

Narratives

Executive Summary

The Service Collaborative of WNY's AmeriCorps Builds Lives through Education (ABLE) program will concentrate on the CNCS Focus Area of Education in 2013-14. Based on eight successful years of service, ABLE will place 194 full, minimum-time and Education Award Only members in public schools and community organizations located in some of Buffalo and Western New York's most impoverished neighborhoods. Member service will design and implement educational programming that will increase the academic engagement and achievement of over 3,000 children. A CNCS investment of \$1,440,804 will be matched with a significant applicant contribution of \$1,520,856.

Rationale and Approach

1.a. Need: Buffalo, New York's Public Schools are in the midst of an educational crisis; talk of a state takeover has loomed in the shadows for years. Living in the third poorest city in the country, children are in dire need of a safe, supportive and quality educational environment. The established education infrastructure is failing them. Plagued with low academic achievement, high dropout rate and high absenteeism, compounded with a volatile management/union relationship, the community is frustrated and desperate for innovation and change.

For over eight years, The Service Collaborative of WNY (TSCWNY) has infused hope into public schools in Buffalo and Niagara Falls through the AmeriCorps Builds Lives through Education (ABLE) program. ABLE has established itself as the primary provider of high-quality national service tutoring and educational support to students and has the experience and established relationships to broaden its impact on individual students and the community as a whole. Aligned with the CNCS Focus Area of Education, ABLE will specifically address the critical educational issues of low-student achievement, low-student engagement, and the need for more thorough teacher preparation.

The ABLE program will continue to work in the poorest neighborhoods in the Western New York (WNY) region, with a focus on the City of Buffalo. Over 80% of Buffalo Public School (BPS) children are eligible for Free/Reduced lunches. According to the New York State (NYS) Community Action Association's 2011 NYS Poverty Report, almost 30% of Buffalo residents live in poverty, twice that of NYS. The number of children living in poverty (43.5%) is three times higher than the national average. The NYS Education Department (NYSED) appointed Distinguished Educator Judy Elliott this fall to develop a plan to improve Buffalo's failing schools. She is the first Distinguished Educator ever appointed in NYS to assist a low-performing district. This plan will recommend how to accelerate the improvement of students, with specific emphasis on 28 persistently low-achieving schools; nearly

Narratives

half of the 59 schools in the Buffalo Public School District are among the worst five percent in NYS. Profound problems permeate the entire district, affecting all 32,000 students in various ways. Less than one third of elementary and middle school students perform at grade level in reading or math. NYS Assessment Scores in 2011-12 for Grades 3-8 in both Math and Literacy show less than 35% scored three or above (Meets Proficiency Standard). Minority students in Grades K-12 did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress in English Language Arts or Mathematics. Only half of all BPS students graduate from high school. Truancy is rampant in Buffalo Public Schools; in a recent report, one-third of high school students missed more than seven weeks of school and nearly half of kindergartners missed nearly a month.

1.b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly effective Means to Solve Community Problems: To meet the need for greater student achievement and more effective educational environments, ABLE members will be placed in full and part-time service in identified classrooms and out-of-school academic programs. They will focus on two main activities: 1. Creating and delivering academic support within the classroom. 2. Providing direct tutoring to students in-need. These activities will be convened in accordance with AmeriCorps regulations, based on current ABLE best practices, and tailored to student, school, and community needs.

100 Full-time (FT) members are being requested for two activities. The first activity proposed for 35 FT members is the development and implementation of tailored academic programming, under the tutelage of an experienced (certified) teacher. ABLE members will play a dynamic and transformational role at a number of public and charter schools throughout Western New York, in grades K-12, and all serving children living in extreme poverty. Members will participate in teacher-assisted lesson planning, the delivery of Common Core subject-specific lessons, and special projects within each class. They will help identify individual and student needs, research best practices and design projects to meet those needs in cooperation with their site supervisor, who in most cases is the building Principal. Secondly, 65 FT members and 30 Educational Award Only (EAO) members will participate in "push-in" and "pull-out" tutoring at schools and educational partner organizations. This tutoring approach is modeled after a proven-effective program called Reading Recovery, employs one-to-one, specialized tutoring, and has been found to increase student performance. During "push-in" tutoring, ABLE members will work with students that are struggling to understand information being taught. Likewise, during "pull-out" tutoring, the member will provide instruction outside of the classroom. Students in need will receive tutoring at least three times per week for a total of ~1.5 hours. This will ensure students who are scoring well-below grade level on assessments receive the intensive

Narratives

remedial work and personal attention they need, while enabling classroom teachers to maintain the current pace of learning without neglecting those in need of extra assistance. Lastly, 64 minimum-time (MT) members will provide intense academic enrichment during summer programming at three sites. Sessions will be held Monday through Friday for a minimum of four hours per day.

In order to measure similar CNCS Outputs and Outcomes, members will assist teachers in developing annual goals and learning objectives for students, as well as track data and student progress towards these goals. Members will be held to the same high standards as classroom teachers by their supervisor and measured according to the NYSED Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR), including classroom observations. They will review this evaluation with their classroom teacher and site supervisor and determine areas of success, plans for improvement, and sustainability strategies. In addition to these primary activities, ABLE members will organize service projects with their students and fellow ABLE members. FT ABLE members will be required to create and deliver at least three service projects during their term. This service will not only meet a community need, but provide the ABLE members with opportunities to develop as civic leaders through service.

