded the Academic Support Center at Benjamin Franklin Institute where she was also the Dean of Students. Before that, she worked as a Site Leader in City Year, overseeing a team of 8-14 AmeriCorps Members. She was also the Associate Dean of Students at Allegheny College. With a Master's Degree in Intercultural Relations from Lesley University, Paula has an academic background in empowering young and diverse populations. As Tenacity's AmeriCorps Director, Paula is responsible for all compliance, as well as selecting, training, and continuously building Members' sense of service throughout the grant cycle.

Paula also directs Member orientation and trains staff on AmeriCorps expectations. She instructs program staff on grant administrative requirements, AmeriCorps compliance, and supervision during initial training, and provides support through site visits and meetings. Our Vice President of Operations, Ian Schneiderman, will lead the financial orientation and assist in administering AmeriCorps. Ian brings over 20 years of experience as an information technology executive. The Chief Financial Officer, Rob Lapidus, will support Ian. Rob has a wealth of prior experience, and with him at the helm, we received exemplary feedback when the MA Service Alliance reviewed Tenacity's financial systems.

Paula and Middle School Academy Associate Program Director Brian Tuttle create and implement a comprehensive Member training program. Brian's background includes curriculum development for various organizations and 7 years of experience working in our MSA, including work as a Site Director. Tenacity strategically provides Members with the information and skills they need to begin their service successfully, and then revisits and deepens skills throughout the year through additional training at semi-monthly meetings. Tenacity uses input from Members and site staff to target training, as well as structured reflection, team building, and professional development opportunities to

## Narratives

ensure that Members learn throughout the year, ending their service empowered for ongoing service with youth.

Tenacity maintains a comprehensive database to track data across all program elements. Vice President of Operations Ian Schneiderman oversees all evaluation with the support of an Operations Team that maintains and updates our database. Luke Gorman, Associate Middle School Academy Director, will be responsible for the dissemination and collection of data from each school site. Luke has been at Tenacity for five years first serving as a site leader and later acquiring greater management roles. Additionally, one of our key organizational goals for the coming year is to enhance our evaluation systems with the support of an outside evaluator and the new position of AmeriCorps Administrative Assistant, to be filled by September 2013.

Tenacity has five years of experience with the AmeriCorps Program, during which time we have managed our Members effectively. We have used this gap year as a strategic opportunity to align our evaluation methods more fully with the new CNCS performance measures. Tenacity also has years of experience with government funding, most notably federal Supplemental Education Services (SES) funding for Title I schools, which Tenacity has successfully administered at each of our partner schools. When Massachusetts received a No Child Left Behind waiver for SES funds, Boston Public Schools consolidated their funds, and from among 30 program delivery partners selected only six, of which Tenacity was the third highest recipient.

Because AmeriCorps Members are central to the Middle School Academy, all organizational staff support them. Overseen by President & Founder Ned Eames, Tenacity is divided into an Operations Department, Development Department, and Pathway Programs, each with their own director and support staff. Under the leadership of the AmeriCorps Director, the Operations Department and Pathway Programs work together to oversee the AmeriCorps Program. The Development Team works diligently to generate the revenue and resources necessary to provide quality services at no cost to the students we serve. Department leaders regularly meet with Tenacity's 17-member Board of Directors throughout the year to present program and organization updates, including the status of MSA and our Members. While the AmeriCorps Director is charged with ensuring compliance and encouraging service leadership, all organizational employees contribute to achieving success in these areas.

## Narratives

### Sustainability

Tenacity has already mobilized a range of public and private funding partners, resulting in over \$1 million in funds raised this fiscal year, with projections of over \$3.4 million in support toward the long-term sustainability of the Middle School Academy. With a strong funding base, and the close partnership with the Boston Public Schools reinforced by assurances of continued funding, MSA is sustainable for the foreseeable future. BPS's strong support for an expanded partnership will encourage funders to further invest in MSA's high impact potential. Our annual revenue is generated through individuals (40%), foundations (37%), events (14%), government (8%), and corporate support (1%). Tenacity has 13 years of experience in increasing our annual revenue to accommodate program growth.

