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Executive Summary

20 AmeriCorps members will prepare low-income college-aged students in Minnesota for success in post-secondary education through college persistence curriculum and support services. At the end of each year of this project, students will demonstrate increased financial literacy, knowledge of campus resources, and self-advocacy, which will be reflected in college persistence and graduation rates. This project applies to CNCS' Education focus area. The CNCS investment of \$200,000 will be matched with \$800,000 in private contributions.

Rationale and Approach

a. Need

This country is facing a college completion crisis. The percentage of Americans with college degrees has remained flat for nearly 40 years, even as we've shifted to a knowledge-based economy (Lumina Foundation, 2011). Currently, 13 other countries have more college graduates per capita than the United States; just a generation ago, we led the world (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). President Obama has set a national goal to be world leaders again by 2020.

Many believe the key to success is to do a better job educating low-income students. Nationwide, only 8% of young people from low-income backgrounds earn a college degree by age 24, compared to 82% of their wealthier peers. Education Trust data shows that if low-income students earned college degrees at the rate of all other groups, we would once again lead the world.

Minnesota's college education trends mirror those nationwide. The state sees significant gaps in degree attainment between white students and students of color: in 2010, the 6-year degree attainment rate for white students was 62%, compared to 43% of black students and 54% for Latino students (U.S. Department of Education, IPEDS survey, 2010). At two-year institutions, black and Hispanic students saw dropout rates of 56% and 64% respectively, compared to 43% for white students (U.S. Department of Education, IPEDS survey, 2007). In 2010, 32% of white residents over 25 held a Bachelor's degree - approximately double the rate for Hispanics (14%) and Blacks (19%).

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce's "The Midwest Challenge" report predicts that by 2018, 70% of Minnesota's 902,000 job vacancies will require post-secondary education. However, the state's traditional college-going population is declining; the only growing populations are those who have been least likely to earn degrees: low-income students and students of color. These are the students College Possible focuses on - those with college potential, but who lack the resources to earn admission, enroll, and earn their degrees.

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College Possible supports low-income students from their junior year of high school through college graduation. Our students' average family income is less than \$25,000; 91% are students of color, and most are first generation college students. These students face extreme barriers to college access and success; in a recent survey, unenrolled College Possible students cited everything from financial aid issues to sociocultural anxieties as obstacles to enrollment. This proposal requests 20 full-time AmeriCorps members to serve as "coaches" for our College Program, providing targeted support to graduates of our High School Program to foster college enrollment, persistence, and degree completion. The interventions are described in detail in section b.

Vincent Tinto, professor and scholar in college access and success work states, "It is not enough to provide low-income students access to our universities and colleges and claim we are providing opportunity if we do not construct environments that effectively support their efforts to learn and succeed once access has been gained. Simply put, access without effective support is not opportunity."

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

College Possible's mission is to make college admission and success possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of consulting and support. AmeriCorps members are the crux of that mission, providing the intensive services necessary for our students to achieve college success.

Members deliver three programs: our High School Program, which helps students address college access barriers and earn admission; our College Program, which fosters college persistence and degree completion; and college planning workshops for 9th and 10th graders. This proposal requests 20 AmeriCorps members to serve as coaches in our College Program. Each coach would support a portfolio of approximately 125 students enrolled in institutions across Minnesota.

College Possible's College Program supports students at over 150 institutions of higher education nationwide, including most four-year colleges in Minnesota and many Twin Cities-area two-year institutions. We have developed two coaching models to meet student needs:

Campus Based College Coaches (CBCC) are based on-site at Twin Cities colleges with high concentrations of College Possible students. They forge strong relationships with colleges and are available on campus 4 days per week. They collaborate with campus resources to empower students to recognize their needs and access support systems, and facilitate connections between students to help build social capital. Depending on enrollment trends, 6-10 coaches funded by this grant would be campus-based coaches.

Technology Based College Coaches (TBCC) are based at our Saint Paul headquarters and support a portfolio of students at campuses both in and out of state. They utilize phone calls, texting, e-mail,

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Facebook, and other Web 2.0 tools to connect students with campus resources and with each other, and also make scheduled campus visits where possible. Depending on enrollment trends, 10-14 of the coaches funded by this grant would be technology-based coaches.