Without ABLE members, partner sites would have less academic and personal student support. Students that are not diagnosed learning disabled, but are still in need of academic remediation, may not otherwise receive the extra help needed in order to maintain grade level performance. Their presence sets a positive tone in the classroom with students while allowing the teacher to focus on the class as a whole. The involvement of members as educators and role models demonstrate to urban youth the value and importance of community and service.

TSCWNY is requesting 100 FT members(1700 hours), 30 Reduced half-time EAO members(675 hours), and 64 MT members(300 hours), for a total of 194 slots(124.97 MSY). FT members will serve 35-40 hours per week for a year. EAO members will serve part-time 15-20 hours per week for a year. MT members will serve 40 hours per week for eight weeks. Members will serve at partner sites, either BPS, charter schools or academically-focused out-of-school programs throughout WNY that serve impoverished and at-risk youth. Three FT members in their second year of service will be designated "Team Captains" and will develop ongoing leadership and networking opportunities for fellow ABLE members. The types of slots requested are based on years of program experience and partner feedback. In order to place a member at a site, potential partners must submit a thorough response to a Request For Proposal (RFP) process. This application requires sites to develop a plan that identifies their own organization's needs and how members can help to increase their own capacity and better serve students. The varying slot types align with the program design and will accommodate the

Narratives

specific needs of a potential partner site, ensuring a positive experience for both members and participating partners.

1.c. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact: Consistent with the W.K. Kellogg Program Logic Model, the ABLE program has developed interventions that will result in improved teaching, and therefore improved learning and student performance. This model recognizes that the work of ABLE members links community and school resources with structured activities such as data-driven instruction, resulting in measurable, long-term impacts. In order to link planned work with intended results, the program requires a theory of change that identifies how activities are expected to affect outcomes. For example, ABLE members perform specific approved activities such as assisting with lesson planning, organizing field trips, and remedial instruction with small groups. Based on extensive, ongoing partner and community feedback and direct member service, this evidence informed approach will lead to more effective teaching, a more positive learning environment, increased student engagement, and a final result of increased student achievement. A similar approach has been adopted by the NYS Board of Regents which oversees the largest education system in the country. The Regents Reform Agenda was designed in 2009 in an effort to transform NYS' educational system and is based on the following principles: Implementing Common Core standards and developing curriculum and assessments aligned to these standards to prepare students for success in college and the workplace; Building instructional data systems that measure student success and inform teachers and principals how they can improve their practice in real time; Recruiting, developing, retaining, and rewarding effective teachers and principals; and, Turning around the lowest-achieving schools. The ABLE program complements all four facets of this plan and supports the premise for the model above. Members will participate in activities that address the four components of this plan: they will implement Common Core standards with teachers; assess students and use data to create student learning objectives with teachers; understand the Annual Professional Performance Review system prior to entering the full-time profession of teaching; and, have immeasurable experience working with urban youth in underperforming schools.

The impact of AmeriCorps investment will be long-term and substantially impact students in Buffalo. Data from the 2007-11 American Community Survey reflects almost 20% of Buffalo residents did not graduate from high school, and only 23% have a Bachelor's degree or higher. Last year, almost 50% of BPS students did not graduate. This is a trend that will have a catastrophic effect on the region, if not rectified. According to The Buffalo News, in Buffalo, 45% of individuals without high school diplomas live in poverty. Improving education in Buffalo has the potential to increase the tax base and

Narratives

maintain and attract new businesses due to a stronger, more skilled workforce. The ABLE program additionally impacts the quality of new teachers entering the workforce. It provides them with a year of hands-on industry experience in a rapidly changing urban environment, while building a portfolio of unique skills and a civic minded teaching philosophy for schools seeking qualified teachers.

The ABLE program will continue to have a profound impact on a minimum of 9,000 children in-need in Buffalo and WNY over the next three years by focusing on the CNCS Education K-12 Objective and utilizing national standard performance measures to demonstrate significant community impact.

Proposed Interventions-Classroom Teaching, Tutoring-Small Group, and Summer Learning Programs will be based on the overarching community need to improve the quality of education and increase student achievement. Aligned Outputs for Classroom Teaching and Tutoring-Small Group will measure ED1: Number of students who start in a CNCS-supported education program and (Priority)ED2: Number of students who completed K-12 education programs. Aligned Outcomes for Classroom Teaching and Tutoring-Small Group will measure (Priority)ED27: Number of students in mentoring/tutoring programs with improved academic engagement, (Priority)ED5: Number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math and (Priority) ED2: Number of students who completed K-12 education programs. ABLE designed an additional Output and Outcome for the Summer Learning Programs due to the fact that the above measures are only applicable to year-long programs. Although not required, past Summer Learning Programs achieved significant results and are worthy of reporting due to the impact it had on hundreds of children over a brief time period. Thus, ABLE will again measure the number of students that attend Summer Learning Programs, the number of students who complete a Summer Learning Program, and the number of students in a Summer Learning Program with improved academic engagement.

