

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

During the three-year grant period from 2013-2016, 50 AmeriCorps members will directly provide experiential nutrition-based education programming through hands-on cooking and practice at the grocery store to 27,000 low-income families in 29 states with significant numbers of participants at risk of food insecurity. Cooking Matters program participants will demonstrate reduced food insecurity and report key food resource management behaviors shown to improve food security, including planning meals ahead of time, comparing prices, and grocery shopping with a list. AmeriCorps members working with Cooking Matters are called upon to recruit, train, and support a cadre of volunteers to provide experiential nutrition education programming, leveraging a total of 15,750 additional volunteers, many of whom reach additional participants beyond those reached directly by AmeriCorps members. This project will focus on the CNCS focus area of Healthy Futures. The CNCS investment of \$498,825 will be matched with \$792,974.

## Rationale and Approach

### a.) Need

Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign is a national, sustainable solution to one of the most serious threats to the health of our nation's children: food insecurity. According to reports published in Fall 2012 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), 48.8 million Americans, including 16.2 million children, live in "food insecure households," or households that are challenged with providing enough food for all members. Rates of food insecurity are substantially higher than the national average among households with incomes near or below the federal poverty line, among households with children headed by single parents, and among Black and Hispanic households.

The No Kid Hungry campaign seeks to address food insecurity by connecting families to the food and nutrition programs that are available to them. Cooking Matters is an essential component of the campaign, teaching families key food shopping and preparation skills that allow them to stretch their food dollars and consistently provide healthy meals. We work with 33 lead partner organizations to offer Cooking Matters courses and shopping tours across the country.

Our local partners go through a rigorous selection process and are chosen based on alignment in mission, capacity to engage others in the community around the issue of food insecurity, and proven track record raising resources to increase reach and services in their community and state. Cooking Matters has six lead partners within the seven states defined by the USDA as having above-average

## Narratives

food insecurity. Altogether 22 of our 33 lead partners are located in states with an average or above-average food insecurity rate compared to the continental U.S. These 33 organizations partner with other community organizations that include after-school programs, housing programs, Head Start centers, and other agencies that serve low-income families. As a result of this targeted outreach, most Cooking Matter participants are enrolled in food assistance programs (e.g. SNAP, WIC), 32% identify as Latino, and 40% identify as African American, proving that our outreach efforts enable us to reach populations in which food insecurity is most prevalent.

### b.) AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems

Share Our Strength requests 50 full-time AmeriCorps members (50 MSY) to increase our ability to meet the community's demand for Cooking Matters hands-on cooking, shopping, and nutrition education offerings. Share Our Strength will place AmeriCorps members at its 33 Cooking Matters program partner locations across the country to increase the number of community members served. These partners have been highly vetted as described above, and the capacity of each partner is carefully evaluated before AmeriCorps placement is considered.

The number and type of AmeriCorps members requested is directly related to the rapid growth of Cooking Matters and our partners. Since 2010, the year of Share Our Strength's previous recomplete application, the number of organizations offering Cooking Matters courses across the nation has increased by 57 percent, to a current total of 33 partners.

Since 2007, the year of Share Our Strength's first National Direct AmeriCorps grant, the program has grown from serving over 5,000 course participants annually to serving over 23,000 course participants annually, due in large part to the support provided by AmeriCorps members who work directly to coordinate courses and build the volunteer base needed to run our programming. In fact, during the previous grant year, AmeriCorps members directly reached 3,625 participants through our Cooking Matters courses, nearly 20% of the program's overall reach during the grant year, and over 55% more participants than projected in our grant proposal. The success of previous cohorts of AmeriCorps members has subsequently positioned us to more than double our AmeriCorps program to 50 MSYs this grant period.

AmeriCorps members play a critical role in the planning and execution of Cooking Matters programming, including both our 6-week courses and one-time shopping tours. AmeriCorps members will work with Cooking Matters staff to implement effective hands-on education and teach families at risk of hunger the skills they need to make healthy, affordable, and delicious meals for their

## Narratives

families. Members will: (1) Coordinate courses including managing the classroom, securing needed food and materials, and supporting volunteers and participants. (2) Work with community-based agencies who host courses for their clients in efforts to expand reach of program. (3) Recruit, train, and retain culinary, nutrition, and support volunteers who lead Cooking Matters courses.

### c.) Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measureable Community Impact

Cooking Matters is a critical component of Share Our Strength's Theory of Change, finalized in 2012, which guides our strategy to end childhood hunger in the United States. The goal of Cooking Matters is for children at risk of hunger to have the healthy foods they need to grow and thrive throughout their lives. As a leader in its field for nearly 20 years, Cooking Matters has built its overwhelmingly successful evidence-informed programs around these principle tenets of effective nutrition education, earning a spotlight in Isobel Contento's authoritative book, *Nutrition Education: Linking Research, Theory, and Practice* and special recognition from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service.

