

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

50 AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 650 volunteers to improve literacy outcomes for 1,425 children annually in metro Denver. The existing Colorado Reading Corps is a replication of the Minnesota Reading Corps and is being implemented by Mile High United Way. Members will serve as one-on-one reading tutors for kindergarten through third grade students and will recruit, engage and train corporate volunteers to individually read with a third grade student in their community within a program called Power Lunch, increasing awareness of education issues and civic engagement in the community. At the end of the 3 year grant, 3,633 students in kindergarten through third grade who likely otherwise would be failing will have demonstrated significant progress in their reading proficiency. This project falls under the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$650,000 will be matched with \$775,800.

## Rationale and Approach

a. Need: Attaining reading proficiency by third grade is the most important predictor of high school graduation and career success (Campaign for Grade Level Reading 2012). Research has shown that students who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave high school without a diploma than proficient readers ("Double Jeopardy: How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation" Annie E. Casey Foundation, April 2011). Only 65.5 percent of students are graduating from high school in metro Denver (Colorado Department of Education, 2011). Yet, Colorado has one of the most highly educated workforces in the country (35.9 percent possess a bachelor's degree or higher versus the national average of 27.2 percent). Students who are not reading at proficient levels in the early grades typically do not catch up as they transition from learning to read to reading to learn. These students find schoolwork more challenging which can lead to course failure and disengagement from school. This is where Mile High United Way's focus on third grade literacy becomes critical. Mile High United Way has aligned its work with Colorado's education agenda to ensure that changes are not piecemeal but systematic and enduring. Colorado's education system has struggled with budget cuts in recent years, leading to larger class sizes and less specialized attention to young readers who are falling behind. The average amount budgeted per pupil (student) for the 2012-13 school year in Colorado is \$6,474 (Colorado House Bill 12-1345), which is about \$600 less than it was in 2009 and \$2,510 less than the national average (Education Week, Quality Counts, 2012). Yet since 2009, enrollment has increased by nearly 28,000. Additionally, districts have had to endure budget cuts; for example, Jefferson County Public Schools

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(Jeffco) reduced its budget by \$40 million last year and Aurora Public Schools by \$25 million.

In Colorado, public schools are being asked to do more with less, and teachers struggle to provide the necessary individual intervention to students struggling to comprehend grade-level curricula. As Bob Balfanz, a noted researcher at Johns Hopkins University, has said, we need a "second shift of caring adults" to support children.

**Student Selection:** The Colorado Reading Corps (CRC) is replicated from the Minnesota Reading Corps model which is one of the largest AmeriCorps literacy programs in the country. Initial findings and conclusions from the Process Assessment of the Minnesota Reading Corps, an independent evaluation conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, find the Reading Corps to be highly replicable. CRC selects students who have the capacity to learn to read but who experience literacy struggles that can be corrected with timely and effective data-driven interventions (children identified as Tier II within a Response to Intervention (RtI) framework). CRC will use the Minnesota Reading Corps' validated assessment instruments and evidence-based practices to identify children who are reading below proficiency and are in need of supplemental or Tier II support. Once the students "graduate" from the program, lower quartile students, who will benefit from the CRC program, are then placed in the program. AmeriCorps members are effective as specialized reading tutors who support student literacy while engaging teachers and parents in student literacy achievement.

The Reading Corps model aligns well with the Response to Intervention ([www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org)) framework because students who are served by CRC members are receiving Tier II support; students are eligible for the program based on screening data. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach at reducing special education referral rates (Marston, et al., 2003; Bollman, Silbergliitt, & Gibbons, 2007; Burns & Gibbons, 2008; VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007), and improving reading outcomes (Callender, 2007; Gettinger & Stoiber, 2007; O'Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005; Vellutino, et al., 2008).

CRC currently places 20 AmeriCorps members in twelve Jefferson County (Jeffco) elementary schools, the largest school district in the state. The requested funding will continue to build on the strong foundation established in these twelve schools while also expanding into Aurora Public Schools (both districts are located in Metro Denver). The determination of school placement will be strictly based on need. Working with members of the school district in selecting elementary schools, priority will be given to Department of Education School Improvement Grant schools.