Each grant year, out of the total number of students served, ABLE Classroom members (35 MSY's) will serve 650 students, 93% will complete a full year of academic services resulting in 75% or 453 students will demonstrate improved academic engagement and improved academic performance in literacy and/or math. ABLE Tutor members (76.43 MSY's) will serve 1170 students, 75% will complete a full year of academic services. As a result, 75% or 658 students who have completed a full year of academic services will demonstrate improved academic engagement and improved academic performance in literacy and/or math. Summer Learning Program members (13.54 MSY's) will serve 930 students, 90% will complete the program. As a result, 75% or 628 students who complete the program will demonstrate improved academic engagement. In order to measure Outputs, ABLE staff will quantify the number of students that begin and end the classroom program, including those

Narratives

students tutored in the Summer Learning Program through daily attendance records maintained by the school and educational partners. The improved academic engagement Outcome will be measured utilizing a pre/post teacher survey designed by ABLE staff, based on the NYSED Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness. Improved academic performance will be measured by a combination of NYSED approved assessments administered throughout the school year. Student progress will be monitored/tracked by each school differently; however, the assessment method throughout the year will be consistent with NYSED regulations, enabling members to track the scores of each student. To continue to measure Output, FT members will complete a report at the close of each quarter, and MT and EAO members will complete one report at the close of their term: the report will measure the number of students served and retention among students in the Program. This ongoing collection of data will be utilized to develop consistent reports in a timely manner for the NY State Commission.

Performance Measure (PM) targets are identified through a combination of successful program delivery experiences (e.g. NYSED's Annual Report Card on existing ABLE partner schools, preliminary Program evaluation results, and feedback from local education leaders). Information regarding community needs was gathered through annual site surveys and 2012-13 ABLE Requests for Partnership Proposals. Extensive research on new NYSED regulations and current BPS issues was conducted in order to understand the overarching student needs including State and Federal expectations of students, teachers and schools over the next three years.

The ABLE program has seen great success in the improvement of educational environments in Buffalo. The final Performance Report for the 2011-12 contract year reflects achievements well beyond the target goals of serving disadvantaged children and youth through tutoring and educational out-of-school programs. National PM #1 Tutoring reported 75% of the 7,031 students saw an increase in their academic improvement; PM #1 Participant Development reported 100% member participation; PM #2 Strengthening Communities reported 2,940 volunteers recruited and 54,350 hours served.

1.d. Member Recruitment: Based on current successful practices, ABLE will recruit from a diverse range of ongoing partners, specifically those who train, employ and serve underrepresented populations throughout WNY. Through a detailed local and national strategic recruitment plan, ABLE staff carries out their duty to provide equal opportunities to every American, demonstrated by the diversity of the current ABLE class, consisting of one-third underrepresented populations. ABLE staff presents information to local college students interested in pursuing careers in education, with an

Narratives

interest in working within an urban setting. They also attend teacher recruitment days and host open houses and informational sessions at a variety of local nonprofits. In addition, there are regular postings on TSCWNY.org, AmeriCorps.gov, college websites, social media outlets, United Way newsletters, WNY Service Learning Coalition newsletters and email blasts to ABLE alums. Partner sites publicize service opportunities within their respective communities. ABLE continues to forge new community relationships to enhance recruitment with local nonprofits such as the International Institute to engage new Americans, veterans through AmeriCorps VISTA, and retired and/or unemployed individuals through the BPS Adult Education system. A comprehensive three pronged background check is run for each member which is based on the National Service Criminal History Check (CHC) screening procedure.

1.e. Member Training: The ABLE program has developed a reputation as a premier service opportunity for individuals interested in pursuing a career in the education field, attracting members nation-wide. Member development and training is an ongoing, monthly, process and all members are required to participate. All active ABLE members attend a two-day pre-service orientation to introduce them to AmeriCorps and its history, the Western New York area, community statistics and neighborhood tours. Every site is required to develop a training plan that provides members with a thorough understanding of the community they are serving in and their specific responsibilities at that site. The ABLE monthly training curriculum is based on a unique combination of the most recent NYSED requirements for teachers and introductions to professional development activities members may pursue at their site such as the Danielson Framework for Teaching, data gathering, and reporting. In addition to the education-based training, members are given the opportunity to choose sessions based on their experience and need. Sessions include: Becoming an Excellent Leader Inside and Outside the Classroom, Bullying Prevention, Working Cross Culturally, ELL Strategies, Communication with Peers, Dropout Prevention, Financial Literacy, and Red Cross Emergency Preparedness. In addition, sessions on pertinent education 'hot topics' and current events are scheduled. Members are also surveyed anonymously to ensure relevant feedback and are instructed how to complete the same on-site training required of school staff, such as APPR and Common Core standards.

At the outset of service, both ABLE members and generated volunteers will complete training regarding prohibited activities as per 45 CFR 2520.45 and 45 CFR 2520.65. Upon enrollment, ABLE members will sign a contract that outlines the rules on prohibited activities. This will continuously be reviewed and reinforced with members during orientation, ongoing trainings, and site visits.

Narratives

1.f. Member Supervision: This year's 92% retention rate demonstrates the capacity of ABLE to provide exceptional supervision, support and guidance to members. Member supervision is done jointly with primary supervision conducted daily by their site supervisors and monitored by ABLE staff. Site supervisors are selected by the authorized individual at the partner site and are identified in the site's RFP response, which is then approved by ABLE staff. The partner sites receive a contract, which outlines the expectations, regulations and policies of the program and must be shared with all site supervisors. All supervisors are required to attend the Supervisors Institute, which provides them tools for success in hosting an ABLE member. Partner sites receive a bi-weekly newsletter, informing them on program activities and inter-site communication. In addition, ABLE conducts site visits to assist with supervision and monitoring. A site monitoring tool is used at the initial and mid-year site visits to ensure all policies, rules and regulations are being followed and no prohibited activities are being performed. At these site visits, supervisors and members often discuss concerns and request assistance in handling site-related issues as well as educational resources to improve their effectiveness with students. Pre/post service year site surveys help assess success.