Cooking Matters courses are built around the framework of Social Cognitive Theory, which has been successfully used to influence nutrition practices. In addition, curricula and materials used are based on the latest scientific literature and best practices in the field, reflecting the most current and tested thinking on appropriate content and facilitation methods for each audience. During the previous grant period, 90% of adult graduates experienced positive change in nutrition or food resource management behaviors, including planning meals ahead of time, comparing prices, using a grocery list, using the nutrition facts label, thinking about health when planning meals, or making meals with at least 3 food groups. One graduate of a Parents of Preschoolers course told us, "The thing that stood out to me most about this class was the shopping trip. As a low-income family, it is often difficult to afford meals, even much less healthy meals. The shopping trip taught me that it is possible to provide a healthy meal, even on a limited budget."

Performance Measure H11: Number of individuals receiving support, services, education and/or referrals to alleviate long-term hunger: The fifty AmeriCorps members requested in this proposal will allow Cooking Matters to teach an additional 9,000 individuals per year, or 27,000 individuals over the three-year grant cycle, strategies to maximize their food resources and prepare healthy, low-cost meals as a way to increase their food security and alleviate long-term hunger. In order to measure the number of individuals served, lead partners are responsible for reporting attendance through the Cooking Matters database, surveys submission, and tour reporting forms within two weeks of course

## Narratives

or tour completion. Through the use of these tracking documents and the database, Share Our Strength is able to ensure that it is collecting accurate and timely information.

Performance Measure H12: Number of individuals that reported increased food security of themselves and their children (household food security) as a result of CNCS-supported services: In the next grant cycle, we expect 30% of adult course participants to report improved food security for themselves and their families, resulting in 1,440 adult participants in AmeriCorps member-coordinated courses reporting improved food insecurity each year, or 4,320 adult course participants over the three-year grant period. In May 2012, Cooking Matters is releasing a new Cooking Matters for Adults participant survey that has been tested for validity and reliability through an extensive research process. This revised survey will ask participants ¿How often do you worry that your food will run out before you get money to buy more?¿ both pre- and post-course, which is one of the indicators of food insecurity used by the USDA Economic Research Service. Additionally, our Cooking Matters for Families survey asks adult participants ¿How often did you run out of food before you get money to buy more?¿ Cooking Matters focuses food insecurity measurement on adults since they typically make household food decisions, but also believes in the importance of educating children about healthy food preparation so that they can build life-long habits that will ensure long-term food security for themselves and their families in the future.

In addition to performance measure H12, Cooking Matters will track changes in key food resource management behaviors shown to improve food security, including planning meals ahead of time, comparing prices, and grocery shopping with a list. During the grant period, Cooking Matters expects that 75% of graduates will show improvement in these food resource management behaviors. In addition, Cooking Matters plans to maintain an 86% graduation rate (the percentage of participants who attend at least four out of six two-hour course sessions) among AmeriCorps member-coordinated courses to ensure resources are used as efficiently as possible.

Finally, Cooking Matters will conduct a follow-up study of Cooking Matters graduates during the grant period using a representative sample to determine whether changes in food security and food resource management behaviors are maintained three to six months post-course.

### d.) Member Recruitment

Local and National Cooking Matters staff contribute to and are responsible for AmeriCorps recruitment efforts in complimentary ways. Local program staff is responsible for local recruitment efforts, member screening, and member selection. Local level recruitment efforts include soliciting

## Narratives

individuals with a background in nutrition, education, culinary arts, community organizing, and other related fields. Qualified Cooking Matters graduates from the community are invited to serve, and community agencies that host courses are asked to recommend people for the AmeriCorps positions. Local Cooking Matters program staff is provided with templates for position descriptions/job postings, guides for interviewing and screening, and comprehensive support from Share Our Strength.

Share Our Strength is committed to creating a diverse member cohort and works diligently to promote an inclusive member corps. In the coming grant year, we will give increased attention and effort towards researching and creating strategic messaging to better recruit according to particular motivations among more diverse groups of AmeriCorps members and potential program volunteers. Examples of this include: (1) We will reach out to the Veteran Affairs offices to assess the potential interest and motivations of this population for volunteering with Cooking Matters. (2) As part of our increased efforts to engage with the Cooking Matters graduate network we'd like to investigate more deliberate recruitment among this audience. (3) We will provide updated recruitment tools/templates and strategies to our local partners that will encourage and support their efforts to recruit and engage underrepresented populations as AmeriCorps members and Cooking Matters volunteers.

### e.) Member Training

Share Our Strength provides an intense orientation and training program to create an excellent member experience that will build commitment to public service and provide a lasting impact to the community. During their term of service, Cooking Matters AmeriCorps members develop skills in public speaking, writing for targeted audiences, cross-cultural communications, time and resource management, nonprofit and volunteer management, and an improved knowledge of food, nutrition, and hunger.