The College Program serves students who have completed our High School Program and are in college or hope to enroll. Beginning with our summer bridge program, which prepares graduating high school seniors for enrollment, the College Program curriculum helps students build academic, social and financial skills; form connections with their schools; and track progress toward degree completion. Coaches utilize 15 curriculum modules to support students in areas that research--both external and from yearly surveys from our college students--shows are tied to college success:

1. Connecting to campus resources/practicing help-seeking behavior. Students who build campus connections are more likely to persist than those who simply show up for class (Engle and Tinto, 2008). Coaches help build student support networks by linking them to on-campus resources.
2. Building effective time management and study skills. First year curriculum focuses on developing the skills and habits of successful college students, including healthy coping mechanisms for stressors such as balancing workload and social commitments.
3. Maintaining financial responsibility. Students learn how to manage account balances and budgets, renew their FAFSA, secure loans and identify work-study options.
4. Mapping a degree. Coaches provide guidance on exploring areas of interest and building relationships with advisors and professors to maximize support in a chosen field of study.
5. Career readiness. Coaches help students secure jobs and internships through job shadowing and job fairs; finding professional mentors; and using career centers and alumni networks.

Using the curriculum as a framework for connecting with their students, coaches track correspondence as they work towards objectives like enrollment, class registration, and FAFSA renewal to achieve the ultimate goal of degree attainment. Coaches also plan student gatherings to promote community building; form study groups to strengthen academic support systems; and collaborate with college departments to provide trainings and professional development opportunities. AmeriCorps members are a uniquely effective means of solving the problem Minnesota's low-income students face: the lack of resources needed to achieve post-secondary success. Members provide the critical link between students and college campus resources. Most colleges have resources dedicated to student retention, from financial aid offices to academic support services to clubs and organizations. However, low-income and first-generation students have little or no experience with these structures, and they and their families often struggle to navigate other institutional systems as well. In fact,

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research shows that low-income families tend to trust relationships over systems. "When students and workers who have been in poverty (and have successfully made it into the middle class) are asked how they made the journey, the answer nine times out of 10 has to do with a relationship--a teacher, counselor, coach or boss who made a suggestion or took an interest in them as an individual" (Payne, DeVol and Smith, 2001).

College Possible builds relationships with students, who come to associate College Possible with energetic, passionate people who do whatever it takes to support them. One student comments: "It has truly been a blessing to have been a part of this program (College Possible) in high school, and it is great to still have a coach while in college. You guys make a huge difference in my life."

The structure of AmeriCorps enables coaches to serve students outside typical office hours, and conduct outreach in ways that campus staff cannot. Coaches connect with students via Facebook and text messaging, and proactively check-in with students who may not be on anyone else's radar. They help families complete the FAFSA and often identify new technological resources for supporting students that staff may not be aware of. They are absolutely critical in providing the "people power" to connect with students, helping them recognize their needs and access support accordingly. As one student said, "College Possible completely changed my views about college and helped me to understand that it's an actual option for someone like me and to keep hope. I love College Possible and my coach for everything we stand for and the stereotypes we're breaking. I aspire to give back to College Possible once I graduate from college."

Members themselves are recent college graduates, and many are people of color and/or first generation college students. AmeriCorps attracts energetic, idealistic, talented individuals committed to service. Their passion and tenacity, combined with proximity in age to students as well as shared social, economic, and cultural experiences, make them powerful messengers. The 1-2 year term of service framework of AmeriCorps channels members' talents into a concerted, short-term endeavor that yields dividends for students while avoiding the issue of full-time staff burnout. Our college students have expressed value in having different coaches throughout college; each coach's unique perspective exposes students to a variety of insight and expertise.

As the first program in the country to apply AmeriCorps members to the issue of college access, we have seen nation-leading results while running a cost-effective program that leverages federal funding to achieve broad community support. The structure and brand of AmeriCorps enables us to attract talented people whose costs are funded in part by the grant, and federal funding itself is a powerful lever for seeking matching support from private donors. Our strategic use of volunteers through

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AmeriCorps increases our capacity to serve students and grow to scale, creating a much larger impact on the community's education needs than we would otherwise have.

A June 2011 Harvard study confirms the effectiveness of our AmeriCorps members: College Possible students are more than twice as likely to enroll in college as non-program peers with the same profile.

c. Evidence-Based/Evidence-Informed and Measurable Community Impact

AmeriCorps members serving with College Possible carry out evidence-based interventions modeled after academic research and best practices, including learnings from our highly successful High School Program. A fair amount of work has been done to identify barriers to college success for low-income students; more recently, researchers have begun identifying activities that promote college success for these students. College Possible's College Program is helping to build successful practices in this field, and we are excited to work with researchers to contribute to the evidence base. Our model has been developed based on research described below.

*Addressing academic barriers. Hooker and Brand (2009) found that academic success behaviors such as study skills are critical components to college success. Yet Engle and Tinto (2008) find that "low-income, first-generation students...lack important study and time management skills, have less confidence in their academic abilities, and experience more difficulty navigating the bureaucratic aspects of academic life due to their lack of exposure to college." When low-income students experience academic difficulties they are less likely to use support services, talk to professors, or study in groups, all of which are associated with success in college (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006).