1.g. Member Experience: The very nature of providing at-risk youth with the opportunity to pursue a better life will provide ABLE members with a meaningful experience. ABLE identifies sites that share the AmeriCorps passion and mission to provide a service with a significant community impact. As AmeriCorps alums, the ABLE Director and Program Manager utilize their years of service and personal experiences to design/implement meaningful and impactful opportunities for each member. They are personally vested in the process and meet with ABLE staff multiple times per week to discuss all aspects of the service experience and discuss two critical questions: What are you doing for the AmeriCorps members? What are you doing for the ABLE program? This ongoing dialogue ensures the infusion of the National Service and AmeriCorps identity and provides the basis for activities that support member reflection and learning from their service. Members are encouraged to maintain ongoing communication and sharing of best practices and are provided networking opportunities with industry professionals during monthly trainings and Team Captain gatherings. They participate in Meaning of Service (NYS Council for Humanities) sessions; discuss and reflect on how to become more civically engaged citizens; and, work with the ABLE staff as to how to continue their path of service once their term is completed.

ABLE staff ensure members understand their roles as both ABLE and AmeriCorps members and provide partner sites with a clear understanding of their relationship with AmeriCorps. Each site is required to orient staff and their community in regards to the Program and must display an

Narratives

"AmeriCorps Serves Here" poster.

It is well documented that when members feel connected to each other during their ABLE term, it enhances their experience and positively impacts their attitude/perspective. Starting at pre-service orientation, staff focuses on team-building and deliberate networking strategies. They help members work with other local AmeriCorps program Team Leaders to plan AmeriCorps Week activities and larger scale service projects that involve hundreds of AmeriCorps members, the local RSVP program and Habitat for Humanity members. They are also invited to attend the annual NYS AmeriCorps kick-off in Albany, NY to meet national service participants from across the state and share their experiences. The mission of AmeriCorps is central to every aspect of the program. Thus, all ABLE communication materials include the AmeriCorps logo and staff is always in AmeriCorps apparel when in the community.

1.h. Volunteer Generation: The recruitment and engagement of volunteers plays an integral role in each member's service experience. Members are required to design a service project and generate community volunteers to assist in the implementation of the activities. Such programs expand educational opportunity at each site and fill a gap in service due to limited staff and budgets within the schools. Members work closely with staff from the WNY Regional Volunteer Center (RVC) at TSCWNY, which trains members on how to post volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers via VolunterWNY.org. The ability of the ABLE staff and members to recruit and manage volunteers is increased exponentially due to the willingness of partner sites to communicate volunteer opportunities on behalf of the Program. ABLE staff oversees all volunteer engagement to ensure they are only participating on allowable activities. Because members and supervisors are informed of prohibited activities at the beginning, and during, the program year, they are relied on to produce volunteer opportunities that do not engage volunteers in prohibited or unallowable activities. This is reinforced during the RVC training, and maintained by staff throughout the year.

1.i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: TSCWNY has an ongoing commitment to 'branding' national service. The ABLE program consistently publicizes its affiliation with AmeriCorps on all forms of communication with the public and collaborative partners such as the TSCWNY website, Facebook, Twitter, member uniforms, press releases, etc. In each partner's contract, it outlines the AmeriCorps branding requirements. At partner site visits, ABLE staff reviews these requirements and ensure they are being followed as outlined within the site monitoring tool.

Organizational Capability

2.a. Organizational Background and Staffing: TSCWNY creates opportunities for all individuals to

Narratives

serve their communities, challenging them to turn their ideals into action and their passion into positive change. Through transformational service and civic responsibility, TSCWNY is designing a sustainable future for our nation's communities. As an independent non-profit organization, TSCWNY has been recognized as a community leader with the capacity to identify/address community needs through direct service. ABLE, one of its most successful programs, mobilizes individuals in national service to revive/strengthen the educational environment by expanding opportunities for today's at-risk youth and by their commitment to help transform America's future - one student, one classroom and one community at a time.

TSCWNY is built on an infrastructure of responsible grant stewardship of Corporation for National and Community Service and other federal funds, producing countless quality programs involved in transformational service. In 2012, the most recent full program year, 453 AmeriCorps members served Western and Central NYS. These members served 409,433 hours at 105 non-profit organizations/schools, achieving an impressive list of accomplishments including: 23,862 volunteers recruited who provided 327,830 hours of community service; 1,086 individual service projects designed/implemented for neighborhood improvements; 17,945 children in communities-in-need were served; over 2.8 Million pounds of food was distributed to 29,187 low-income families/month; and, over \$3.3 Million in cash and in-kind resources were raised.

TSCWNY also has a formidable history in the creation/implementation of successful and innovative national service programs, particularly those focused on education. As a twice competitively funded AmeriCorps State program, ABLE partners with schools and education-focused non-profit organizations to deliver services that strengthen and revive educational environments, particularly through student tutoring. Members serve on a daily basis, operating under a unique service description that aligns with the ABLE mission. Since 2004, ABLE has served over 50,911 students through tutoring and educational programming. ABLE has also engaged ~22,239 community volunteers that have provided 160,052+ hours of service to WNY.