Jeffco has 154 schools with 89 elementary schools located in urban, suburban and rural parts of the state. Jeffco was chosen for the CRC program because of its need for services, its size, and its ability to

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incorporate a new program in elementary schools. The targeted population is focused on students who are below reading proficiency levels and in schools where the average free and reduced lunch rate is at least 42 percent of students.

Aurora Public Schools is an urban school district with 33 elementary schools, and a high need for a targeted reading tutor program. Currently, only 50 percent of third graders in this school district are reading proficiently at their grade level (compared to 74 percent in the state of Colorado) and only 54 percent of students are graduating on time. With the support of Aurora Public Schools administrators, CRC will be working exclusively in Title I schools. Currently, 22 of 33 elementary schools are considered Title I.

b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems: To improve literacy rates among Colorado students in grades K-3, Mile High United Way proposes to expand a proven AmeriCorps tutoring and intervention model with the full expansion support of the model's developers. Minnesota Reading Corps is a highly successful program designed to build a seamless system of literacy acquisition for children in kindergarten through third grade, which uses student benchmarking and progress monitoring assessments to guide decision-making. Currently in its tenth year, Minnesota Reading Corps has helped 73,095 children, working to achieve reading proficiency by third grade.

Minnesota Reading Corps partners with school districts to deploy AmeriCorps members into educational settings, where they implement literacy instruction grounded in the science of how young children best learn to read. The program demonstrates the unique role AmeriCorps members can play in complementing teachers and providing individualized literacy tutoring; performing direct, frequent, and continuous performance assessments; and ensuring that teachers have the data they need to guide daily instruction.

Mile High United Way has worked closely with the Minnesota team to develop - for the first time outside of Minnesota -- a model that has full fidelity to the original program. By replicating the Minnesota Reading Corps' AmeriCorps-based design, Mile High United Way has invested heavily to dramatically accelerate reading proficiency rates by creating a defined pathway to positively impact Colorado's literacy achievement gap. ServeMinnesota, the agency that developed Minnesota Reading Corps, solicited Mile High United Way to lead this replication based on the organization's early literacy focus, its effective internal capacity, and its community influence.

Mile High United Way is requesting 50 full-time AmeriCorps members and will place 48 full-time members in school sites in Jeffco Public Schools and Aurora Public Schools. Two additional full-time

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members will focus their time coordinating the day-to-day needs of the volunteer engagement Power Lunch program, which employs corporate volunteers to build relationships with third graders through reading once a week in Denver Public Schools elementary schools (see section h: volunteer generation). As Power Lunch expands, it will be offered in Jeffco and Aurora elementary schools that also host CRC tutoring sites. Each of the 48 tutoring AmeriCorps members will work one-on-one with an estimated 30 at-risk children annually, using intensive, research-based literacy interventions and conducting weekly progress monitoring. Each student will receive 20 minutes of individually tailored daily tutoring, and each AmeriCorps member will serve approximately 18 students every school day. On average, students will be in the program for 13.5 weeks. Approximately 1,425 children will be served through the program in year one of this grant cycle. On-site, partner school staff will serve as in-kind 'Internal Coaches', and AmeriCorps members will also receive support from a consulting 'Master Coach' with expertise in child literacy, Response to Intervention models and data and assessment.

All 50 full-time CRC AmeriCorps members will be trained in 10 specific research-based, leveled literacy instructional protocols and will receive ongoing support and supervision by an on-site internal coach. The 48 members who will serve as tutors will assess each student on a weekly basis through a web-based data collection and progress assessment instrument, AIMSweb (see Member Training section) and use reliable, proven assessment tools to monitor student progress. In addition, they will use data to determine tutoring strategies tailored to meet the specific needs of each student. The use of research-based instructional techniques and technically adequate assessment tools to guide interventions make CRC programming unique within the literacy landscape.

CRC tutor members will provide 100 minutes of individualized research-based literacy interventions weekly to each child in their active caseload. Members will collect weekly progress monitoring data on enrolled students using AIMSweb. Students will "graduate" from the CRC on a rolling basis when they score 3-5 consecutive weeks above the proficiency benchmark. This is demonstrated through the weekly progress monitoring assessments which show that they have acquired the literacy skills to be "caught-up" with their grade-level peers. At this time, an additional student in need of support is placed in the program to fill this spot. Once exited, students are assessed for three additional consecutive weeks to ensure that they stay on track with grade-level expectations. If they fall below those levels, they are re-enrolled in active CRC tutoring.