Member Orientation: (At least 35 hours per member)

Through our annual survey, members tell us that local and national orientations adequately helped prepare them for their service. At the start of service, AmeriCorps members participate in a 5-part webinar orientation with their peers and a welcome telephone call from their hosting organization's assigned Cooking Matters National Field Manager. The orientation serves to familiarize new members with the rules and requirements of the Cooking Matters AmeriCorps program; provide a history of National Service in the U.S.; introduce members to the structure and objectives of Cooking Matters and Share Our Strength; and provide an introduction on how to perform their central member service

## Narratives

responsibilities of volunteer management and course coordination. In a survey completed in Spring 2012, 71% of AmeriCorps members agreed or strongly agreed that the online training webinars presented by Share Our Strength prepared them for their service year.

In addition to the orientation provided by Share Our Strength, each local Cooking Matters partner provides an additional 30 to 40 hours of intensive orientation and initial training for AmeriCorps members. Overall in 2012, 82% of AmeriCorps members agreed or strongly agreed that the training provided by their direct supervisor prepared them for their service year. This includes an orientation to the local organization, to the local Cooking Matters program systems and procedures, and to responsibilities associated with the AmeriCorps position. Local orientation takes the form of informational meetings, shadowing, and written instruction.

Ongoing Training: (At least 52 hours per member)

Share Our Strength provides in-service training to AmeriCorps members through a variety of methods on topics central to their work plan objectives. Topics include program background and gold standard implementation, rules of AmeriCorps program, life after AmeriCorps, communications and other professional development topics.

Monthly Conference Call: Each hour-long webinar includes at least 35 minutes for training and 15 minutes for members to share information about their local projects. Training topics include volunteer management, perfecting an AmeriCorps elevator speech, life after AmeriCorps, and social media and blogging. AmeriCorps alumni and members completing a second term have helped facilitate these calls in the past, and we expect will continue to do so in the future as a means to strengthen connection among members and to AmeriCorps overall.

On-line Workspace: Share Our Strength maintains an on-line resource center (a.k.a., intranet), specifically designed for AmeriCorps members, local staff, and national staff to connect and share ideas, resources, or experiences. Members use the discussion board features to engage in national conversations regarding best practices and other topics of interest.

In-Person Trainings: AmeriCorps members repeatedly tell us they truly value the opportunity for in-person trainings as a means of sharing best practices with fellow Cooking Matters AmeriCorps members and learning from the hands-on experiential workshops provided. Share Our Strength hosts two in person trainings each year. In-person trainings gives members a chance to network with one another, build community, and share best practices in the field.

Additional Training: In addition to the extensive training provided by Share Our Strength, supervisors also encourage members to attend relevant activities and training events sponsored by the

## Narratives

Corporation for National and Community Service, state commissions, Cooking Matters, or other organizations on topics relevant to their work plan and areas of interest for professional development.

Adherence to Rules of Allowable Activities: Share Our Strength will continue to ensure that members work only on approved activities and that the program does not violate the non-duplication, non-displacement, and non-supplementation requirements of the Corporation through several program measures. First, all new Cooking Matters AmeriCorps members and supervisors attend a training that includes a review of permitted and prohibited member service activities as well as other supervisory responsibilities and requirements. Second, each local program develops a detailed work plan for their AmeriCorps member that is reviewed and approved by Share Our Strength within the first month of a new member's term of service. Finally, Share Our Strength's host site monitoring process further ensures that members are engaged only in grant-approved activities through yearly host site visits.

### f.) Member Supervision

Share Our Strength provides direct support and guidance for both AmeriCorps members and supervisors, designed to ensure that both have a meaningful experience. Share Our Strength not only provides formal training and evaluations, but designated staff are also available to act as sounding boards, celebrate and encourage successes, troubleshoot challenges, and develop close relationships with both members and direct supervisors. As a result, the majority of AmeriCorps members report feeling well-supported throughout their terms of service.

### Member Support & Supervision

Local supervisors and Share Our Strength through daily interaction and scheduled meetings, provide scheduled and ad-hoc support and guidance to ensure that AmeriCorps members are meeting the goals developed in their work plans, are satisfied with their work, and remain productive members of the Cooking Matters team. Local supervisors provide member support and supervision through shadowing, continuous interaction, and an. Cooking Matters National Field Managers also meet individually with AmeriCorps members on a quarterly basis at minimum or more frequently when needed to provide ongoing to Share Our Strength and space to provide updates on how things are going.

A formal performance evaluation between the member and their supervisor takes place at three months and in the final month of the members' year of service. Progress regarding both the member work plan and service hours are discussed to make sure members are tracking successfully, feel

## Narratives

satisfied, and identify areas for continued professional development. Share Our Strength provides additional support and guidance after assessment of completed reviews and updated work plans are submitted to us. We review all evaluations and updated work plans for themes and information that may influence future support and guidance to provide members and supervisors.