The ABLE Director (1.0FTE), Melissa McGreevy, B.A., is responsible for overseeing programmatic/fiscal operations including goal setting/management, budget creation/oversight, ongoing program evaluation, and maintaining established department standards. She also provides leadership, vision and quality assurance to the program and staff. Ms. McGreevy began her commitment to helping others by serving with City Year Boston and has continued helping others serve for ten years, five with TSCWNY. Reporting to the ABLE Program Director, Lauren Kalczynski, B.A., the ABLE Program Manager (1.0FTE), is responsible for day-to-day assurance that the program

Narratives

is implemented in accordance with ABLE program objectives. She also leads member recruitment and implements member trainings. An ABLE alum, Ms. Kalczynski coordinated the ABLE Recovery program in 2009 and has been with the program since then. The ABLE Assistant Program Manager (1.0FTE), Naomi Pabon-Figueroa, Ed.M, is responsible for assisting the Program Manager in providing member development support via site visits, goal setting and conflict mediation. Her previous experience managing a highly-competitive professional development internship program has strengthened ABLE member program support for over three years. The ABLE Program Assistant (1.0FTE), Matt Hanley, B.S., is responsible for member enrollment procedures, overseeing National Service Criminal History Check procedures, maintaining program databases, and ensuring that program administrative functions are compliant and met with quality and time-sensitivity. His previous experience managing high-volume recruitment at an international staffing company contributes to efficient program compliance. The Member eGrants Administrator (.75 FTE), Carol Quinnan, utilizes 11 years of experience assisting AmeriCorps programs at TSCWNY to ensure ABLE member files are maintained, members are enrolled and tracked through the eGrants system, member hours are compiled, and members are exited upon completing their terms of service. The Human Resource Coordinator for TSCWNY staff and members (.51FTE), Tina Dalka, a 10 year veteran of the agency, oversees and maintains all aspects of personnel administration and is responsible for staff and member payroll. All 1.0 FTE staff completed a course on Non-Profit Management provided by the Buffalo Chapter of the Harvard Business School Club and participated in professional development, and/or the National Conference on Volunteering and Service. Each year the NYS Office of National and Community Service requires program directors and staff responsible for financial oversight to attend a two-day AmeriCorps Program Director and Fiscal Training. Staff that complete the training incorporate material into TSCWNY financial and programmatic orientation for new/current staff. ABLE and TSCWNY, as a whole, are successful in providing needed financial/programmatic assistance to service sites. TSCWNY staff has an excellent relationship with the NYS Commission on National and Community Service and enjoys quick/informative responses to programmatic technical assistance questions. ABLE regularly uses resources available, such as AmeriCorps.gov, the eGrants Help Desk, and the National Service Knowledge Network, and provides resources to partners during the Supervisors Institute. Similarly for financial assistance, the TSCWNY Executive Committee, comprised of the Executive Director, Board Liaison, and Controller, ensures the financial health of the organization. Assistance is sought when necessary in the form of counsel from legal or the Corporation. To provide financial technical

Narratives

assistance to host sites, ABLE /TSCWNY staff provide recommendations on where to seek match funds to support members, ongoing communication strategies, needs for training and technical assistance etc. In this way, staff can identify and respond to sites' requests, providing resources and trainings through a bi-weekly newsletter and focus groups when a need is identified.

As outlined in Section I, all ABLE members participate in an orientation, monthly professional development trainings and bi-monthly site visits. The training curriculum is designed to increase the impact each member makes at their site. ABLE staff continuously meets with community members, teachers, principals and local education experts to increase knowledge of topics that would be relevant for incoming members. Professional facilitators provide high-quality, research-based trainings for pre-service and monthly training, which is consistent with NYSED academic content standards.

TSCWNY operates multiple concurrent state/federal grant programs as well as programs funded via private/corporate donors. TSCWNY Board, staff, members and partner sites are committed to consistent/accurate evaluation and work with local/national external evaluators to implement components of evaluation/data collection within their scope of work or service related to the program. ABLE staff are working with an external evaluator this year to improve collection methods in order to gather additional data to best determine and measure impact. During 2012, TSCWNY engaged the services of an external evaluator to conduct both formative and impact evaluations of the current ABLE program. The evaluation discusses performance, compliance and responsiveness of the ABLE Program (draft included with attachments). ABLE staff will utilize the information to address issues and acknowledge best practices to ensure program success.

Yearly, TSCWNY seamlessly continues its provision of national service programs to WNY, overseeing, on average, five national service programs annually. Over the last five years, TSCWNY has received competitive funding for two AmeriCorps State and one AmeriCorps National program, formula-funding for three AmeriCorps State programs, funding for three American Recovery and Reinvestment Act programs, and funding for two AmeriCorps VISTA programs. TSCWNY was also awarded two YouthBuild grants through the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development and the Dept. of Labor. TSCWNY has a proven history in its ability to manage these grants. The 2012 operating budget was \$4.8Million, with 73% or almost \$3.5Million consisting of federal grant funds. The TSCWNY Executive Director, Controller and Board Liaison oversee stringent fiscal/programmatic controls to ensure the quality of all TSCWNY grant program/operations comply with federal administrative and financial management regulations. To ensure on-site monitoring of financial systems, TSCWNY participates in an annual independent audit and semi-annual internal audit. In

Narratives

2012, an Independent A- 133 audit of TSCWNY 2011 financials reported no findings or questioned costs, affirming that TSCWNY's financial systems are sufficient in monitoring expenditures/managing federal grant funds. TSCWNY was also audited by the Office of the Inspector General and the findings were released in September 2011. The report yielded less than 1% of questioned costs.