AmeriCorps members serve at the ground level in elementary schools, alongside teachers and literacy experts. Members have the ability to connect with parents and engage students' families in their

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reading advancement. Members are expected to reach a minimum of 1,700 hours of service and, beyond their specific duties as reading tutors and Power Lunch coordinators, are provided specific opportunities to volunteer in afterschool programs, community recreation centers and libraries, and other activities approved by the Program Manager in the surrounding area.

Members will also complete their hours of service participating as an advisory panel and as trainers for Power Lunch, which is the Mile High United Way volunteer engagement program. A detailed explanation of how AmeriCorps members will work to generate this volunteer base can be found in the (h) volunteer generation section.

The AmeriCorps model allows the CRC program and Mile High United Way to offer its services to elementary schools at no additional cost to the school district. This is incredibly advantageous to the education system in Colorado which is already financially stretched. The proposed AmeriCorps program engages and has the potential to positively impact four levels of the metro Denver community: kindergarten through third grade students, school communities (including parents, teachers and administrators), AmeriCorps members, and corporate volunteers and community members (through the Power Lunch program).

In its inaugural year, CRC was met with great enthusiasm from school officials and parents in Jeffco Public Schools.

"We couldn't have asked for better people to join our staff. They're one of us, they greet kids every morning at the door, students know who they are, staff love them, we just have benefitted in so many ways, not only for the interventions that they provide for students who have needs, but as a staff member too, we just love having them with us." Principal Deb Hines, Fremont Elementary

"It's been super exciting. We have 36 students and out of our 36 students, we have already seen growth; we have 94 percent growth out of those students in a 4-6 week period of time." Instructional Coach Denein Cusak, Fremont Elementary

"His speech and his reading skills have just blossomed enormously. It's kind of neat to see him come out of his shell, finally." Parent of Peck Elementary student

CRC also has support from Colorado's Governor and Lieutenant Governor as a leading innovative reading program in Colorado. "Ensuring that all children in Colorado are prepared for school and able to read at grade level is an integral part of making our state successful. Colorado Reading Corps is a program that is making a difference for young readers and I hope to see this program expand and be offered in every school in our state." - Colorado Lt. Governor Joe Garcia.

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

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There are three essential elements for any model that addresses prevention and early identification of students with reading disabilities (Vaughn et al., 2007), all of which are present in the CRC. These elements are outlined below:

1. Valid and reliable measures for assessing student growth: Deno (1985) and has been replicated by Marston & Magnusson (1985); Hintz et al., (2002); and Fuchs et al., (2004).
2. Evidence-based instructional interventions: Research has demonstrated that providing strong early language and literacy experiences in both the preschool and early elementary years, as well as early intervention for any reading difficulties, is the most successful and efficient method for ensuring that children become proficient readers (Vellutino et al., 1998; Torgesen et al., 2003). CRC tutoring is supplementary to, not in place of, comprehensive core reading instruction program offered by schools. CRC members, with the support of the Master and Internal Coach, select from 10 research-based supplemental reading interventions for use with their students. These interventions share a common focus on building fluency for basic reading skills such as phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, decoding skill, and sight word recognition.
3. Systemic approach to utilizing data and providing evidence-based interventions based on student response. Initial work by Fuchs et al.(1983) set the stage for data-utilization research which has been supported over the past three decades by many studies (Deno et al., 2001; Howe et al., 2003; Fuchs et al., 2004). The design of CRC is aligned with a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach which is a framework to support educators to use data for instructional decision making.

Community Impact- By employing the resources of AmeriCorps, schools can supplement existing efforts to ensure that students become proficient readers by the end of third grade. Results of the Minnesota Reading Corp's literacy interventions and tutoring strategies with students are compelling, showing that participating children in grades K-3 gain the literacy skills required to be on target to score proficient in the third grade state reading assessment. In 2011, of the 4,967 third grade children who successfully "graduated" from Minnesota Reading Corps programming in kindergarten through third grade, 3,991 (80 percent) demonstrated reading proficiency on the Minnesota statewide exam. Of all students that participated in the program, 85 percent showed significant progress. This evidence demonstrates that students identified as at-risk for failing the state reading exam responded well to literacy tutoring. The CRC is a rigorous replication of this program, and is expected to achieve similar results: 1,211 of the 1,425 (85 percent) students annually who are enrolled will demonstrate significant progress in reading proficiency.

