

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

25 AmeriCorps members serving through the American Legion Auxiliary Call to Service Corps at six national nonprofit organizations with service locations in California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, Virginia, and Washington will develop and deliver information and referral, outreach and engagement, and case management services to veterans, servicemembers, and their families nationwide. The members will assist 50,000 veterans, servicemembers, and their families annually. Veterans and military families served will experience improvements in family strength, economic well-being, and housing security due to having been connected to human services by the AmeriCorps members. This project aligns with the CNCS veterans and military families focus area. The CNCS investment of \$325,000 will be matched with an equal amount of cash and in-kind resources from the project's operating sites.

## Rationale and Approach

### Need

The target community of the American Legion Auxiliary Call to Service Corps, an AmeriCorps project which is national in geographic scope, is a population group comprised of the nation's veterans, military servicemembers, and their families. Broadly speaking, this target community (hereafter "the military and veteran community") includes 2.28 million servicemembers, 3.14 million dependents of servicemembers, 22.7 million veterans, and an undetermined number of dependents of veterans. (Sources: US Department of Defense, US Department of Veterans Affairs)

Within this vast military and veteran community are a subset of members who are economically disadvantaged, as indicated by measures such as \$88 million in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits used at military commissaries in 2011 (commissaries serve both active, inactive, and retired servicemembers), 844,000 veterans unemployed in January 2013, 1.45 million veterans living at or below the federal poverty level in 2009, and 145,000 veterans experiencing homelessness in 2011. (Sources: Defense Commissary Agency, Department of Labor, Department of Veterans Affairs)

Some members of the military and veteran community face family functioning, emotional, and economic strains that are directly attributable to their military and veteran status. Examples include servicemember, spouse, and couple stress attributable to the servicemember's deployments and returns; military spouse inability to work due to an absent second parent or career-stunting frequent relocations; military child difficulty in school and peer relations due to his family's relocations to new communities; and veteran struggles with readjustment to civilian life. (Sources: VA National Center

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for PTSD, National Military Family Association, Military Child Education Coalition)

This amalgamation of stressors has produced great and growing need within the military and veteran community for a range of morale, emotional health, and practical human services. Fortunately, both the public and private sectors have assembled a vast array of programs specifically for servicemembers, veterans, and their families. The Congress, the U.S. Departments of Defense, Labor, and Veterans Affairs and the states have established a human services enterprise inclusive of health services, housing assistance, education and training, family support, transition assistance, and income benefits. This public system is supplemented by resources and services from the private for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, including from the national organizations participating in this AmeriCorps project as operating sites.

This human needs delivery system is far from perfect. Gaps in resources and services exist because the volume of need is growing, especially in the areas of family support, workforce development and employment, and housing. Moreover, the system has become so complex that many members of the military and veteran community find access to it intimidating or frustrating, and ultimately abandon their search for support. Further exacerbating the systems challenge is the reality that many members of the military and veteran community bounce between military/veteran & civilian and public & private service providers, disrupting their continuity of care in so doing.

These access to resources and services challenges are the primary community need that this AmeriCorps project addresses. The ALA Call to Service Corps will deploy AmeriCorps members to six national nonprofit organizations that provide human needs services to the military and veteran community. The AmeriCorps members will develop and deliver services that enable members of that community to access the resources and services they require and deserve for the well-being of themselves and their families.

Our project's operating sites have been serving the military and veteran community from as far back as 1881 to as recently as 2012. By matching AmeriCorps resources prioritized for veterans and military families with our own capabilities, the ALA Call to Service Corps will capitalize on the promise that national service offers for the nonprofit sector and the federal government to collaborate around our shared goal of uplifting those who protect and have protected our nation through military service.

AmeriCorps Members as Means to Solve Community Problems

The American Legion Auxiliary requests an allocation of 25 full-time AmeriCorps members for placement at six operating sites with service locations in California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana,

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Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. The members will develop and deliver information and referral, outreach and engagement, and case management services to veterans and military families throughout the nation, especially those with family functioning, economic, and housing needs. Secondly, they will generate volunteers from the military and veteran community and the general population to contribute to the operating sites' human service delivery efforts.

We will place AmeriCorps members in the following service assignments:

Gateway to Services Assistant (American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters). One member will gather and disseminate information on human needs resources and services for veteran and military families through ALA's Gateway to Services information and referral portal. The member will customize referrals for military and veteran families who contact the Auxiliary for assistance, including referrals to programs of The American Legion and ALA.

Services to the Armed Forces (SAF) Assistants (American Red Cross). Two members will provide support to the military and veteran community accessing SAF services through the Florida regional office of the Red Cross. They will make follow up contact to military family members who initiate emergency communications to deployed servicemembers through the Red Cross. They will coordinate Red Cross participation and involvement in regional Yellow Ribbon reintegration events and homeless veteran stand downs. They will develop a community resource guide that assists servicemembers, veterans and their families in accessing regional resources and services. They will recruit Red Cross volunteers into the VA Voluntary Service at a new VA medical center opening in the region.