TSCWNY has two executive level positions, Executive Director (ED) and Controller. An active Board of Directors oversees the organization as a whole. TSCWNY is led by ED, Kate Sarata, EdM, leads TSCWNY. She is a former ABLE Director, an alum of AmeriCorps VISTA and has been on staff with TSCWNY since 2006. Ms. Sarata holds certificates in Non-Profit Management from SUNY Brockport and the Harvard Business Club of Buffalo. The Controller, Kelly Stephenson, is responsible for ensuring the organization has sufficient knowledge of the legal, policy and regulatory fiscal environment and that agency resources are used efficiently/effectively within the parameters of each funding source. Ms. Stephenson has 20 years of accounting experience. TSCWNY operational staff also includes Michael Casciano, Board Liaison. His responsibilities include financial oversight of budgeting and grant operations and he is the liaison to the Board on financial and legal matters. The TSCWNY Board of Directors meets monthly and approves the agency budget, assists with fundraising, identifies and facilitates long-term strategies, and evaluates the performance of the ED.

TSCWNY, an independent non-profit organization, creates opportunities for individuals to serve by challenging them to turn their ideals into action and their passion into positive change. The agency offers several terms of service and program options for individuals with various educational and work related experiences. In addition to ABLE, TSCWNY administers Opportunity Corps, a competitively funded AmeriCorps State program; currently in its second year of operation providing financial literacy training to Buffalo's economically-disadvantaged adult citizens in non-profit and educational institutions. One of the largest and most successful VISTA programs in NYS, the Serve New York VISTA program at TSCWNY fights the injustices and causes of poverty that face individuals and communities in NYS, specifically veterans and military families and at-risk students.

2.b. Sustainability: ABLE and TSCWNY programs have been successful in securing match funds from partners over the course of operation. Through an effective contract management system and ability to offer partner sites a choice in payment plans, ABLE collected 100% of its match for the last program year. ABLE maintains regular communication with partners and is open to their changing financial needs. As necessary, payment schedules may be revised, always working to meet the goal of 100% match received. TSCWNY resources also consist of funding from local, state and city

Narratives

governments, local non-profit organizations, foundations, businesses that sponsor members for non-profit partners, charter schools, and colleges and universities. In-kind contributions also continue to grow annually, exceeding \$1.2 million in 2012. In a true public/private/non-profit partnership, TSCWNY exhibits the vibrant success that comes from these three types of entities pooling their resources to solve the area's most pressing issues. Support from community stakeholders has increased for TSCWNY as well, and is demonstrated in everything from expanded relationships with partner to increased local demand for members. For the 2012-13 program year, ABLE received an additional 52% of formal requests for members than it could accept.

The ABLE budget remains sound and enables the Program to invest in both staff and program development. Successful members also increase the capacity of the schools to deliver quality academic programming and therefore ensure the demand for members in future years.

TSCWNY recently established an exciting collaborative relationship with the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County (UWBEC). This partnership has already provided TSCWNY with immeasurable opportunities to share services and expand the region's volunteer base through the Regional Volunteer Center. New and joint initiatives with the United Way and TSCWNY will have great funding potential and result in productive new partnerships. TSCWNY understands and embraces the need to align with community organizations with complementary missions in order to expand and improve programming and the impact its programs have on the community. For example, United Way currently hosts members from three TSCWNY National Service programs. Such a variety of service programming in one centralized location increases efficiency, capacity and impact, and ensures sustainability.

The ABLE program continues to generate interest from both the public/private sectors and will explore a number of new education opportunities with United Way and other community stakeholders this year. TSCWNY will also continue to pursue new relationships with NYSED, private corporations aligned with partner schools and local foundations. An aggressive outreach campaign will be launched in the coming year to invite potential local partners to member trainings/events to expose them to the ABLE program in an effort to generate new resources.

A critical component in TSCWNY's sustainability strategy is to increase capacity to recruit and manage volunteers. The WNY Regional Volunteer Center, a part of TSCWNY, provides opportunity for community partners to learn about and utilize VolunteerWNY.org to recruit and manage volunteers. This website is a one-stop-shop to publicize and identify volunteer opportunities. It should also be highlighted that partners are regularly held to high standards and must report successes in order to sustain/grow a partnership.

Narratives

TSCWNY maintains a constant/diverse base of community partners. More than 85% of 2012-13 ABLE sites returned from the previous year, and 65% of sites have been with ABLE for 3+ years. Through these consistent partnerships, ABLE has developed partners that increase the quality/reach of service. One example partner site, Buffalo Promise Neighborhood (BPN) partnered with BPS 200 Bennett High School, BPS 80 Highgate Heights, Westminster Charter School, to grow its ability to impact students through the program). Through 15 FT members serving at BPN, 200 at-risk students are receiving personalized tutoring and will participate in service projects this school year. On a parallel path, other community partners such as Cradle Beach/Closing the Gap/United Way (partnered with BPS 45 International School, BPS 72 Lorraine Elementary, BPS 43 Lovejoy Discovery, BPS 93 Southside Elementary), Houghton College, King Center Charter School and Health Sciences Charter School all currently host over 11 members, provide invaluable feedback, and share a similar passion for children and the community. ABLE maintains an extensive ongoing network with additional educational providers in WNY including: Canisius College, Elmwood Village Charter School, Enterprise Charter School, Pinnacle Charter School, Tapestry Charter School, West Buffalo Charter School, WNY Maritime Charter School and Buffalo Niagara YMCA.