In its first year of operation, which started in August 2012, partial year data shows that CRC has

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enrolled and retained 100 percent of its member slots and AmeriCorps members are on target to meet required service hours. CRC has served 351 kindergarten through third grade students across 12 elementary schools and 15 percent have exited or "graduated" successfully. All 12 partnering schools have expressed interest (along with 38 new Jeffco schools) in continuing or starting the program next year.

Overall change: CRC will provide interventions to 4,275 struggling readers over three years. Using historical trends from the Minnesota program (2010-2011 Minnesota Reading Corps Statewide Evaluation), about 3,633 students (85 percent) will be on track to becoming proficient readers by Grade 3.

Demonstrable Impact: Performance measure targets for this grant were based on projections from Minnesota as well as preliminary results of the CRC's first year. Performance measures are (ED2) 1,425 students will complete the program, and (ED5) 1,211 students will show improved academic performance in literacy. Student progress will be monitored and reported annually by internal and external evaluators.

### d. Member Recruitment

Mile High United Way's (MHUW) 12-month member recruitment plan pulls from the local community and reaches out to traditionally underserved populations, resulting in 100 percent of slots being filled in the first month of the program. Our key strategies are:

Presentation to MHUW employees -- With over 800 corporate partners and more than 200 partner agencies, Mile High United Way's 100 employees are knowledgeable about the program and are spreading the word to different professional networks.

Work with local universities/colleges -- Because CRC provides recent college graduates -particularly those interested in teaching - an opportunity to work directly with students in a public school setting, a key recruitment strategy involves the career centers at local colleges: University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Denver, Regis University, University of Northern Colorado, Colorado State University, Colorado College, and the University of Denver. The AmeriCorps Program Manager attends targeted job fairs to reach traditionally underserved populations, including cultural career fairs and disability inclusion fairs.

Work with host sites to advertise in local communities -- Jeffco Public Schools supported the recruitment of AmeriCorps members this past year by posting opportunities within schools, to parents, and on local job boards, engaging members in the local community. This recruitment strategy is key to creating an inclusive group of AmeriCorps members. With the planned addition of Aurora Public

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Schools next year, further recruitment strategies will be utilized in that community. MHUW's marketing team creates flyers and brochures to be distributed by host sites so that the messaging and branding of AmeriCorps remains consistent. As a result of CRC's intentional efforts to build a multi-generational team of Corps members, 25 percent (5) of its current members are age 55 and over. These individuals brought their experience and knowledge from years in the workforce as teachers and business leaders.

How members from local communities will be included- By sending out an AmeriCorps service announcement to all MHUW staff and its partnering agencies, communication is filtered across five counties to over 200 nonprofit agencies. AmeriCorps members also promote service opportunities in the communities where they serve, making presentations in the community, presenting and making recruitment materials available at their schools, and writing blogs to create awareness.

Recruiting and engaging traditionally underrepresented populations/history- Last year program staff attended two disability inclusion trainings and one disability inclusion fair. The result was the selection and placement of an AmeriCorps member with a disclosed disability. Connections were also made with multi-cultural centers at local universities and an organization that connects adults over the age of 55 to volunteer and career opportunities. Additionally, MHUW's Bridging the Gap Program, which serves young people ages 16-24 who are emancipating out of foster care (opportunity youth), connected the Program Manager to actively recruit three members between the ages of 18 and 24 who are considered opportunity youth. The Program Manager participates in military veteran recruitment opportunities as well, including local veterans' job fairs.

e. Member Training: All CRC members along with Internal Coaches, who are member supervisors, take part in an intensive three-day training to orient them to AmeriCorps and prepare them for their placement site, the service they will perform, and the community they will serve. This orientation includes the following: 1) AmeriCorps: The Big Picture -- History of AmeriCorps and National Service, Policies/Procedures, Program Requirements, Timesheets, Confidentiality, Roles/Expectations, Prohibited Activities, Teambuilding; 2) Training on the Skills Needed to Perform Daily Literacy Intervention Activities -- Essentials of Literacy Assessment, Interventions, Benchmarking, Supervision at your School (Coaches only), Progress Monitoring, and Integrity Checks/Feedback; 3) Orientation to School/Placement Site -- Review all Placement Sites, Orientation to the Overall Community to be Served, Next Steps/School Orientation.