Military Family Resource Content Specialists (National Military Family Association [NMFA]). Two members will compile information on resources and answers to questions frequently asked by military family members and those who support them. The members will distribute information to military family members and NMFA volunteers via the organization's newsletter, website, and MyMilitaryLife application.

Emergency Service Program Coordinators (Operation Homefront [OH]). Two members will identify resources for military families contacting OH for emergency services, such as financial assistance, child supplies, furniture, household appliances, and automobile repair. Also, the members will refine and add resources to the organization's resources directory.

Morale Programs Coordinators (OH). Two members will organize morale-lifting programs for military families nationwide. OH morale events include back-to-school backpack drives, holiday toy drives, holiday meal sponsorships, and holiday adopt-a-family initiatives. Also, these members will

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match military families to donated automobiles, event tickets, and other morale-boosting donations. OH uses morale-lifting as a strategy for introducing "cautious" or proud military families with human needs to OH programs.

Regional Programs Coordinators (OH) - Six members will deliver emergency services, morale-lifting, and military spouse support programs through six OH regional offices.

OH Village Coordinators (OH). Three members at OH's transitional housing sites for wounded warriors and their families will assist residents in locating local resources and services, organize morale-lifting events for residents, and prepare apartments for occupancy and vacancy.

Homes on the Homefront (HOTH) Program Coordinators (OH). Two members will connect HOTH residents to resources and services in their communities. Also, they will assist in developing the program's policy and procedures. (HOTH is a new program through which OH receives donations of foreclosed homes from lenders and transfers those properties to needy military and veteran families.)

Volunteer Coordinator (OH). One member will recruit OH volunteers for projects nationwide. The member will assist in volunteer program management, including preparing templates and materials for corporate volunteer teams.

Veteran Resource Navigator (Springwire). One member will recruit homeless veterans into an internet-based information and referral service that connects veterans and their families to resources.

Outdoor Conservation /Wildland Fire Fighting Program Outreach Assistant (Veterans Green Jobs [VGJ]). One member will outreach to veterans and orient them to career opportunities in the conservation and land management industries.

Employment Program Outreach Assistant (VGJ). One member will outreach to veterans and orient them to career opportunities in green industries.

Education Counseling Assistant (VGJ). One member will outreach veterans and orient them to education and training opportunities that translate into careers in green industries.

We are requesting full-time slots because the demand for human needs assistance is growing within the military and veteran community due to the prolonged war period, and now the drawdown and return to civilian life of a large number of activated troops in the coming half-decade. The resultant pressure on the human services delivery system exceeds the current capacity, and in some cases organizational structures, of our organizations to respond to our community members as fully or as completely as we desire. Adding AmeriCorps members into our staffing structures and service locations will enable us to extend our reach to more community members in need.

Each AmeriCorps member assignment supplements or strengthens the work of our operating sites'

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current staff or volunteers. Staff currently bears a heavy burden meeting the daily needs of a growing beneficiary base, leaving little time for program development or improvement. Our sites' volunteers generally are not available for full-time, full-year assignments. These human resource realities, while a management challenge, present the ideal condition for the inclusion of AmeriCorps members into our sites. The AmeriCorps members will respond to excess requests for resources and services, ensure a thorough response to initial inquiries, and relieve full-time staff from beneficiary screening so that they may turn their attention to program quality improvement and sustainability and the management of complex beneficiary cases.

### Evidence-Informed Interventions and Measurable Community Impact

The unifying component of this project (which includes distinct operating sites, an expansive target population, and beneficiaries with varying human services needs) is the set of interventions that AmeriCorps members will activate across operating sites -- information and referral, outreach and engagement, and case management. We have ascribed the summary term "human needs enabling services" to this group of interventions because they function as intermediary actions which enable an individual or family with human needs to find, obtain, and use the appropriate service(s).

Health and human services professionals know enough about what works and what does not in enabling services to have constructed theories of change, practice standards, and credentialing processes that describe and guide the foundation and proper delivery of enabling services. For example, in the area of information and referral, there exists the AIRS Standards of Professional Information and Referral, an organizational accreditation in I&R, and professional certification in I&R. A similar repertoire exists for case management. Existence of these tools warrant our assertion that the placement of AmeriCorps members in enabling services assignments is an evidence-informed approach.

Our project's end outcomes are to increase the family strength, economic well-being, and housing security of servicemembers, veterans, and their families. Intermediate outcomes expected as a result of the project include: 1) increases in resilience of military spouses assisted by AmeriCorps members (primary member activity); 2) increases in employment of veterans assisted by AmeriCorps members; and 3) increases in housing security among military families, veterans, and veteran families assisted by AmeriCorps members. In pursuit of these intermediate outcomes, members will deliver human needs enabling services interventions. Our project will reach 50,000 members of the target community annually, or 150,000 members over a three-year period. We established this output target by aggregating the numbers of servicemembers, military family household units, veterans, and

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veteran family household units that each site estimated would be served by the AmeriCorps member(s) assigned to their sites.