### Supervisor Selection, Training, and Support

AmeriCorps supervisors are full-time staff members who are hired by the 33 Cooking Matters local partners across the country. Many supervisors have previous supervisory experience and are deeply engaged in their communities. Share Our Strength is deeply connected to local supervisors and works closely with them to understand and commit to the AmeriCorps Supervisor and AmeriCorps Hosting Agreements at the start of each AmeriCorps term. These agreements set mutual expectations and ensure the supervisors understand the time commitment, importance of connecting with their state service commission, program processes and procedures, and prohibited activities.

Share Our Strength provides training and support in a variety of formats to supervisors. Share Our Strength hosts regular supervisor webinars that allows us to discuss best practices in supervision such as providing constructive feedback, improving communications skills and creating a successful work environment, as well as review specific AmeriCorps rules and regulations to ensure that all of our programs are within compliance. In addition, Cooking Matters's host site monitoring policy includes an annual site visit with file audit. During our bi-annual in-person trainings, Share Our Strength provides additional training that is targeted specifically for supervisors.

### g.) Member Experience

Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters AmeriCorps program is designed to enable members to have a powerful service experience that lets them see the community impact they have by working directly with families in need. In addition, as Cooking Matters is a volunteer-based program, an ethic of service is reinforced consistently throughout the year.

In addition to providing a stellar service experience and sense of accomplishment in their work, Share Our Strength also makes every effort to connect AmeriCorps members with the greater AmeriCorps network through State Service Commissions and AmeriCorps alumni. New member and new supervisor trainings include information about the larger AmeriCorps network and opportunities to connect with other AmeriCorps members and supervisors in each state and nationally. For example: In Washington, DC, our member was invited to participate in their inter-corps council; January of this year, we promoted opportunities for our members to connect with other members in

## Narratives

their area during MLK Day of Service; At our 2011 Annual Summit, Cooking Matters AmeriCorps members partnered with Guidance Center Downriver CARES members in a health and information fair for kids in the community; We engage returning members in co-facilitation of in-person and web-based trainings.

### h.) Volunteer Generation

Through the recruiting, training, and retention efforts of AmeriCorps members and new volunteer recognition protocols, Cooking Matters was able to engage over 3,000 new volunteers in the previous grant year. In the 2013-2016 grant period, organizations with AmeriCorps placements will have the increased capacity to recruit a total of 15,750 volunteers, resulting in over 375,000 additional hours of service during the grant period.

The Cooking Matters model relies on volunteers who have skills to share in the areas of cooking, food budgeting and nutrition to instruct participants and deliver our programming to families struggling to stretch their food resources. In order to respond to growing demand and expand the program, Cooking Matters must also expand its volunteer base. AmeriCorps members also create volunteer recruitment and management tools including flyers, monthly newsletters, volunteer websites create invitation. They also play a role in developing systems for volunteer appreciation like special events, awards, and incentives. Many members have recently helped their hosting organization to harness the power of social media to recruit and retain volunteers.

### i.) Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

Share Our Strength is committed to building the AmeriCorps national service brand and ensuring that our lead partner organizations promote the AmeriCorps name and the impact that is accomplished through AmeriCorps members. Share Our Strength will promote the AmeriCorps name on its website and through our active social media network. AmeriCorps members blog posts to the No Kid Hungry blog, highlighting the impact of their work and communicating the members' experience with Cooking Matters. Additionally, the AmeriCorps logo or name is included in all member recruitment materials, including online position postings and application forms. The AmeriCorps logo is included in new staff trainings for all local Cooking Matters staff across the nation as well as monthly training calls for AmeriCorps members. AmeriCorps is also recognized on training materials during in-person conferences, as well as in Cooking Matters Annual Review and Lead Partner Annual Reviews. At the upcoming 2013 Share Our Strength Conference of Leaders, attended

## Narratives

by over 500 individuals committed to ending hunger in the United States, we will recognize the good work of the AmeriCorps members during our Leadership Awards Dinner.

### Organizational Capability

#### a.) Organizational Background and Staffing

##### Organization's Mission and Program Implementation

Share Our Strength was founded in 1984 on the belief that everyone has a strength to share in the global fight against hunger and poverty, with a vision to end hunger and poverty in the United States and abroad. Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign pairs access to food and education about food in a strategic approach to surround kids at risk of hunger with the healthy food they need every day. Cooking Matters (originally established in 1993 as Operation Frontline) represents the educational component of that equation. This behavior-changing and highly-acclaimed model teaches low-income families how to eat better for less by providing key cooking, nutrition and budget management skills through a hands-on, learner-centered approach. Throughout the last 20 years, Cooking Matters has developed the staff support and infrastructure to run an effective nutrition education program that has reached over 100,000 participants to date.