*Maintaining financial stability. Low-income students face significant financial barriers to college, and the process of securing financial aid is often confusing. Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2007) argue that the FAFSA is too complex, and that lack of immediate feedback about eligibility may discourage students from applying. There also may be confusion about what aid is available and an aversion to borrowing to pay for college (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Engle and Tinto (2008) suggest specific strategies to reduce the impact of these financial barriers: Workshops designed specifically for students and their families about financial aid, "especially filling out the FAFSA"; financial education about the options for paying for college; and financial literacy including "how to budget and use the banking system, the pros and cons of credit card use, and other forms of financial literacy to help students better acquire and utilize their financial aid..."

*Connecting to campus and career readiness resources. Social capital has been associated with student persistence in higher education (Wells, 2008). First generation college students are more likely to work full-time, go to school part-time and live off campus, which their ability to fully incorporate

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themselves into campus life (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). They also have a harder time transitioning between the norms, values, and expectations that exist on campus, and those that exist in their home or neighborhood (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). And yet, first-generation students actually derive more benefit from campus involvement than their peers (Engle and Tinto, 2008).

*Coaching model. First generation college students and those of lower socio-economic status often don't know they need help, don't seek it out or don't know what questions to ask. Coaching is cost-effective and has high impacts on academic performance and building time management, self-advocacy and study skills (Bettinger and Baker, 2011). The University of Virginia's Peer Advisor Mentoring Program utilizes a near-peer coaching model that has seen incredible success, and College Possible's own high school coaching model has proven to significantly impact student outcomes. Florida State University--where there is no difference in graduation rates between African-American and White students--works to engage students with the campus in off hours, stating that "simply contacting students makes a difference" (Carey, 2005).

*Use of Technology. InsideTrack, a for-profit coaching model used by universities nationwide, utilizes phone, email, text messages and social networking sites, and has served as an evidence-base for our technology-based coach model. A 2011 study of InsideTrack found that coached students were 5% more likely to persist and 4% more likely to graduate within four years than uncoached students. College Possible seeks independent evaluation to reinforce academic research and demonstrate our community impact. We are engaging a third-party evaluator to conduct the first external evaluation of our College Program in 2013, and will continue working with independent researchers to carry out the evaluation plan attached to this proposal. We also collect internal data to evaluate our College Program. Initial evaluations show that our campus-based program has slightly higher interim results, but that our technology-based program is highly efficient on campuses with smaller numbers of our students, and for students with less conventional schedules (e.g. commuter students). After only three years of implementation, both models' results match national averages for students of all income levels, and are significantly higher than averages for low-income students.

During the most recently completed year, we saw several markers of College Program success:

*94% of students who attended our summer bridge program (over 300 students) and 84% of the overall class of 2012 enrolled in college in fall 2012, compared to 52% of low-income students who enroll within one year of high school graduation nationally.

*93% of students completed their renewal FAFSA, ensuring financial aid eligibility for the next year;

*84% of all first-year students at a 4-year institution (class of 2010) returned for a second year,

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compared to 78% nationally; and 76% of students attending 2-year institutions returned, compared to 61% nationally.

*74% of all students who have started the College Possible College Program either are persisting in college, or have already graduated.

*In 2011-12, 229 students earned two-or four-year degrees. By August 2012, 654 students had earned a bachelor's degree, and another 214 had earned an associate's degree or certificate. Our six-year graduation rate increased by three percent from last year to 58% overall, comparable to the national rate of 57% and the state of Minnesota's 61% graduation rate for all students. This is over five times the national 6-year graduation rate for low-income students, which is only 11%.

We diligently collect data to manage toward the community impact we hope to achieve. Much of what we track is consistent with the National College Access Network's (NCAN) recent release of the field's common measures of college success, including: participation in our pre-college summer bridge program, college enrollment and persistence, and completion of financial aid paperwork. Each semester, we produce reports outlining enrollment, transfer and degree completion rates, using the National Student Clearinghouse and college registrars to ensure data accuracy. In addition, we have developed interim measures that help coaches target students who may be struggling. We work with students to ensure they are registering for the next semester and earning credits toward their degree. With positive indicators of College Program success and continued AmeriCorps investment, we expect to see increases in our students' college persistence and graduation rates. This grant would enable us to support at least 3,000 students annually. Specific performance targets are included in the performance measures section of this document. Through aggressive goal setting, and by aligning all program activities with our ultimate goal of college success for our students, we have set our 6-year graduation rate to be 65% by 2015, which would significantly exceed the national average for all students, regardless of income (currently at 57%).