We will measure project outputs by requiring members to tally beneficiary interactions in a daily activity log. The members will sum those tallies and report them to ALA in monthly progress reports. We will measure project intermediate outcomes by administering brief survey instruments to military spouses receiving medium- to high-dose enabling services from AmeriCorps members. (We will exclude from intermediate outcome measurement those beneficiaries receiving brief I&R services only, as the receipt of a brief intervention is unlikely to produce the desired intermediate outcome in and of itself, but rather place the individual on a pathway toward that outcome.) We will administer the voluntary surveys to beneficiaries at the points of service initiation, service completion, and six-month follow-up (if the beneficiary can be found). We will consult with operating sites and an evaluation consultant to develop the survey instruments and establish survey administration protocols. Each operating site will utilize the same instrument to ensure consistency of data across sites. Operating sites will aggregate and report data to ALA semi-annually. ALA will report results annually in the grantee progress report.

Current Grantee Performance - CNCS waived ALA from performance reporting in our last full year of program operation (2010) because it determined, after it had already approved our project plan, that our member activities and performance measures were misaligned. Therefore, we are not able to respond to this application criterion. We discuss our current and CNCS-approved performance measurement system below under the "organizational background and staffing" criteria.

### Member Recruitment

Member recruitment is a shared responsibility of ALA and each of our project operating sites. ALA posts to the AmeriCorps portal a service opportunity listing unique to each member assignment. Each posting includes a statement of the project's total commitment to nondiscrimination. We distribute the service opportunity listing, inclusive of a brief description of the AmeriCorps program and member benefits of service, to the operating sites for their use in operating-site specific recruitment.

Strategies our operating sites deploy to generate an applicant pool include notifications of their service opportunities in their newsletters and websites; postings on online job and volunteer search engines, dissemination of the listing to partners and affiliates, and outreach to college and university career centers, veterans specialists within local workforce agencies, state service commissions, and CNCS state offices.

Also, ALA posts a general service opportunity listing for our project on the AmeriCorps portal. We

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harvest email addresses from applications to the general listing and add those addresses to an ever-growing email distribution group, which then receives notices directly from ALA when specific AmeriCorps assignments are open for application. We have found this strategy successful in generating a larger applicant pool when specific announcements open. Our generation of a sufficient applicant pool was cited by CNCS as a program strength in our AmeriCorps National project's last full year of operation.

We contribute to the CNCS goal of reversing the underrepresentation of veterans and military family members in national service assignments by appealing to our own target community to consider our project if they are considering national service generally. We include special invitation language to veterans and military family members in our service opportunity listings. We encourage operating sites to recruit applicants in physical and online locations where members of the target community congregate. We post a general service opportunity listing on Military.com. We have a proven track record of enrolling AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA members with military and veteran backgrounds. Nearly one-third of our members in current service are veterans or military spouses.

### Member Training

We organize our learning and development plan for members around three stages of service: pre-service, start-of-service, and in-service. We administer a pre-service orientation to each AmeriCorps member prior to his enrollment. The project director conducts the orientation. The orientation takes place by webinar, utilizing software that permits incoming members to type questions into a chat feature or to ask questions verbally. This orientation is 90 minutes duration. The orientation covers all CNCS-required elements of a pre-service orientation and includes: project purpose, outputs and outcomes, eligibility for service, benefits of service, terms of service, prohibited activities, drug-free workplace requirements, standards of conduct, nondiscrimination and sexual harassment policy, reasonable accommodation policy, suspension and termination of service, grievance procedures, member evaluation policy and procedures, member learning and development, and member experience and identity. Also at this stage, we ensure the member has a copy of her assignment description. We review it orally a second time (the member and operating site have discussed the assignment once already during an interview). We discuss the skills the member is likely to acquire as a result of her service. (Those skills vary by position, but are likely to include business writing, community member outreach and engagement, and human needs resource identification.) We execute a member contract only after the member has completed pre-service orientation.

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Start-of-service orientation is a shared responsibility of ALA and the member's operating site. ALA organizes small-group or individualized webinars for incoming members on the topics of timekeeping, progress reporting, and AmeriCorps identity. Each webinar is 45 minutes duration. The webinars are conducted by the project director or the project specialist.

Operating sites provide in-person orientations to new members. The method of orientation varies among operating sites, but must include the following topics: organization mission and purpose; organization programs and services; assignment description review; member service year review; member learning and development opportunities and goal setting; site-specific standards of conduct and site-specific policies and procedures. We require operating sites to submit their new member orientation agenda to ALA for review. Further, to ensure that the member has received this orientation, ALA requires the member and the supervisor to jointly complete a checklist assuring that orientation has been completed to the member's satisfaction. This checklist prompts an explicit discussion between the member and supervisor on the member's learning and development and skill acquisition goals during his service term.