This three-day orientation focuses on orienting AmeriCorps members to their year of service as national service tutors versus orienting them to individual placement sites, while a formal school/on-

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site orientation, planned for the following week, will discuss site specific details such as school culture, dress code, and the school facility.

Skills to be acquired during term of service- Ongoing training is provided throughout the year --one day per month --to deepen each member's understanding of strategies and interventions with children. Trainings include AIMSweb -- a data tracking software through which members learn about progress monitoring and finding the most appropriate student interventions --and Great Leaps, which drills down on interventions to focus on building fluency and phonics. Beyond the realm of literacy, skills that translate to life beyond AmeriCorps include conflict resolution, positive communication, business writing, networking skills, resume writing, interview skills, and project management.

Members also participate in community service days, organized by the Program Manager, followed by a civic reflection discussion to further their interest and commitment in civic engagement.

How training will prepare members to perform activities of service/ongoing training and timeline-

The training highlighted above will prepare AmeriCorps members to perform as tutors. Once a month AmeriCorps members attend a roundtable that combines civic reflection with skill-building training and teambuilding. Additionally, these roundtables support the development and expansion of the Power Lunch program. AmeriCorps members will use their skills and expertise to develop program improvements and enhanced volunteer engagement. Both the AIMSweb and Great Leaps training opportunities -- which take place in the fall -- prepare members to perform as tutors, while their CRC binders act as a tangible resource for student engagement the entire year. The binders are filled with different evidence-based literacy interventions that can be identified by both member and Coach, and are reviewed at weekly supervision meetings. Internal and Master Coaches work with AmeriCorps members one-on-one to help build skills as tutors by keeping sessions interactive, rewarding children for positive behavior, and catering each intervention to meet individual needs. Additional training topics to take place monthly include resume writing, interviewing, emotional intelligence, the importance of early literacy, mentoring 101, and conflict management.

Ensuring that members and volunteers adhere to prohibited activities- MHUW takes seriously the prohibited activities outlined by AmeriCorps and revisits these regularly with both AmeriCorps members and coaches (supervisors) to ensure compliance. As mentioned in Section e (Member Training), the three-day AmeriCorps orientation highlights these prohibited activities and explains steps to take should these be compromised. These activities are also listed in the binders that every member receives, and they are reviewed through regular email communication and at mid-year evaluations. In addition to outlining all rules and regulations in AmeriCorps member's contracts and

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having monthly check-ins with the Program Manager to ensure compliance, CRC has both group and individual orientation trainings with members and Internal Coaches. Members participate in deeper discussions of prohibited activities and Internal Coaches discuss the importance of compliance and action to take if a member is not abiding by AmeriCorps and CRC rules and regulations. During monthly professional development lessons, compliance scenarios and conversations are discussed with members to ensure they are familiar with all prohibited activities and that they are reinforced throughout the year.

f. Member Supervision: The member supervision plan includes the following:

-On-site assistance from Internal Coaches (member supervisors) -- includes day-to-day management, troubleshooting, and assistance in identifying appropriate interventions; an Internal Coach roundtable is conducted during the first two months of the service year to discuss growing pains and identify and strengths or weaknesses of the program; On-site review meetings with a Master Coach - provides training, coaching, and fidelity checks --every other week-- to ensure that interventions and weekly assessments are being done correctly and has extensive experience with curriculum-based measurement, using scripted interventions (Standard Treatment Protocol), working with Response to Intervention (RtI) framework; Oversight from the Program Manager -- includes performance monitoring, conflict mediation, review of prohibited activities, and member time approval and visits each site at least once a quarter. In between site visits, the Program Manager checks in weekly via email; and, Oversight from the Program Coordinator - updating member files, helping to plan professional development opportunities and community service days, coordinating and scheduling events for roundtables and civic reflections, and overseeing compliance.