Currently, Sea Change Capital Partners is working with College Possible to develop a cost analysis of the College Program. While this analysis is not finalized, initial results indicate strong promise in the college program in producing a significant social return on investment.

d. Member Recruitment

We have great success with member recruitment, receiving over five applications for each available position. We strive to recruit members from traditionally underrepresented populations to reflect our students' demographics: more than 35% of our members are people of color, and 25% are first-generation college graduates. We will continue to build on this diversity in the coming years. Our

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retention rate -- as well as the results Corps members achieve -- speaks to our success in working with these populations. Many grew up or attended college locally, and have firsthand experience with community issues. We work to ensure that the opportunity to serve is open to all people, including those with disabilities by reaching out to campus disability services offices. We also recruit College Possible program alumni, whose program experience makes them highly effective Corps members. To maximize the number of people who hear about AmeriCorps opportunities with College Possible, we take the following recruitment approach:

*Raising awareness: We advertise our AmeriCorps positions via information sessions at colleges and job fairs; emails to our database of nearly 20,000 people and to college list-servs; newspaper advertisements; postings on the AmeriCorps website and Idealist.org. Because our members must have a bachelor's degree, we recruit heavily at college campuses nationwide.

*Recruitment partners: Colleges, both local and across the nation, are key partners. We also work with local community organizations such as YMCA/YWCAs; through national organizations such as African American fraternal or sorority organizations; and through faith-based and service organizations like Lutheran Social Services and Teach for America.

*Participation from program participants: Our students attend colleges nationwide, and their personal experience with College Possible makes them both wonderful recruiters and candidates. Furthermore, most of our students are people of color, which helps to create a diverse Corps. To date, 21 former students have served on the Corps.

e. Member Training

We are committed to training Corps members in the specific skills required to deliver college preparation services, which include navigating admissions and financial aid processes, becoming familiar with campus resources, and working with students in a trustworthy, culturally competent manner. We also provide training to facilitate personal and professional development. Our staff is dedicated to overseeing the member experience, including development, training, and supervision. Trainings are led by knowledgeable College Possible staff as well as outside trainers from college admissions and financial aid offices, the MN Office of Higher Education, and community organizations that provide additional resources to students.

Orientation: Corps members participate in at least 10 days of orientation, including a retreat that helps build the esprit de corps that is a key sustaining factor throughout the year. Topics covered:

*What is AmeriCorps?; What is Service?; College Possible organizational history

*AmeriCorps civic engagement activities, prohibited activities & compliance

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*Demographics of the Twin Cities/Minnesota; Educational Achievement Gap; introductions to key communities we serve (e.g., Hmong culture; Latino culture)

*Financial Aid 101; Intro to Student Services; Working with College Students

*Team-building activities; social activities led by returning Corps members; leadership opportunities

*Introduction to campus sites: meeting staff and students, learning about each campus' resources

Ongoing Training: Throughout the year, members convene at our headquarters each Friday to participate in trainings specific to our mission, relevant to their positions, or focused on developing members as citizens. They also meet in teams to discuss curriculum delivery to students.

A general training timeline, which coincides with the curriculum delivered to students, is as follows:

*Fall: Getting to know colleges; working with college students; financial aid problem solving; registration for spring courses

*Winter: Financial aid/budgeting; transferring logistics; teaching/leading college planning workshops

*Spring: Registration for fall courses; FAFSA renewal; renewable scholarships

*Summer: transition to college for graduating seniors

*Members are trained on and regularly review prohibited activities for AmeriCorps participants. We hold an orientation session on this topic, and members prepare peer presentations on AmeriCorps rights, responsibilities, and prohibited activities. As volunteer opportunities arise, volunteers are also informed about the scope of their activity which specifically excludes prohibited activities.

f. Member Supervision

To achieve excellent results for students and run an effective AmeriCorps program, we place strong focus on member supervision. College Possible Program Coordinators directly supervise 5 to 10 Corps members each, meeting with them bi-weekly to observe their work with students, provide feedback and support, and work with technology-based coaches to deliver content to students. Program Coordinators conduct member evaluations; help lead member recruitment and orientation; prepare training sessions, service projects and recognition activities; and help prepare reports, correspondence and other paperwork required for AmeriCorps grants. This intensive management structure ensures that members have a fulfilling experience and achieve outstanding results for students, as evidenced by our student success rates and ability to retain members throughout their term and often into a second year. One of our college students comments: "The thing I value most about my coach is her involvement with my school and her commitment to her service. It's not just about emails and phone calls. It's about a connection that will help lead to your success."