In-service learning and development is a shared responsibility of ALA and operating sites. Chief among the in-service learning opportunities offered by ALA is a monthly webinar series on military and veteran culture and organization management skills. Among the topics we offer are: orientation to military culture, orientation to veteran benefits, military child and youth concerns, veteran homelessness, veteran employment, community member outreach, performance measurement, volunteer recruitment, and business writing. We deliver some of these webinars in collaboration with the CNCS Veteran and Military Family Knowledge Network, thereby leveraging the technology and event planning resources of CNCS contractors and bringing subject matter and personnel expertise to the entire national service field while simultaneously meeting our own members' needs.

Other learning and development opportunities that ALA delivers to our members include: distribution of member contact information for networking; support to an online social media group for members; and distribution of announcements of publications and webinars.

Learning and development opportunities generated by operating sites include: delivery of experiential learning (such as allowing member participation in service events generated by the organization in order to expose her to the work of the organization and its beneficiaries), inclusion of the member in organization conferences and events, and linking members to training events organized by state service commissions and statewide and local nonprofit associations.

Member Supervision

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We assure that each operating site assigns a supervisor to each member. We collect job descriptions of those supervisors to ensure that AmeriCorps member supervision has been included among their duties. We require operating sites to submit a roster of supervisor names and contact information so that ALA may ensure a match to each AmeriCorps member. We notify members of their supervisor of record when we send them invitations to service. We build an electronic mail distribution group of supervisors to communicate pertinent project policies and procedures directly to them, and not rely solely on the operating site primary point of contact to relay information.

Operating sites draw from their human resource pools to identify appropriate supervisors. They tend to be employees at the manager or higher level of responsibility over divisions in which the AmeriCorps member(s) will be serving. This facilitates the members' integration into a staff team. Our sites have already designated 22 individuals as supervisors, indicating a high degree of supervision will be available to our members.

We provide a project orientation to each supervisor before they begin supervising members. We orient them through a 90 minute webinar that parallels the topics included in the pre-service orientation for members, but from a supervisor vantage point. The project director and other project team members stands at the ready to field questions from supervisors at any time. We encourage operating sites to connect supervisors to online and in-person training events for AmeriCorps grantees organized by state service commissions and local volunteer connector organizations.

### Member Experience

Unlike national service projects that assign members to teams serving discrete geographic service areas, our project's members are distributed to multiple states and may serve alone or in small groups at their service location, thereby heightening our responsibility to connect them to the larger AmeriCorps network to which they belong.

Our first step in building members' sense of connection with AmeriCorps takes place before they enter service. At the time we invite members into service, we send them a resource page with links to information about AmeriCorps, including the CNCS website, AmeriCorps website, AmeriCorps Connect, and the CNCS strategic plan summary. We follow this by discussing AmeriCorps identity during pre-service orientation. Most substantially, we deliver a 45-minute webinar explicitly focused on AmeriCorps identity during the start-of-service phase of learning and development. The webinar introduces members to national service, CNCS, the AmeriCorps network of programs, the AmeriCorps State and National program, and the CNCS strategic plan (and how the member relates to the plan!). The webinar then proposes a range of opportunities for members to maximize their AmeriCorps

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experience, including through reflection, publicity, and networking. Paired with this webinar is a set of resources we have developed for AmeriCorps members to promote their affiliation with the AmeriCorps program. These templates include talking points/elevator speech, news release, letter to the editor, and recommendations for networking with AmeriCorps members through online, local, and statewide AmeriCorps member and alumni networks.

We encourage members to reflect on their service experience throughout their term, suggesting that they keep a journal, write an essay or blog for their personal post or for inclusion in our monthly e-newsletter, or contribute to the photo or video contest conducted during AmeriCorps week.

When members near their ends-of-term we convene them in small groups by conference call for discussion with each other about their accomplishments and future plans. Also, we impart to them the opportunities available to continue in their service pursuits as AmeriCorps alums and as community volunteers.

We will amend the project's standard operating site memorandum to require operating sites to include "AmeriCorps" within the assignment title, signature block, and business cards of members. Finally, we will require operating sites to contribute cash of \$50 per member for the purchase of AmeriCorps service gear such as lapel pins and polo shirts. We will amend both the project's operating site memorandum of agreement and member contract to specify instances where the member must wear AmeriCorps gear.

The most important action we can take to develop the member's lifelong sense of connection with AmeriCorps is to ensure they have a service term rich in skill-building and powerful in impact. We measure members' satisfaction with their service experience through satisfaction surveys administered at the 30-day and 90-day periods. We then utilize the members' mid-term evaluations to capture yet another snapshot of their experience to date. The project director reviews survey results and evaluations and intervenes directly with the member and the operating site in cases where member experience is low or medium, so that improvements may be actualized.