##### Staffing

Share Our Strength knows that meeting our goal of ending childhood hunger will not happen without the strategic management of financial, human and material resources. To that end, Share Our Strength's board and senior staff engage in regular strategic planning sessions and all staff is involved in organization planning each year. Share Our Strength is governed by a 22-person Board of Directors, which is composed of a diverse group of men and women representing a strategic variety of fields of expertise, including both corporate enterprises and nonprofit organizations. Priorities are set for the organization overall and areas for improvement are identified.

Additionally, the Cooking Matters Advisory Council is comprised of volunteers who are seen as experts in their fields and can use it to help grow and strengthen the Cooking Matters program. While the Board of Directors and Advisory Council will continue to provide strategic guidance in building and sustaining our programming, the following staff members will work directly to implement the AmeriCorps grant:

Leigh Ann Edwards, MPH, RD, Cooking Matters Director of Operations ¿ Since 2006, Leigh Ann has worked on the Cooking Matters team to oversees training and technical assistance provided to Lead Partners and works closely with start-up programs as they build their infrastructure. Leigh Ann

## Narratives

joined Cooking Matters in 2006. Leigh Ann oversees the National Volunteer Manager in administering the AmeriCorps National Direct grant and National Field Managers in providing direct technical assistance to AmeriCorps members and their supervisors.

Jessica Sherry, Manager, Financial Planning and Analysis √ Jessica Sherry joined the Cooking Matters team in April 2012. Jessica oversees all financial reporting/compliance for the AmeriCorps National Direct grant. More broadly, Jessica supports Cooking Matters' programming by providing consistent budget management and oversight, grant reporting, and forecasting analyses. Jessica also takes a lead role in the overall organizational annual planning and budget process. She works closely with Share Our Strength's Director of Compliance to review and approve all federal financial reports and drawdown requests prior to submission.

Ellen Damaschino; Gill Davidson, RD; and Elizabeth Evancho, MPA, Cooking Matters National Field Managers √ National Field Managers work to support the day-to-day management of AmeriCorps members and supervisors, and ensure that all AmeriCorps members have a meaningful experience. Each of the Field Managers brings diverse experience to the team, including culinary, nutrition, fundraising, and nonprofit management expertise.

National Volunteer Program Manager √ This position, which is currently being hired, is responsible for the overall management of the AmeriCorps grant and ensuring that we are in compliance with grant rules and regulations at all times. He or she will provide day-to-day management of Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters AmeriCorps National Direct program, including being a liaison between Share Our Strength and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS); enrolling and exiting AmeriCorps members; tracking and reporting program performance; developing Share Our Strength's annual application to CNCS; and collaborating with members of Share Our Strength's finance team on financial tracking and reporting. In addition, he or she will collaborate with Field Managers to lead the development and implementation of training plans and technical assistance for AmeriCorps National Direct members and their supervisors to ensure a positive member experience; oversee volunteer recognition efforts; and analyze and assess opportunities to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of systems, tools, policies and procedures for AmeriCorps and Cooking Matters overall volunteer program. Share Our Strength is currently accepting applications for the position, and is seeking applicants with Bachelor's degree plus 2-4 years of related experience developing and implementing training and volunteer programs, with previous experience managing AmeriCorps or other federal grant programs highly preferred.

Cooking Matters Operations Coordinator √ This position is to be hired in 2013 and 50% of their

## Narratives

time will be spent providing support on key aspects of planning, coordination, and administrative management for the AmeriCorps program. This position will support efforts to ensure program compliance by contributing to maintenance and upkeep of records used for reporting and tracking progress, member and supervisor files, and the administrative functions for enrolling and exiting members.

### Capacity to Provide Sound Programmatic and Fiscal Oversight

Share Our Strength's extensive experience in developing and operating programs and partnerships has proven us highly qualified to implement AmeriCorps National Direct. We have demonstrated this through the successful integration of AmeriCorps National Direct program into our already-established Cooking Matters programs at highly-functioning nonprofit partners and successful transition from a VISTA program to national direct in the mid-2000s.

Share Our Strength has a franchise-style partnership with its Cooking Matters local program partners, except for Boston, MA and Denver, CO which Share Our Strength operates directly. Share Our Strength creates centralized resources and systems that create economies of scale, such as technical assistance, curricula and other program materials, evaluation and reporting services, and, in some cases, grants. Share Our Strength conducts a web-enabled conference call each program year to review current programmatic and financial policies and procedures of Share Our Strength's AmeriCorps National Direct grant and provide training to local program staff. We also provide a programmatic and financial policy overview to all incoming supervisors throughout the year. The Field Managers also provide technical assistance through monthly conference calls, group trainings, management of the Cooking Matters AmeriCorps workspace, in-person site visits, and individual communications. Our local program staff knows that they can contact the Cooking Matters national office for fast and friendly assistance. This collaborative arrangement has already resulted in over 7,400 courses serving over 110,000 low-income families.