AmeriCorps is a crucial element of our strategy to expand and enhance our program, and our proven track record in engaging donors, partners, and volunteers will assure that MSA can integrate these extended services into our ongoing operations. Tenacity raises substantial resources toward MSA that constitute our AmeriCorps program grantee match. The AmeriCorps program will increase Tenacity's ability to raise funds, in-kind resources, and human resources to sustain it beyond the grant period by facilitating our MSA's expansion and deepening its capacity to impact student outcomes, engage Tenacity families in student success, increase the number and diversity of volunteers, and strengthen our school partnerships. After the AmeriCorps grant's completion, the AmeriCorps Director would transition into directing the volunteer effort to ensure that community investment grows.

As our crucial partner in determining our program's outreach, Tenacity expects an even stronger continued partnership with BPS as it addresses the urgent need to increase high school and post-secondary completion. Each of our partner schools are involved with our program design, student recruitment, family engagement, and providing data on student performance by which we can assess and adjust MSA. Families offer feedback on program quality and specific information on their children. Boston Centers for Youth & Families contribute tennis facilities, and the Mayor's Office helps fund our capstone summer program. New Balance offers in-kind support and the space for our headquarters at a reduced rate. Our funders enable our MSA to have access to quality resources crucial to our ability to deepen our impact. Tenacity's management team participates in all Boston Partnership Council committees. Founded by the Mayor, the Council brings together leaders and their

## Narratives

resources from community-based organizations to create a more collaborative, cross-sector endeavor to improve youth education.

### Compliance and Accountability

Tenacity's AmeriCorps Director oversees all compliance and accountability seeing to it that all staff and Members are well aware of AmeriCorps expectations and prohibited activities. Site Directors continuously supervise Members while on site at each partner school and are charged with overseeing the Middle School Academy at their specific location. Site Directors are prepared with three weeks of initial training at the start of Tenacity employment which specifically includes AmeriCorps regulations and prohibited activities. In support of the Site Directors and Middle School Academy as a whole, the AmeriCorps Director ensures program quality by conducting site visits, providing ongoing consultations, and offering guidance about Member management at each site. MSA staff and Members also have an AmeriCorps handbook which provides all necessary information on compliance. Site Staff are charged with immediate reporting of any compliance breach. The Director conducts monthly site visits at each partner school to monitor and ensure compliance. Instance of compliance violations would be investigated and resolved by the AmeriCorps Director and VP of Operations, and would be brought to the attention of the Massachusetts Service Alliance if they were severe.

### Demonstrated Compliance, Enrollment, Retention

Across past AmeriCorps grants, Tenacity has demonstrated strong Member and financial compliance. We faced a weakness in communicating changes on the performance measures needing adjustment as well as evaluation methods and collection. During this gap year in AmeriCorps funding, Tenacity became more fully aligned with AmeriCorps performance measures. Despite demonstrated impact as reflected in our students' 95% high school graduation rate and better performance on the state-wide standardized exam compared with non-participants, it was challenging to report on annual student progress as required for AmeriCorps due to our use of the GRADE. For the next grant cycle, Tenacity has created a powerful new database to gather and analyze all program-related data. Our partnership agreements in the coming grant cycle will include commitments from the schools to complete teacher surveys for reporting on AmeriCorps outcomes. Measurement will be based on semi-annual student

## **Narratives**

and teacher surveys, which will be complemented by data from school records. An external consultant will help design and ensure our survey instruments are reliable and keyed to our specific academic engagement indicators. We will use detailed tracking on our measurement targets. In the second semester of the 2012-13 school year, we will pilot our measures to ensure their efficacy.

Tenacity's Member enrollment has been strong, with a rate of 100%, and we successfully filled all of our slots in each year of program operation since 2007. Last year, we experimented with part-time slots, one of which was filled quickly by a strong candidate and the other proved impossible to fill due to a lack of available part-time candidates. Tenacity worked with the Massachusetts Service Alliance to convert the remaining part-time slot into two minimum-time slots. Both were successfully filled with exceptionally qualified individuals.

During the last full year of program operation, Tenacity maintained a Member retention rate of 90%. We lost two Members. One Member returned home due to difficulty adjusting to urban life, while another, despite intensive coaching and counsel, was not able to provide a level of service representative of AmeriCorps expectations and was let go. To avoid similar setbacks, Tenacity refined the interview process in an effort to ensure reasons for leaving the program are minimized through more targeted questions.