### Volunteer Generation

Four AmeriCorps members have volunteer recruitment activities built into their assignment descriptions. They will utilize the existing procedures of their operating sites to accomplish volunteer recruitment. Volunteers recruited will be placed in morale-lifting, peer support, or administrative assignments. Management of the volunteers will largely be the responsibility of operating site full-time staff. Operating site points of contact will ensure that volunteers recruited by AmeriCorps members are not assigned to volunteer activities that are prohibited or disallowed in the AmeriCorps program.

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ALA will assist with compliance with this requirement by developing a flyer on prohibited activities for operating sites to reproduce and distribute to volunteers recruited or supported by AmeriCorps members.

### **AmeriCorps Identification**

Parallel to our commitment to ensuring members' identification with AmeriCorps is ALA and operating sites' identification with national service, including AmeriCorps. ALA and the operating sites are proud to be among the first military and veteran organizations to participate in CNCS programs. Along with this opportunity comes the responsibility to be ambassadors for CNCS and AmeriCorps with our own members and supporters, our collaborators and partners, and the general public. Accordingly, we will increase our efforts to brand our organizations as national service participating organizations. Already we require operating sites to identify their affiliation with AmeriCorps on their organization websites and through signage at member service locations. We will amend our standard operating site memorandum of agreement to require the inclusion of the AmeriCorps name or emblem on organization print materials developed or directly associated with the service being provided by the AmeriCorps member. ALA will monitor compliance with these expectations by subscribing to operating site newsletters, requesting members to submit copies of any written materials they generate along with their progress reports, and the project director spot checking the operating site web pages for evidence of AmeriCorps branding.

### **Organizational Capability**

#### **Organizational Background and Staffing**

We use a consortium model to organize our project. American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters serves as the consortium leader, legal applicant for CNCS funds, and grantee.

The American Legion Auxiliary, founded in 1919, is the world's largest women's patriotic service organization, with nearly 800,000 members. Our mission is as follows: "In the spirit of service not self, the mission of the American Legion Auxiliary is to support The American Legion and to honor the sacrifice of those who serve by enhancing the lives of veterans, military, and their families, both at home and abroad. For God and Country, we advocate for veterans, educate our citizens, mentor youth, and promote patriotism, good citizenship, peace, and security."

The beneficiaries of ALA programs over its history are incalculable. They include disabled, hospitalized and homeless veterans; families of military servicemembers deployed to conflict zones and serving stateside; girls and boys with educational and health care needs; community members across the nation, including low-income persons, for which ALA units conduct community service

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projects daily; and our volunteers and their husbands, parents, siblings, children and other relatives who have served our great nation.

Members of the American Legion Auxiliary's 9,500 local units in the U.S. and 11 foreign countries work in practical, hands-on ways to serve nearly 1 million veterans each year. They raised or spent more than \$10 million and contributed 1.9 million hours of service to help veterans and military families in 2010 to 2011. Another 2.1 million hours per year go toward community service activities that advance ALA's mission. Those hours are the equivalent of more than 3,000 full-time employees. Other levels of the organization include state departments and national officers and committees, as well as a professional national staff at the American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters in Indianapolis, Ind.

Marquee American Legion Auxiliary programs include ALA Girls State and ALA Girls Nation. Together, the programs attract more than 20,000 participants each summer for experiential learning about state and federal government. The Poppy program raised more than \$3 million in donations for veterans programs in 2010-2011 by distributing paper poppies hand-crafted by veterans. The ALA is the fourth largest provider of volunteers to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs through its VA Voluntary Service program. The ALA is a national co-presenter of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, which is comprised of talent competitions in art, creative writing, dance, drama and music for veterans treated in the VA national health care system. The Auxiliary Emergency Fund awards grants to members in financial crisis because of natural disasters or other emergencies.

Auxiliary members also donate flags to servicemembers and schools, assemble "hero packs" for military children, send care packages to troops and wounded warriors and hold stand downs to provide veterans with personal services and necessities. ALA also accomplishes its mission by encouraging its members to support organizations with similar missions, such as Operation Homefront, USO and Operation Military Kids.

ALA is the appropriate lead organization for the consortium due to its current grantee relationship with CNCS and its leadership role as an intermediary organization for other military and veteran organizations in the national service arena. We have served as a VISTA sponsoring organization since 2009 and an AmeriCorps National direct grantee since 2010. We have acquired the requisite experience to effectively manage AmeriCorps projects with multisite and multistate complexity. We handle member enrollment, timekeeping, payroll of 64 AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA member slots. We collect and track cash and in-kind contributions from AmeriCorps National operating sites. We file required progress and financial reports and receive an A-133 audit.