2.c. Compliance and Accountability: TSCWNY has designed a number of internal assessment tools to ensure programs remain compliant and accountable. TSCWNY operates programs in accordance with the guidelines in OMB circular A-122, which lists Cost Principles for Non Profit Organizations, the rules and regulations of CNCS and the NYS Commission of National and Community Service contract provisions. Written policies for non-profit and national service programs ensure that systems are consistent and compliant, and updated on an annual basis. Internal checks/balances are provided by the Controller. Program Directors participate in the budget process; track service site matching dollars; report program performance to the Board; and analyze program-specific Profit and Loss statements. To ensure continued excellence in service and compliance, regular monitoring is conducted with partners to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including those related to prohibited activities. ABLE's Assistant Program Manager conducts regular site visits with members/supervisors. During site visits, staff inquires about service activities, performance measurements, and overall project satisfaction. Members are also asked about prohibited activities, to ensure none of their activities could be questioned. TSCWNY maintains open communication with all partner sites; additional meetings can be arranged by TSCWNY staff, site supervisors, or members, if needed. If determined that a site has asked a member to participate in a prohibited activity, the site is automatically terminated as a partner and is unable to request future member positions. TSCWNY

Narratives

holds itself, and the partner sites, accountable if risk or non-compliance issues are identified. If the non-compliance is not associated with prohibited activities, the first warning is a face-to-face meeting with the staff member, or partner site who is in non-compliance, and the ABLE Director. This meeting is documented in writing and placed in the appropriate file. If a second issue arises, a meeting is scheduled with the ED. If a third time, the staff member or partner site will be terminated from TSCWNY.

TSCWNY serves in communities with Special Circumstances such as excessively high poverty rates. The primary area of service is Buffalo, NY where 29.9% of citizens live in poverty, over twice the poverty level for both NYS (14.5%) and the US (14.3%). According to the US Census, 43.5% of Buffalo's children live in poverty. Demonstrated Compliance: The program was in full compliance during the last program year. Enrollment: The ABLE program enrolled 100% of the slots received during the last full year of operation. Retention: Overall, retention was high for the last program year at 92.4%. Those who left the program did so due to job opportunities that better fit with their career goals/financial needs. In efforts to improve retention, ABLE staff has made strategic decisions to award more member slots to less partner sites, in order to have groups of members at each site, resulting in increased team support and member satisfaction.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

TSCWNY respectfully requests \$1,440,804 from the Corporation to continue the provision of critical academic services to over 3,000 at-risk children in Western New York, yielding significant, measurable results.

3a. Cost Effectiveness: The proposed budget is cost effective for a number of reasons. ABLE has consistently utilized the approved cost per MSY of \$12,571 throughout the duration of the current 2010-13 grant cycle, well below the maximum allowed cost. Due to the formation of extensive community partnerships and commitment of multiple resources from host sites, TSCWNY has the ability to further decrease this cost by over \$1,000 per MSY, proposing a cost of \$11,529 per MSY for 2013-14, 87% of the maximum amount of \$13,300. In an increasingly competitive national service environment, the agency proposes an overall single grantee match of 51% for Year 1, with great potential to increase annually due to the fact that some existing and potential new partner sites have the capacity to provide additional training, supervision, supplies, and materials to members. Both CNCS funding and partner investments are utilized efficiently and maximized in order to pursue additional local resources. For example, a new collaborative relationship with the United Way will provide TSCWNY with exponential administrative cost savings and endless new programmatic

Narratives

opportunities. In on-going talks with the United Way, TSCWNY has already developed a model of successful collaboration in its Regional Volunteer Center. Staff from TSCWNY and United Way will work together regularly and share community partners to maximize service. TSCWNY anticipates that additional collaborations will develop over the next year, based upon complimentary programming initiatives of the two agencies, allowing for costs to decrease administratively, but not causing a drop in services.

TSCWNY has a proven history in its ability to manage federal grants. The organization currently operates five federal and national service grants. The 2012 operating budget is \$4.8Million, with 73% or almost \$3.5Million consisting of federal grant funds. During the past five years, the agency has received funding for AmeriCorps State and National, including American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and AmeriCorps VISTA programs, totaling over \$6.6Million. The proposed ABLE Program funding request would represent 29% of the TSCWNY's total operational budget for 2013-14.

ABLE has obtained diverse resources through extensive partnerships with 40+ schools and education-related organizations. The proposed ABLE program requires \$1,520,856 through both in-kind/cash commitments from non-CNCS sources to support the program. Current partners demonstrated their commitment to partner with ABLE in the form of both in-kind and cash match. This year 17 sites have provided the following in-kind match: \$250,000 in space, over \$130,638 in ABLE site tutor training, and \$486,171 for site supervision. Per the program's RFP process, each site agreed to contribute cash match of \$6,000/FT member, \$1,000/MT member and \$500/HT EAO member totaling \$667,000 this year. In addition to ABLE partner sites, TSCWNY will pursue new grant funding through joint collaborative proposals with local public schools and United Way of Buffalo and Erie County. In order to address the overwhelming need for academic remediation and support in the schools, ABLE will identify innovative partnerships with complementary missions that will provide members with unique training opportunities for staff/members that will result in increased student achievement.