Share Our Strength continues to use and modify already-established systems described elsewhere in this application for providing training and skills development for AmeriCorps members and their supervisors. Our AmeriCorps members also know that they can contact the Cooking Matters national office for fast and friendly assistance at any time. Share Our Strength requires those supporting the AmeriCorps program to participate in the trainings provided by CNCS to ensure shared understanding of programmatic and financial processes, procedures, and requirements to ensure the highest quality Cooking Matters programming is provided by each of our local partners.

### Capacity to Complete an Evaluation

## Narratives

As stated in the Evaluation Reporting and Plan section, Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters program has long had a system for collecting data and providing measureable results that demonstrate Cooking Matters behavior-change impact to improve overall food security and healthy choices. Cooking Matters Program Development and Evaluation team is comprised of four full-time employees who lead survey and curriculum updates, research in the field, and evaluation studies. This team will lead the internal program evaluation required to measure long-term impact of our courses in regards to improving food security, as well as measuring progress against our measurable performance metrics.

Proven record of compliance and responsiveness

Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters is currently in its final year of our second AmeriCorps National Direct award, and maintains effective systems for managing and overseeing the AmeriCorps National Direct program. Throughout these two grant terms, Share Our Strength has submitted timely progress reports proving that we have met or exceeded all measureable goals, and has remained responsive to any requests for additional information.

Program Integration within Organization

Share Our Strength, which was founded on the belief that all people have strengths to share, truly understands the impact our AmeriCorps program has through direct service and outreach to participants. In addition, the program enables us to reach thousands of volunteers, thus multiplying their impact to an even greater extent and ensuring that people beyond the AmeriCorps network have the opportunity to engage in the fight to end childhood hunger. Our AmeriCorps program is a critical piece of our Cooking Matters program, supporting nearly 20 percent of Cooking Matters overall impact. As such an integral part of Share Our Strength's mission to end childhood hunger, the AmeriCorps program is valued and well supported across various departments including Human Resources, Finance, Creative Enterprises and Development, and Communications.

b.) Sustainability

Securing Financial and In-kind Contributions

The cost to run Cooking Matters is shared between Share our Strength and our local partner organizations. While the majority of Cooking Matters funding is provided through two current National Sponsors, ConAgra Foods Foundation and Walmart, we are seeking to diversify and thus stabilize this funding even further in fiscal year 2013. The national Cooking Matters office provides all curricula, program materials, training, and evaluation services to partner organizations free of charge due to the sustained and growing support that we receive.

## Narratives

Local partner organizations pay to implement Cooking Matters locally by raising public and private funds primarily to support staff, food and transportation costs. Several local programs are now included in their states' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) plan and are able to receive partial reimbursement for program costs from that source. Share Our Strength is providing technical assistance to local programs not yet receiving SNAP-Ed funds on how to receive that and other funding.

We have succeeded in securing the match resources outlined for the AmeriCorps National Direct program thus far and anticipate continued success. In addition, both Share Our Strength and our local partners have committed to making the in-kind contribution of staff time. Several departments across Share Our Strength are dedicated to overseeing our AmeriCorps program, and our local partners commit to providing staff support to recruit, train and supervise AmeriCorps members.

### Volunteer Support

Cooking Matters volunteers play an integral role in Share Our Strength's commitment to building a strong volunteer network. Many of our local partners have a waiting list of families and organizations who are interested in Cooking Matters, so much so that the demand far exceeds staff capacity to provide programming, making volunteer support absolutely critical to program growth.

### Organization Collaboration and Community Leadership

As leaders in nutrition education, Cooking Matters national staff members serve on the Society for Nutrition Education Foundation board of trustees, and are active in national groups. In addition, Cooking Matters lead partners also collaborate with local community agencies who want to provide experiential nutrition education to their clients; in the last grant year alone, our local partners collaborated with over 1,100 community agencies across the country. This arrangement maximizes the efficiency and quality of the programming provided while reducing duplicative efforts and also increases the long-term stability of programming. Our partners work with local organizations including faith-based organizations, afterschool programs, WIC and SNAP offices, transitional living facilities and churches with low-income members to provide classes in their facilities.

### c.) Compliance and Accountability

Share Our Strength provides regular program monitoring and training to ensure that each Lead Partner's implementation of the Cooking Matters AmeriCorps program is in full compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. This includes the review of locally-completed 3-month and exit-month member evaluations, three-month check-in calls between Share Our Strength and members,

## Narratives

as well as semi-annual satisfaction and assessment conference calls between hosting organizations and Share Our Strength. Other activities Share Our Strength uses to monitor and assess compliance include: an annual site visit, annual file audit, annual feedback survey, and monitoring discussions on the Cooking Matters Resource Center.