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The project director for our AmeriCorps activities is Robert K. Reeg. Bob is the director of government relations for the American Legion Auxiliary and project director of the American Legion Auxiliary Call to Service Corps. In his project director capacity, Bob is responsible for leading the Auxiliary's AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps National projects to build and coordinate the capacity of military, veteran, and civilian organizations to support veterans, military servicemembers, and their families. Prior to joining the American Legion Auxiliary in 2008, Bob has held positions in advocacy, program development, and project management with organizations such as the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, National Network for Youth, National Coalition for the Homeless, and American Public Human Services Association. Bob holds a Master of Public Administration degree from The George Washington University and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Vanderbilt University.

Bob has emerged as a veteran and military families focus area leader in the national service movement. He is member of the CNCS Veterans and Military Families Knowledge Network Learning and Development cohort. He collaborates with this Knowledge Network in organizing for the national service field a series of webinars on military and veteran topics. He represents ALA on the advisory council to the Community Blueprint, a military and veteran initiative led by Points of Light. He is a recipient of a Daily Point of Light award for his veterans activities. He is a regular presenter on military and veteran topics at the National Conference on Volunteering and Service. And he was selected by CNCS in 2011 to complete a leadership development program of the American Express Leadership Academy.

ALA has assembled a staff team to support our AmeriCorps investments, inclusive of a project director, project specialist, and partial time of three employees from ALA's human resources and finance divisions. The project director convenes the team biweekly to review project progress and to relay pertinent information about AmeriCorps policy and program changes to the full team. ALA staff new to the project receive the same project orientation that ALA provides new supervisors of project operating sites. The project director attends the annual AmeriCorps grantee meeting. In 2012, the project specialist attended the annual conference of the National Service Inclusion Project. In 2013 our project specialist and compliance accountant will attend the Grants Management Institute.

Our AmeriCorps projects have the full support of the organization's elected leadership and chief executive, made evident by their decision for the organization to pursue this application for a second AmeriCorps National grant.

To meet our project evaluation design and analysis needs, we enjoy a relationship with the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration of the George Washington University.

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In 2011, we collaborated with TSPPPA Director Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, whose expertise is performance evaluation, and two master of public administration candidates under her tutelage, to develop the performance measurement system and tools of our current AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA projects (both of which place members in capacity-building assignments). Our resulting performance measurement system and tools to be top-of-the-line. We look forward to presenting on this robust system for measuring the effectiveness of capacity-building activities at a workshop at the 2013 National Conference on Volunteering and Service. Dr. Newcomer has pledged ongoing support to ALA in the development, refinement, and implementation of our AmeriCorps project performance evaluation systems, which we will need to do since this project shifts our AmeriCorps National work from capacity-building to direct service.

Current Grantees: Generally, CNCS has found ALA to be operating our AmeriCorps project in a satisfactory matter. In 2010, CNCS identified five modest areas of noncompliance in its grantee progress report feedback. In 2011, CNCS cited only two noncompliant incidents, indicators that we are improving in our project management.

In terms of the project's placement within the overall organization, because of the Call to Service Corps' collaborative orientation and large grant size, it is placed within the executive division of the organization. The project director reports directly to the organization's executive director.

### Sustainability

Our immediate plan for securing resources for project implementation concentrates on generating cash and in-kind contributions from ALA and each operating site. As the project proceeds, we will share news of our impact with organizations interested in the military and veteran community, including philanthropies and corporations with demonstrated histories of investment in our population and organizations. One tool we have available for maintaining their attention is a monthly e-news highlighting our AmeriCorps member accomplishments. We trust that by keeping our project consistently before our stakeholders, we will soften them to support our efforts financially should federal funding for the project cease.

Each operating site has its own fund development capacity. Collectively, our annual revenue budgets total nearly \$3.5 billion (ranging from \$1.5 million to \$3.4 billion), suggesting that we have future capacity to generate funds to support the project's activities, and more critically, to support the direct human services to which our AmeriCorps members will be connecting members of the military and veteran community. We see potentiality for collaborative fundraising among operating sites to sustain and grow this project over time.

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The ALA Call to Service Corps enjoys the admiration and support of many organization stakeholders working in the military and veteran space. This can only be a positive from a sustainability perspective. ALA and our project operating sites share membership in the military and veteran organization sector, and therefore share a common network of public and private partners to call upon for advice and solidarity. This includes federal agencies such as DOD and VA, service organizations such as USO and Volunteers of America, and corporate philanthropies such as Bank of America Foundation and USAA Foundation. Many of us gather through networks such as Points of Light's Community Blueprint initiative and ServiceNation's Got Your 6 public awareness campaign. We rely on these collaborators and networks to provide intelligence on the resources and services needs of the military and veteran community (beyond which we observe directly by being military and veteran-serving organizations), as well as new program initiatives to which we will want to connect beneficiaries.