Ideally, Program Coordinators have had significant work experience prior to joining our team;

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including working with AmeriCorps supervising staff. All program staff complete orientation and training that introduces them to College Possible; covers supervising and project management; and reviews our performance goals. They also participate in three separate trainings on AmeriCorps program management requirements, and shadow experienced staff during member check-ins. Our Program Director is supported by the national office and provides oversight related to Corps member management, including training, support, and accountability in managing member files; ensuring compliance with AmeriCorps regulations including prohibited activities; and providing a positive experience for members.

g. Member Experience

We are committed to ensuring that all AmeriCorps members who serve with us have a powerful experience that produces measurable community impact, builds organizational capacity, and fosters a life-long spirit of service. Our program is structured to deliver on this by providing the following:

a. Empowerment to solve community problems: AmeriCorps members are ideally suited to address a key community need, and uniquely effective in doing so, which creates a powerful member experience. By dedicating themselves to an issue where they directly impact results, they gain a sense of power and efficacy that carries through to future career plans.

b. Significant responsibility and autonomy: College Possible AmeriCorps members are immediately vested with the significant responsibility of helping students prepare for college or continue through to graduation. They lead in planning events, connecting with college admissions staff, and serving as community spokespersons for the organization and their students.

c. Member recognition: We have a number of one-time and ongoing activities to recognize member achievements:

*An end-of-term service celebration recognizes team and individual accomplishments, and honors members for their commitment to service.

*An "AmeriCorps Member of the Year" award is given annually to the one or two most outstanding Corps member(s). The award is based on member nominations and is usually in conjunction with public recognition such as a mayoral proclamation.

*We frequently offer member rewards or incentives such as appreciation breakfasts and an ice cream social to recognize team success in meeting goals.

*Corps members can nominate each other for our weekly "Idealistic Leader" award. Nominations are read aloud in front of the entire team, publicly recognizing ways in which Corps members exemplified College Possible's Idealistic Leader traits and the spirit of service.

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*Members are highlighted on our website, and featured in our media coverage whenever possible. Additionally, during their term of service, members are well recognized at their service sites as AmeriCorps signs are proudly displayed outside office space doors.

We provide multiple structured reflection opportunities throughout the term of service. During orientation, members discuss their decision to dedicate a year of their life to service. At our mid-year retreat, members reflect on their service to date and set personal goals for the remainder of their term. At the end of the year, members write about their service and what they have learned, and share these reflections at our year-end service celebration.

College Possible Twin Cities hosts both AmeriCorps and VISTA members, and proudly collaborates with other national and community service programs supported by the Corporation. We host and attend trainings with other youth-serving AmeriCorps members, and participate in statewide efforts with other AmeriCorps/VISTA programs whenever possible. We regularly participate in National AmeriCorps Week activities, and members plan and participate in multiple organization-wide service projects each year, reinforcing the connection to national service and lifelong civic engagement. At least one of our AmeriCorps or VISTA members serves on the Inter Corps Council (ICC) annually, connecting our team to the AmeriCorps community in Minnesota.

Our trainings are also built to foster identity as AmeriCorps members. Member orientation and training is divided into four strands (see Section 1 E); one is focused on AmeriCorps. From an orientation session called "What is Service?" to regular updates about policy related to CNCS programs, members are highly attuned to their relationship with AmeriCorps and gain a sense of pride in "getting things done for America." Corps members plan and participate in organization-wide service projects during the year, including Make a Difference Day in October and Martin Luther King Jr. Day in January. Projects support a variety of community needs to highlight the many service opportunities available.

h. Volunteer Generation

College Possible recruits volunteers to expand our impact by identifying program needs and leveraging community networks to help meet them. Volunteers serve on our local Board, connecting us with local foundation officers, educational services, and youth programs, and ensuring that our program is addressing key community needs. College personnel, career advisors, school counselors, and cultural experts volunteer time and expertise by leading trainings for staff and Corps members. Other needs, from office maintenance to photography, are met through volunteer efforts of industry professionals. College Possible Twin Cities' pilot Idealistic Mentors program engages volunteers as one-on-one

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mentors to students to help them achieve personal, academic, and professional goals. Through a partnership with iMentor, a New York-based nonprofit with a track record of using technology to facilitate mentoring relationships, College Possible recruits approximately 100 mentors annually to support students from their senior year in high school to college graduation. Mentors come from a variety of professions and backgrounds, from corporate partners to government agencies to former College Possible students and Corps members. Once recruited, mentors must go through an intensive screening process to ensure that they will not engage in prohibited activities. Mentors connect with their college mentees through a combination of a web-based email platform, Facebook, phone calls, text messaging, and organized meetings, providing structured, relevant, individualized support as students pursue their college degrees. Coupled with the targeted guidance of college coaches, this initiative provides critical additional support for our students, reinforcing the pipeline from high school to college graduation.

We also engage students themselves in volunteerism, helping them recognize their own power to serve others, and to view service as an opportunity to give back to the community that has supported them. Every year, our college students help their younger peers prepare for college by serving as hosts and panelists on campus visits and at organization events.