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

#### Cost Effectiveness

Tenacity's AmeriCorps budget is cost effective in utilizing the skill sets brought by Members to enhance the quality and expand the quantity of services, both in terms of executing the curriculum and recruiting volunteers. In asking for 28 full-time members to serve alongside our projected 15 full time site staff and 130-160 volunteers, Tenacity will be able to serve additional school sites. The cost of living in Boston is approximately 30% higher than the average city, and we are raising our stipend from the minimum of \$12,100 to \$15,000, in addition to supplying our Members with monthly subway passes and shared site computers. These costs will total 30% above the minimum stipend. The travel portion of the budget accounts for the Annual Grantee Meeting, the Financial Management Institute, and the National Conference on Service and Volunteering. Full time staff who work with Members receive full-time staff benefits, which collectively account for 15% of their wages.

## Narratives

Our requested funds do not exceed the maximum cost per Member Service Year. Tenacity requests the maximum cost per MSY, which is approximately 45% of our project budget. We will provide a 55% match. The CNCS share is entirely devoted to direct Member costs, while Tenacity's share provides the staff support, professional development, and all resources and materials. All of our funding comes from our general operating revenue sources: individuals, corporate sponsors, foundations, government, and event revenue. The total AmeriCorps project will account for approximately 22.5% of our budget, with the Tenacity match portion accounting for 12% and the CNCS contribution for 10.5%. Tenacity has received previous AmeriCorps funding through formula grants, and we were always successful in raising our required match amounts.

We will obtain \$453,663 from non-CNCS sources, or 55% of the total AmeriCorps budget, to support the project. As of the beginning of this fiscal year on September 1, 2012, Tenacity has raised \$514,390 from foundations, over \$470,000 from individuals, \$54,500 from events, over \$15,730 in corporate gifts, and \$16,100 of in-kind support. For this fiscal year, Tenacity plans to secure \$1,250,000 from individuals, \$1,170,000 from foundations, \$250,000 in government support, \$450,000 from events, and \$5,000 in corporate gifts toward our general operation. As the core program in Tenacity's long-term approach, most of our fundraising is geared toward the Middle School Academy. We partner with dozens of foundations, both ongoing and new collaborations, and this year began a three-year term as a Boston Marathon charity, with a goal of raising at least \$70,000 each year. Most support from events is generated by Tenacity's annual Gala.

Over their lifetime, a high school dropout costs Massachusetts \$122,227, while a high school graduate contributes \$344,796 in taxes and a college graduate contributes \$948,013 (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2012). MSA invests \$6,000 per student per year, of which CNCS would contribute \$1,300. Our program contributes to a return on investment to the community of between \$467,023 and \$1,070,240 over the lifetime of our students. The AmeriCorps program is a cost effective way of addressing a vital need among BPS students for increased support during middle schools years to promote high school and post-secondary completion. Tenacity's 95% graduation rate shows that our pathway approach centered on MSA effectively addresses this need. Members also extend our current capacity and ongoing sustainability by engaging, training, and supporting volunteers.

Budget Adequacy

## Narratives

The budget reflects the higher than average cost of living expenses in the Boston area. It ensures an adequate percentage of resources to provide our Members with the program and site-level of supervision they need to be successful, as well as adequate resources for our members to have the tools, equipment, and training they need to be able to perform and grow. Criminal history checks and FBI checks are included in our budget. By creating site teams that include a contingent of AmeriCorps Members, the teams will have the human resources to expand and deepen Tenacity's support to students and fulfill our mission.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

During our last grant cycle, Tenacity evaluated our literacy program through district-wide exams. The MSA management team analyzed these results and worked with site staff and Members to adjust their lesson plans accordingly. MSA management team members visited each site periodically to observe program quality and highlight areas for improvement and recognition, and met weekly to review program progress based on these results and site staff assessments. The AmeriCorps Director assessed Member and site performance, and had regular feedback meetings with Members. Over the next grant cycle, we will continue to analyze results from the MCAS and conduct management and AmeriCorps status meetings, and enlist an outside evaluator to design teacher and student surveys, as well as more robust evaluation mechanisms.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A