### Compliance and Accountability

ALA deploys prevention, detection, and enforcement strategies to ensure project, operating site, and member compliance with AmeriCorps program requirements. Our compliance plan extends beyond the core elements of operating site memorandums of agreement, member contracts, and operating site and member pre-service orientations. Preventively, it includes the development and dissemination of a set of finely-tuned policies and procedures on all aspects of the project, including recruitment, enrollment, criminal history checks, timekeeping, progress reporting, grievances, and nondiscrimination and sexual harassment. In addition, we collect from operating sites and review evidence of policies in place such as member safety and nondiscrimination, before we place a member at the site.

In terms of detection, we look for patterns of low risk, such as occasional untimely submission of member timekeeping instruments. Also, we look for member complaints about their service assignment or environment, as can be expressed in satisfaction surveys, progress reports, or direct communication with project staff. Each of these moments serves as an early warning signal of potential greater compliance challenges afoot or ahead. Each instance triggers a communication from the project director or another project staff member with the operating site point of contact and/or the member to reinforce project requirements and to develop a corrective action approach if the circumstance becomes frequent.

Enforcement mechanisms in our portfolio include requiring operating sites to prepare written corrective action plans, withholding the placement of additional members at operating sites with

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multiple slots until compliance issues have been addressed, and even removing a site from the project if the compliance matter is especially grave.

Current Grantees:

**Demonstrated Compliance** - In 2010, CNCS identified five areas of noncompliance. On the matter of late enrollments and exits, we uncovered our incomplete understanding of the selection, enrollment, and exit features of the AmeriCorps portal. We now understand the portal and have virtually eliminated late enrollment and exits. On the matter of operating site monitoring, we submitted and received approval of an operating site monitoring policy and procedures. We successfully refuted CNCS questions on potential member displacement and member fundraising. And we explained our failure to meet full enrollment by one member slot and pledged to transfer the slot to another operating site in the project.

**Enrollment** - In 2010, we enrolled 14 of 15 allotted members. We were unable to fill one position in a high cost of living area at the living allowance that we were able to offer. We have since transferred that slot to another operating site in a lower cost geographic area.

**Retention** - In 2010, we retained 10 of 14 enrolled members. We were required by program requirements to remove two members for failure to submit truthful applications, when adverse criminal history information that contradicted their applications came to light only after FBI check results arrived. Three members removed themselves from the project when they accepted full-time employment. We have amended our criminal history check authorization form to prompt applicants to be even more forthcoming about any and all criminal history so that we have 100 percent information before check results arrive. And we now have incorporated into our applicant screening process explicit questions about the member's intention to complete a service term even if offered a full-time assignment.

**Multi-Site Applicants**

**State Service Consultations**

ALA notified in writing the state service commission in each state where we will be placing an AmeriCorps member through this project. We invited the commissions to provide us additional instructions for completing the initial consultation, or to follow-up with questions or comments on our project. Post-award, operating sites will notify each state service commission when a member has been placed into service in their state and request the commission to include the site and the member(s) in training and networking opportunities if state resources permit it.

**Operating Sites and Service Locations**

## Narratives

ALA is proud of the role we play as an intermediary in creating pathways to national service participation for compatriot military and veteran organizations who are national in scope (and therefore not well-suited for AmeriCorps state projects), but which lack capacity or volume of member need to warrant independent applications for national direct support.

Our process for recruiting and selecting operating sites included several steps. First, we contacted sites in our current AmeriCorps National project to notify them of our intended change of focus from capacity-building to direct services and invited them to consider renewing as operating sites under the new project. Of our three current operating sites, two (NMFA and OH) expressed intent to continue.

Second, we issued a written invitation to express interest in entering the ALA Call to Service Corps to over 20 national-scope military and veteran organizations with which ALA regularly collaborates. We convened a conference call for the subset of organizations that expressed interest in learning more. We also provided them a PowerPoint presentation that covered the responsibilities of operating sites. Finally, we provided the subset of interested parties a proposal information form. The form includes sections that address AmeriCorps criteria for operating site selection, such as a biographical sketch of the site primary point of contact to address the quality of leadership criterion and a listing of organization awards received as an indicator of community involvement. Also, we collected proof of applicant sites' nonprofit status and their most recently completed Form 990 federal tax return. Upon review of the information presented in the proposal information form, ALA selected the following organizations to serve as operating sites in the ALA Call to Service Corps AmeriCorps project:

American Legion Auxiliary National Headquarters will place one member in one service location in Indianapolis, Indiana.

American Red Cross, founded in 1881, prevents and alleviates human suffering in the face of emergencies by mobilizing the power of volunteers and the generosity of donors. The American Red Cross is always there in times of need. The Red Cross aspires to turn compassion into action so that all people affected by disaster across the country and around the world receive care, shelter and hope; our communities are ready and prepared for disasters; everyone in our country has access to safe, lifesaving blood and blood products; all members of our armed services and their families find support and comfort whenever needed; and in an emergency, there are always trained individuals nearby, ready to use their Red Cross skills to save lives. The Red Cross will place two members in one service location in Orlando, Florida.