In order to minimize compliance issues, Share Our Strength also provides written resources and trainings to ensure that all supervisors have a deep understanding of AmeriCorps rules and regulations, including prohibited activities. Supervisors agree to ensure that their Lead Partner organization completes, collects, maintains and submits copies of required AmeriCorps documentation to Share Our Strength and to meet their other responsibilities as they pertain to member supervision and support throughout the grant year.

When risks of noncompliance or member dis-satisfaction are identified, through any of the systems mentioned above, Share Our Strength takes immediate action to rectify the situation, supporting our local partners to ensure that these issues are understood and appropriately managed moving forward. If repeated instances of non-compliance are identified we instate a probationary period with the hosting organization to more closely monitor activities, and if we don't see proactive steps to correct will consider not placing future members at that site.

Demonstrated Compliance: Share Our Strength did not have any compliance issues or area of risk identified during the last grant year, and we recently received response to our grant progress report submitted in December 2012 that indicated no compliance concerns. Even though our record with the Corporation for National and Community Service is highly positive, our commitment to excellence has driven us to continue seeking opportunities to improve communications and our monitoring systems to ensure compliance at all service sites.

Enrollment: Share Our Strength enrolled 100% of the member service slots during our last full federal grant year.

Retention: In the 2011-2012 grant year, we filled 100% of our 21 awarded MSY with an 86% retention rate. Six Cooking Matters AmeriCorps members (nearly 30%) in that class went on to gain full-time employment in Cooking Matters or continue on for a second term as an AmeriCorps member, which speaks to the high quality experience we provide and members' satisfaction with the program. However, three members (accounting for 3 MSYs) during the grant year were unable to complete their year of service. These three members included 1) a member in North Carolina who transitioned into a salaried position working with a homeless population; 2) a member in California who was exited after her host site lost funding for its Cooking Matters program; and 3) a member in

## Narratives

Nebraska who was exited for breaking the rules of conduct of her host site organization by incurring a DUI off hours one month before the end of her term of service. We view these as unique situations but continue to improve recruitment and monitoring efforts to ensure the highest retention rates possible.

To ensure members understand the full year commitment and clarify program participation requirements, Share Our Strength continues to require that final AmeriCorps candidates participate in a 30-minute screening call with Share Our Strength. The Summer 2012 supervisor training call, mandatory for all supervisors, focused on new member recruitment and helped to further emphasize the need to recruit members that are committed to completing a full term of service. Once members have been accepted into the Cooking Matters AmeriCorps team, we continue to provide a supportive environment for AmeriCorps members to develop their professional talents and feel connected to the wider network of the Cooking Matters community across the nation. Additionally, when changes in supervisors occur at host sites, we provide weekly check in calls to ensure members have an alternative point of contact readily accessible during the transition period. We have learned through our experience working with the AmeriCorps program that providing this strong support system throughout member tenure is critical to ensuring members have a meaningful experience and improving overall retention rates.

Consultation with State Commissions: As of 1/31/2013, Share Our Strength has consulted with all state and territory service commissions in the states and territories that we plan to operate. We have completed all required registration in states in which we were required to do so. Additionally, by connecting AmeriCorps members directly to their state commissions, we are able to help members feel a deeper sense of connection to their state AmeriCorps programs and eliminate the duplication and coordination of CNCS resources. In the coming year, Share Our Strength's Volunteer Program Manager will give renewed attention to connecting our members with state service commissions and strengthening communications for Share Our Strength to ensure non-duplication of resources.

Operating Sites and Member Service Sites: Cooking Matters works with 33 local partners across the country that will serve as both operating and member service sites including: Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, Little Rock AR; Capital Area Food Bank, Washington DC; CCE-Tompkins County, Ithaca NY; City Harvest, Inc., New York NY; Community Health Network of CT Foundation, Wallingford CT; Cooking Matters Colorado, Denver CO; Cooking Matters Illinois, Chicago IL; Cooking Matters Massachusetts, Quincy MA; Dare to Care Food Bank, Louisville KY; Ebenezer Medical Outreach, Huntington WV; FLIPANY, Lauderhill FL; Food Bank of South Jersey, Pennsauken NJ; Foodlink,

## Narratives

Inc, Rochester NY; Georgia Coalition for Physical Activity and Nutrition, Stone Mountain GA; Gleaners Community Food Bank of SE MI, Detroit MI; Good Shepherd Food Bank, Portland ME; Idaho Food Bank, Boise ID; Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, Raleigh NC; Local Matters, Columbus OH; Lowcountry Food Bank, Charleston SC; New Hampshire Food Bank, Manchester NH; North Texas Food Bank, Dallas TX; Operation Food Search, Saint Louis MO; Oregon Food Bank, Portland OR; Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana, New Orleans LA; Second Harvest Food Bank of Lehigh Valley, Allentown PA; Solid Ground, Seattle WA; Tarrant Area Food Bank, Fort Worth TX; The Queens Galley, Kingston NY; Three Squares, San Francisco CA; UMN Extension, St. Paul MN; Virginia Cooperative Extension, Alexandria VA; Visiting Nurse Association, Omaha NE.