AmeriCorps members play a crucial role in volunteer recruitment and management. They plan volunteer opportunities, publicize them to program participants, organize and support volunteers, and provide training to implement projects. Their work ensures that volunteer opportunities are planned and coordinated for maximum impact while providing a positive, meaningful experience for participants.

i. Organization Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

In addition to the actions described in Section 1.G. to promote AmeriCorps identity among members, College Possible demonstrates an organization-wide commitment to AmeriCorps identification. AmeriCorps and state commission logos are featured prominently on communication materials (website, newsletters, etc.), on College Possible "gear" (clothing and nametags--all Corps members are required to wear the AmeriCorps logo each day they are on campus), and in our offices on college campuses. Our recruitment materials for potential Corps members describe the AmeriCorps connection and commitment of our organization. We leverage our visibility in the community and our active social media networks to share AmeriCorps news and promote our AmeriCorps affiliation, especially during events such as National AmeriCorps Week.

Organizational Capability

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a. Organizational Background and Staffing

College Possible's mission is to make college admission and success possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support. College Possible was founded in Minnesota in 2000 and is in the midst of a national expansion effort. Our Twin Cities high school program has expanded from 35 students at two schools in 2000 to nearly 1,600 students at 19 schools in 2012-13. Our college program has also grown exponentially, now serving more than 3,000 students on over 150 college campuses. We work to ensure that programmatic growth is matched by management expertise, community support, and financial investment.

College Possible's management structure includes outstanding, experienced staff, both with the AmeriCorps program in the Twin Cities and with the oversight provided by our St. Paul-based national office.

Associate Director Bethany Krueger has a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Minnesota and an M.A. in Organizational Leadership from St. Catherine's University. She joined College Possible in 2001, and has served as Program Coordinator, Senior Program Manager, and Program Director. She has helped manage the program since our first AmeriCorps grant was received.

Program Director Lara Dreier has a B.A. from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities in Sociology -- Law, Criminology, and Deviance. She joined College Possible in 2007 as a Program Coordinator, served as High School Program Manager starting in 2010, and is currently Program Director.

Under the leadership of the Associate Director and Program Director, College Possible hires and trains dedicated, idealistic program staff that manage and supervise Corps members daily. Program coordinators are the first line of communication for members to help troubleshoot problems, reach out for curriculum support, and brainstorm solutions to challenging student situations. Member training is provided during a two-week orientation in August, and each Friday for the remainder of the members' term of service. A combination of college and high school partners, content experts, and College Possible staff serve as trainers for member professional development and skill building.

In addition to these Twin Cities-based staff, this program will be supported and overseen by national office staff who are experts in AmeriCorps grant administration and member recruitment, including:

Chief Executive Officer Jim McCorkell has a master's degree in public administration from the Harvard Kennedy School. Prior to founding College Possible, Jim worked with City Year, a national nonprofit public service and youth development organization headquartered in Boston, where he managed the organization's developmental plan to grow from 11 sites to 20 in four years.

Director of Programming & Evaluation Traci Kirtley has a master's degree in public policy from the

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Harvard Kennedy School. She has provided oversight for College Possible's AmeriCorps grants for nearly eight years, including: grant management, record-keeping, and compliance efforts throughout the organization; and for ensuring that all staff are trained, supported, and monitored to ensure effective management of AmeriCorps resources. Additionally, Traci leads all program evaluations and manages the important work and relationships with external evaluators.

College Program Manager Brooke Hanson has a B.A. from Bethel University, and served as an AmeriCorps*VISTA with College Possible in 2004, creating our first efforts to reach out to our college students. She served a second *VISTA term with Minnesota Campus Compact, working with their college access and success initiative. Brooke rejoined College Possible in 2007 as College Program Coordinator and was promoted to College Program Manager in 2009.

In addition to these staff, College Possible is led by a diverse, talented Board of Directors who provides leadership and oversight. Our Board includes former program participants who ground the Board in the needs of the students we serve. We also have a local board of business and community leaders, which helps identify funding sources, build relationships and increase community awareness.

College Possible has 11 years of experience administering AmeriCorps grants. Our organization's total CNCS support comes from AmeriCorps State and National grants and VISTA placements. In 2012-2013, 53 AmeriCorps members and three VISTA members serve with College Possible Twin Cities. The AmeriCorps program is the foundation of our operations at College Possible; we do not run any other programs beyond our AmeriCorps college access and success efforts. Because of the importance of AmeriCorps to our organization, proper management of this program is top priority. We have outlined procedures for ensuring compliance with file and financial management, and hold regular trainings to ensure avoidance of prohibited activities. We have received high marks for AmeriCorps program performance and management, and work continuously to ensure compliance and responsiveness to recommended changes.

b. Sustainability

To ensure that our program has maximum impact in the community and is around as long as our services are needed, beyond the presence of federal support, our organization is taking a number of steps to be sustainable.