National Military Family Association, founded in 1969, is the leading nonprofit organization committed to strengthening and protecting the families of the men and women currently serving,

## **Narratives**

retired, wounded or fallen. NMFA provide families of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with information, work to get them the benefits they deserve, and offer programs to improve their lives. For more than 40 years, its service and accomplishments have made NMFA a trusted resource for military families and the Nation's leaders. NMFA will place two members in one service location in Alexandria, Virginia.

Operation Homefront, founded in 2002, is a nonprofit organization that provides emergency assistance for troops, the families they leave behind and for wounded warriors when they return home. OH provides direct services that alleviate a military family's or individual's actual/complete emergency financial burden, as well as counseling and/or recovery support. OH will place sixteen members in ten service locations in Oceanside, California, San Diego, California, Colorado Springs, Colorado, Gaithersburg, Maryland, Lansing, Michigan, Boston, Massachusetts, San Antonio, Texas, Hampton Roads, Virginia, and Sterling, Virginia.

Springwire, founded in 1993, connects people in crisis with the social services and support networks that surround them -- expanding a community's capacity to care. By providing free access to tailored communication tools, such as Community Voice Mail and Resource Broadcasting, and through partnering with local community providers, Springwire restores a sense of hope and dignity, enabling people in transition to stabilize their lives and get access to the help they need to move out of crisis. Springwire operates a program specific to homeless veterans in the Puget Sound area and hopes to expand this activity to other geographic areas. Springwire will place one member in a service location in Seattle, Washington.

Veterans Green Jobs (VGJ), founded in 2008, provides green jobs career opportunities for military veterans. Its mission is to engage, transition and connect military veterans with meaningful employment opportunities that serve our communities and environment. As the signature program of Veterans Green Jobs, its employment program matches veterans' military experience and career interests to the skills needed by green employers, links them to training and educational programs to provide them with skills in key subject areas, and connects them with available jobs. VGJ will place three members in two service locations in Carson, California and Sacramento, California.

ALA enjoys programmatic relationships with four of these operating sites. Two (NMFA, OH) receive AmeriCorps National members through us. VGJ receives a VISTA member through us; ARC has received VISTA members through us in the past.

### **Budget/Cost Effectiveness**

## Narratives

We have budgeted \$651,675 to operate the project. We request \$325,000 in CNCS fixed amount funds (\$13,000 per member) to support 25 full-time AmeriCorps members. The balance of \$326,675, or 50 percent of the total project budget, will be comprised of grantee funds.

ALA and each operating site will contribute cash and in-kind resources to secure the balance of funds necessary to meet our obligations to members as well as to support robust project operations. ALA will require each operating site (including itself) to contribute to the project \$2,300 cash per AmeriCorps member. ALA will apply these cash contributions toward FICA/Medicare payments, health insurance, criminal history checks, and AmeriCorps gear.

Additionally, we will require operating sites to contribute in-kind expenditures, including a project share of staff supervisor salaries and fringe benefits, project share of office space, equipment lease and maintenance, technology services, and supplies, the cost of criminal history checks of supervisors, and costs of member travel and transportation to service assignment-related or learning and development-related events. We estimate these in-kind contributions to amount to at least \$10,750 per AmeriCorps member.

We derived the budget for this project from our current experience as an AmeriCorps grantee. Having operated an AmeriCorps National project of 15 full-time members since 2010, ALA has a complete financial record available with which to compare this project. Our financial analysis reveals that a 15-member AmeriCorps project cost approximately \$391,000 to operate for a 12-month period. The total project cost per member amounted to \$26,067. Applying this factor to a 25-member project led us to estimate a total cost of \$651,675 for this project. If awarded our full request of \$325,000 in CNCS funds, a balance of \$326,675 will remain the grantee responsibility. This balance will be met through cash contributions from operating sites totaling \$57,500 (\$2,300 per member) and in-kind contributions of \$268,750 (\$10,750 per member).

Our project is extremely cost-effective for operating sites in that for a cash amount of just \$2,300, they acquire a human resource valued at \$15,000 in tangible member support costs. It is also a cost-effective project for CNCS in that the federal investment is being matched by at least a 50 percent contribution from ALA and operating sites, which is over twice the minimum percentage match required of grantees in the first-year of a cost-reimbursement type grant. Also, by requesting a fixed amount award, we have foregone a modest \$7,500 in CNCS funds that we could have sought had we applied for a cost-reimbursement type grant at the full amount of funding allowable per MSY in cost-reimbursement arrangements.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

## Narratives

N/A

### **Amendment Justification**

N/A

### **Clarification Summary**

N/A

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A