### Budget/Cost Effectiveness

#### a.) Cost Effectiveness

Share Our Strength's total budget request from CNCS is \$498,825. Compared to the 2010-2013 grant period, Share Our Strength has decreased the overall cost per MSY to CNCS, and has also increased the overall percentage match that Share Our Strength will be contributing to the AmeriCorps program in this grant request. This request will help support 50 AmeriCorps members with a total cost/MSY to CNCS of \$9,976. During the past three years, Share Our Strength's cost/MSY support from CNCS has totaled \$12,900/member/year. This CNCS budget request will support 39% of the total AmeriCorps operational budget as compared to 49% in prior years. As an AmeriCorps partner since 2007, Share Our Strength has developed strong operating procedures and structured division of labor necessary to support the efficient and productive functioning of an AmeriCorps program. Our budget request, as compared to that in past years, proves that we have become more efficient and creative in dispatching our financial resources from CNCS.

In total, Share Our Strength and our Cooking Matters Lead Partners will bring \$792,974 from non-CNCS sources to support the AmeriCorps project. Share Our Strength and our Cooking Matters Lead Partners share the costs associated with the grantee share of the budget. Share Our Strength and our Cooking Matters lead partners have a long history of raising funds from diverse public and private sources. By sharing costs and leveraging current financial and in-kind resources, Share Our Strength is committed to ensuring that the fundraising burden is manageable for each partner.

With these funds, our AmeriCorps members will reach an additional 27,000 participants, teaching

## Narratives

them to prepare healthy, low-cost meals as a way to increase their food security and alleviate long-term hunger; that's a cost of only \$1.11/participant.

Proposed AmeriCorps Project as % of Total Share Our Strength Budget: <3%

CNCS Funding Request as % of Total AmeriCorps Operational Budget: 39%

Support from CNCS during Last Five Years: Since 2007, Share Our Strength has received CNCS directed matching grant funds for the operation of our AmeriCorps program.

State Commission Funding Requests: N/A

Sources of Organizational Funding: A leader in innovative fundraising, Share Our Strength creates and maintains diverse income streams ensuring financial stability for the organization and its programs. Investments over the past few years in Share Our Strength's fundraising capacity coupled with the strength of the No Kid Hungry brand, supports expansion of all fundraising channels. This includes corporate and foundation support through cause marketing promotions, grants and sponsorships as well as individual membership contributions and grassroots fundraising through the Great American Bake Sale. A robust events program including our signature Taste of the Nation and Dine Out for No Kid Hungry events and donor dinner series helps increase revenue and secure support within culinary communities nationwide.

### b.) Budget Adequacy

Share Our Strength has relied on our successful implementation of the AmeriCorps National Direct program over the past 5.5 years to guide our programmatic and financial planning for this grant. We believe that Share Our Strength's funding request of CNCS of \$498,825 is modest given the goals set forth in our narrative and the impact we anticipate that our AmeriCorps program/members will have in the community. The funds will directly support a portion of Share Our Strength's dedicated AmeriCorps program supervisory/coordination staff and 54.5% of direct member costs (stipends, health insurance, payroll taxes, etc.). The costs of all required criminal history checks and FBI checks are the responsibility of the local program sites. Beyond the funds requested of CNCS, we have built a

## Narratives

grantee share supported budget that allows for a fulfilling experience for each of our members.

The AmeriCorps program fits naturally into our current Cooking Matters program operations and allows us to leverage current resources for maximum impact. Because AmeriCorps members join an existing network and program model, we remain confident of our estimates for the costs in training and supervision. In addition, we feel that the living allowances projected are reasonable given the quality of the experience that we will provide our AmeriCorps members. Local programs will continue to have the option of providing additional transportation or housing subsidies to members that they feel merit or need supplemental income.

As stated previously, the funds requested to support 50 AmeriCorps members will allow the Cooking Matters program to reach an additional 27,000 participants over the next three years. This participant reach goal becomes possible as our AmeriCorps members help to engage new volunteers, work with new host agencies, and provide local Cooking Matters program staff with greater opportunity to engage in strategic actions that will sustain the program in the future. Through Cooking Matters model of collaboration, shared resources, and natural efficiencies as a national program, we are able to provide a fulfilling and worthwhile opportunity to AmeriCorps members around the country who are able to see tangible outcomes as a result of their service.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

Please see the Evaluation Report and Evaluation Plan emailed to [americorpsgrants@cns.gov](mailto:americorpsgrants@cns.gov) as instructed in the 2013 Notice of Funds Available.

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A