The program is a cost-effective approach for addressing the dire community needs of low-student achievement, underperforming schools and improved teacher preparation. The per pupil costs for remediation, special education, even incarceration, far outweigh the investment in long-term, sustainable academic solutions. The cost of remediation is a contributing factor to the local/State economies' budget crisis. According to Nancy L. Zimpher, State University of New York Chancellor, the need for remediation costs community colleges over \$70 million/year, and that 20% or \$93 million of financial aid awarded to New York's community college students goes toward remedial

Narratives

classes. In addition, skyrocketing special education costs are a concern throughout NYS. In some districts, instructional spending per pupil on students classified for special education services tops \$40,000 per year (NYSED). ABLE provides teachers with the classroom support they need, increasing the effectiveness of their instruction as well as providing students with the remedial and individual instruction they need. This classroom and academic support improves the overall classroom environment and in some cases, may positively impact the all too frequent misdiagnosis of special education, especially within the African American population due to low student engagement and/or low reading levels. ABLE site principals have stated they would prefer to hire an ABLE alum due to the amount of school resources and time required to train them to teach in an urban setting, estimated at \$40,000/per teacher.

There are a number of Special Circumstances affecting the plight of public education in Buffalo, the third poorest city in the nation. The BPS is in crisis, offering children little hope to break the cycle of poverty. According to NYSED, out of 74 total public schools, 44 schools in Buffalo are designated Priority and Focus Schools. There are only 11 schools in the District deemed to be in good standing. ABLE has been tremendously successful in garnering community support and has offered a new and unique solution to a decades old problem. ABLE proposes to slightly increase the number of FT members and sites in Buffalo in order to continue to meet the growing demand for academic enrichment and educational support.

For Current Grantees Only (Current New York State Grantee)

ABLE proposes to increase its share of Grantee costs to 51% while spending \$1,047 less per MSY without a commensurate increase in Federal funds. This match is double the amount in the current year. The agency will utilize 194 member slots to serve over 3,000 children and exponentially impact the learning environments of over 17 schools through their commitment to community and education.

3b. Budget Adequacy (Corporation Share (CS) \$1,440,804 Grantee Share (GS) \$1,520,856):

Proposed ABLE expenses are straightforward and in alignment with the narrative. Not only is the overall request \$162,775 less than the current year contract of \$1,603,579, it also reflects a cash match of \$647,547, up \$124,727 from the current year, for a total of \$1,520,856 match that will serve a broader range of students in need through very specific and measurable activities. Personnel Expenses (CS\$162,741/GS\$540,417) are limited to four FTEs and a portion of two positions that devote a majority of their time to essential member services, with a reasonable Fringe rate of 29% (CS\$47,193/GS\$15,732). The significant Grantee Share reflects the commitment of partner education

Narratives

sites through daily member supervision and training/support. Staff Travel (CS\$4,574/GS\$526) includes minimum yet required costs for travel to CNCS functions, and general local travel to sites. Member Travel (CS\$462) includes minimal local travel for Team Captains and members for site visits. Equipment is not requested. The amount requested for Supplies (CS\$18,450) includes member uniforms, print materials, and office/classroom supplies for members to use at sites. Contractual/Consultant Expense Services (CS\$18,947) are limited to the America Learns Hours Tracker/Timesheet system and payroll services. ABLE Staff Training (CS\$2,250/GS\$750) includes eight training days in order to consistently upgrade skills relevant to program and member management, understanding the most recent regulations/policies from NYSED, best practices in national education and public service initiatives, and assisting in the development of critical community collaborations. Member Training (GS\$152,738) is yet another reflection of the commitment of partner sites and an essential component of the program. Members are provided extensive training from TSCWNY and partner sites. The professional development and education-specific training members receive far outreaches any training they complete during their undergraduate coursework and student teaching experiences because it complements their learning. Most sites encourage ABLE members to participate in professional development training offered to school staff. Trainings also include topics such as behavior management, serving in urban settings, cultural awareness, understanding the NYSED Common Core Curriculum and Annual Professional Performance Review, teaching methods, data systems, identifying community needs, volunteer recruitment and management, life after AmeriCorps, etc. An independent evaluation (CS\$7,500) will be conducted annually and utilized to improve and expand services based on identified strengths and weaknesses, per CNCS regulations. Due to program design, all ABLE member positions are covered positions with recurring access to vulnerable populations as defined in The National Service Criminal History Check (CHC) screening procedure. A comprehensive three pronged background check is run for each member which (is based on CHC screening procedure) includes: Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public Website (NSOPW) National Sex Offender Registry Check, State Criminal History Background Checks (NYS and state of residence during application) and FBI fingerprint-based Criminal History Check. CHC implementation costs are included in Other Program Operating Costs (CS\$22,170/GS\$256,990). Additional costs include cell phones, ABLE vehicle insurance, and space at partner sites. Space provided by sites and educational partners is valued at \$250,000, a savings that enables the program to reach thousands of at-risk youth. Living Allowance (CS\$927,640/GS\$397,560) includes 100 FT members and 64 MT members. Member Support Costs

Narratives

(CS\$156,879/GS\$60,377) include FICA, Workers Compensation, and Healthcare for members. All consultant services reflected in the above budget items do not exceed \$750/per day. TSCWNY does not have a federally approved indirect cost rate, therefore The Corporation Fixed Percentage Method (CS\$71,998/GS\$95,766) has been applied to calculate administrative/indirect costs. Such costs include rent, utilities, postage, and liability insurance and a small percentage of executive salaries; all approved indirect expenses according to CNCS regulations. Per NYS RFP requirements, 10% has been allocated to the State Office. The budget outlined above supports the program design and complements a successful existing infrastructure that has implemented federal grants for decades. Prepared in compliance with the OMB Circulars and AmeriCorps regulations, it will provide the resources necessary to support program activities and achieve desired outputs and outcomes and increase academic achievement for at-risk students.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A