Our first step toward sustainability is ensuring diversity of funding sources. Founded entirely on private-sector support, we leverage four private sector dollars for every dollar of government support. We have never experienced a budget deficit, and have raised enough private support to grow aggressively to meet the needs of low-income students in our community. Our mission resonates

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strongly with a broad audience, from corporate partners dedicated to workforce development to individuals compelled by issues of equality in education. Our revenue plan includes continuing to build a diversified portfolio of support from private foundations, corporations and individuals, in addition to AmeriCorps support. We have already begun to secure funds for the 2013-14 program year, both through the Greater Twin Cities United Way and a Cargill challenge grant that will leverage the support of other local organizations.

Our request for this AmeriCorps proposal totals \$200,000, leaving us to raise \$800,000 in private resources. Funding strategies will include: increased funding from existing supporters with interest in an increased focus on college success; identification of potential new funders who want to support college graduation and workforce development; and pursuit of program support from colleges who have members based on their campuses to support retention and graduation.

College Possible's fund development efforts are supported by a six-member development team with extensive experience in fundraising and stewardship. The team is led by Development Director Debra Behrens, who has fifteen years of nonprofit development experience, and supported by the Chief Advancement Officer in the National Office, Cassie Cramer, who has over 20 years of experience in senior development positions at a variety of organizations across the Twin Cities.

Our community relationships also demonstrate a broad base of support, and contribute to our sustainability. Community stakeholders and partners include:

Local High Schools: We have established crucial partnerships with the 19 Twin Cities high schools we currently serve. These schools don't have the capacity to provide intensive college preparatory programming to all their students; College Possible brings expertise, curriculum and dedicated staff into schools to help more students access college. Schools provide office space for AmeriCorps coaches working in the school, as well as classroom space for after school sessions.

Local Colleges & Universities: Many colleges hope to recruit and enroll diverse students, including low-income students and students of color, but have trouble doing so on their own. Once students are enrolled, colleges often face challenges in retaining and graduating these students without additional support in serving a non-traditional population. College Possible provides that support, and we work to influence campus policies to help low-income students succeed.

Community- and faith-based organizations: College Possible partners with local youth-serving organizations by presenting college planning workshops to their participants. Through these relationships, College Possible Twin Cities has become part of a pipeline of support to students starting from early childhood through college completion.

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Low-income students: Our students and their families are crucial stakeholders in our programming, so we work to ensure that they are involved in planning and implementation. We solicit student feedback via suggestion/ evaluation forms at the end of every school year. We review this feedback carefully, and often incorporate our students' thoughtful ideas into our planning to identify the qualities needed in a coach and to improve the effectiveness of our program.

Perhaps the most compelling case for this project's sustainability is its potential for scale and replication. Our model is a highly efficient, replicable strategy that, with solid documentation and measurement, would appeal to colleges throughout Minnesota. It could easily be adopted by other non-profits or embedded on college campuses and would work with a variety of low-income, first generation, and non-traditional students beyond those who have been through the College Possible high school program.

c. Compliance and Accountability

College Possible takes compliance with AmeriCorps regulations very seriously and holds all members of our team accountable for knowing and abiding by regulations. To prepare supervisors for their monitoring role and to ensure compliance, we take the following steps:

*College Possible holds training sessions for all new program staff to cover all AmeriCorps regulations and review organizational policies and procedures related to program management. They also receive training and hard copy summaries of prohibited AmeriCorps activities, as well as file checklists to ensure that we are collecting and holding all required member management documents.

*College Possible has a member management manual, available electronically and in hard copy to all program staff responsible for member management. We conduct regular member file audits and internal time sheet audits to ensure we can detect, address, and prevent compliance issues. If noncompliance or risk factors are found, we have an escalating disciplinary system that ultimately results in removal from the position should they not be resolved.

*While members may serve at sites throughout the Twin Cities, program staff regularly visit those sites to check in and observe service activities, ensuring member compliance with position descriptions as well as with AmeriCorps regulations.

Enrollment: In 2011-12, our last full year of program operation, we enrolled 100% of our 51 AmeriCorps slots. Our Twin Cities site has achieved 100% enrollment under every AmeriCorps grant since 2001.

Retention: College Possible Twin Cities' member retention for 2011-12, our last full year of program operation, was 100%. We continue to place strong emphasis on commitment to a term of service

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during member recruitment and orientation, as well as member monitoring and openness with supervisors to help address issues without ending a term of service early. Historically, College Possible Twin Cities achieved a 95% or better member retention rate each year since its first AmeriCorps grant.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

a. Cost Effectiveness

College Possible Twin Cities' federal cost per MSY is \$10,000 -- a significant discount from the maximum \$13,000 per MSY. The \$200,000 grant requested from CNCS would account for 6% of our operating budget; to support the total \$1 million project cost (about 30% of our total organizational budget), we plan to raise approximately \$800,000 from non-Corporation sources. Our organization has a diverse base of non-federal support, with cash and in-kind contributions coming from a variety of private, non-profit, and public sources. In our eleven year history as an AmeriCorps grantee, our fundraising strategy has enabled us to exceed the Corporation's match requirements every grant year.

Non-federal sources of support include:

*Corporate foundations: In our most recently completed fiscal year, corporate foundations donated nearly \$1,000,000 (35% of all funds). Corporate funders for this fiscal year to date are: The Cargill Foundation, General Mills Foundation, 3M Foundation, Solutran, US Bancorp Foundation, The Jostens Foundation, TE Connectivity, Securian Foundation, Deluxe Corporation Foundation, Piper Jaffray, Faegre Baker Daniels Foundation, Messerli & Kramer Foundation.

*Private foundations: In our most recently completed fiscal year, nearly \$600,000 was raised from private foundations (20% of all funds). Private foundation funders for this fiscal year to date are: Otto Bremer Foundation, Carlson Family Foundation, GEN Children's Charity, Pohlrad Family Foundation, Hardenbergh Foundation, Linsmayer Foundation, Kinney Family Foundation, Minnesota Private College Council, Walker Foundation, Lilly Foundation, Rahr Foundation, Duke Foundation, Nash Foundation, Northwest Suburban Optimist Club.

*Individual donors: In our most recently completed fiscal year, we raised approximately \$400,000 from individuals (15% of all funds).

*In-kind donations: Many businesses and organizations support our work through in-kind donations. Local colleges provide training on financial aid resources, and state experts support our team in learning about college transferring options. Local businesses have donated office supplies, furniture, food, beverages, and resources to support program efforts and offer rewards to Corps members. We plan to secure additional funding from each of these sources as our college program grows to

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scale, and will be exploring a new source of support by asking colleges to contribute to the cost of our campus-based program. We are proud of our demonstrated success at securing significant non-AmeriCorps funds, and believe we represent a model AmeriCorps program in terms of the results we obtain and the resources we receive to meet the costs of achieving this level of quality.

College Possible has 11 years of experience administering AmeriCorps grants. In the past five years, our CNCS support has come from AmeriCorps State and National grants and VISTA placements. This program is tremendously cost-efficient; the total requested grant will support 3,000 students for a federal cost of just \$67 per student (approximate cost per college student is \$225). We do not yet have a return on investment analysis for our College Program, since it is so new. However, our High School program was featured in a recent book by Minnesota businessman Peter Heegaard, who found a 333% return on each dollar invested (Bang for Your Buck, 2011). The total cost of putting a student through our High School Program is about 1/7 the cost of the most comparable federally funded program. Our College Program costs about 25% the annual cost of our High School program, suggesting that the ROI for the College Program would be even better. This is one of the tools for evaluation we will use as we continue to gather College Program data.

b. Budget Adequacy

We are committed to providing a budget to fully support the program design at a cost per MSY of \$10,000 by running an efficient program and raising significant private resources. Our total budget for our 2013-14 AmeriCorps program will be roughly \$1,000,000, including funding for planned evaluation.

Our college program budget is approximately \$225/student, equivalent to this year's per-student cost and a level we have seen over time to be adequate for an effective program. For example, our current year's college program budget is \$220/student. This allows for appropriate management levels; training and support of members; transportation and supplies needed to support students; and the cost of criminal history and FBI background checks to ensure member eligibility.

In December 2010, College Possible's Board of Directors voted to officially modify our mission to include college completion as a key goal of our work. This AmeriCorps grant would enable us to fulfill this newly expanded official mission, and our Board will be behind efforts to support this program with financial resources as well as the other supports necessary for success. We believe the program is a potential national solution to one of the key problems facing our state and nation, and are fully committed to finding the resources to support it.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

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Although an evaluation is not required at our current grant status, College Possible will work with an external evaluator to design and execute a mixed-method evaluation examining both implementation of and outcomes for our college program. Formative and implementation information will be collected from students and coaches, and qualitative data will be analyzed to explore relationships among themes, including whether themes are associated with particular stakeholders or time frames. In addition, quantitative outcome data will be collected as relates to the performance measures described earlier in this proposal. Quantitative analyses will include, as appropriate, descriptive statistics, correlations between implementation and outcomes, and tests of statistical significance. Evaluation reports will be shared broadly to ensure that this project's learnings contribute to the knowledge base in the field.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A