All Internal Coaches attend the intensive three-day training to both prepare for their role as an AmeriCorps supervisor and to learn how to conduct fidelity checks that ensure member assessment and instruction is done correctly. They receive training in the use of interventions and in the collection and analysis of data for formative evaluation. The Program Manager and Internal Coaches receive supplementary training in discipline management, performance monitoring, and member time approval. Internal Coaches commit to a minimum of 6-9 hours per month directly supervising each member. The Program Manager provides on-site member orientations, approves member time sheets once every week, and completes a mid- and end-of-year member performance evaluation. The Manager and members review evaluations and engage in an open dialogue to celebrate successes and set improvement goals.

While the AmeriCorps Program Manager hires Master Coaches, the Internal Coaches are appointed

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by the principal at each school. It is recommended that these candidates are instructional coaches with strong literacy backgrounds and experience using Response to Intervention (RtI) models. The two members coordinating the Power Lunch volunteers will be supervised by the Program Manager and the Director of Volunteerism. They will also work closely with and be supported by on-sight Parent & Community Engagement Specialists at each school location.

Training high-quality and research based/supervision- The CRC program model is 'curriculum neutral' and aligns with any research-based curriculum used by school districts. The interventions identified for use in the program are each designed to provide additional practice that is supplemental to the core reading instruction provided by the school.

Tutoring Programs Only: CRC complies with AmeriCorps requirements for member tutoring qualifications: a high school diploma is required, and a college degree preferred. CRC also administers a screening tool to ensure that potential CRC members are fluent readers and possess the literacy skills needed to implement the literacy curriculum successfully. This year, 80 percent of members have college degrees and 30 percent have their master's degrees. Applicants also must pass a reading fluency assessment. CRC members are required to participate in an initial three-day training institute and ongoing training to learn how to implement all elements of the program model with fidelity. The Master Coach, recognized as one of Colorado's emerging literacy experts, is the primary instructor. Representatives from Minnesota Reading Corps also travel to Denver to conduct site visits and integrity checks with the CRC throughout the year.

The interventions utilized by CRC correlate to "The Big Five Ideas" reported in the National Reading Panel Report and have an extensive scientific base for their use. CRC ensures appropriate member supervision by requiring sites to select individuals with a literacy background to provide on-site supervision and to serve as an Internal Coach.

g. Member Experience: As an AmeriCorps host site, Mile High United Way offers unique opportunities that lead to powerful service, impact, civic participation, and connectivity because of its place at the intersection between the public, private, philanthropic, and nonprofit sectors. AmeriCorps members are encouraged to take part in Mile High United Way events and trainings such as the Women's Leadership Luncheon, which engages over 1,000 guests annually and utilizes AmeriCorps members by sharing their experiences and recruiting others to get involved as volunteer tutors and mentors. Structured opportunities for reflection and learning- Members have opportunities for structured civic reflection and learning each month and are encouraged to attend professional development opportunities sponsored by Mile High United Way's partner agencies that serve children, adults, and

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families. CRC also has mandatory roundtables with all members that focus on reading short pieces of relevant literature and reflecting on central questions related to the member's service and civic life. Through this process members speak more openly about their values, reflect deeply about choices, understand their motivations, and respond more imaginatively to the needs of their students and community.

Member identity/connection to national participants/sense of connection- AmeriCorps members create bulletin boards at their schools, which display the AmeriCorps logo along with a service description, allowing for parents, teachers, and students to understand the unique role of these members. AmeriCorps members also receive service apparel with the AmeriCorps logo that they wear on site. Monthly roundtables serve as a time of teambuilding where members are reminded of their connection to the bigger AmeriCorps umbrella.

To further enhance this connection, AmeriCorps members plan and take part in "community service days" beyond their daily service activities. These joint days of service connect AmeriCorps members to one another while providing a bigger picture of community need. This past year members participated in service days including the Hometown Huddle with the Denver Broncos, NFL Play60, Food Bank of the Rockies, and local Boys & Girls Clubs. Additionally, AmeriCorps members from programs across the state will come together in March 2013 for AmeriCorps Week and in May 2013 for Literacy Week (held in collaboration with Serve Colorado).

h. Volunteer Generation: To achieve the goal of 650 Power Lunch volunteers, two of the 50 AmeriCorps members will dedicate their time to managing the recruitment, retention, and training of volunteers as well as the program's day-to-day operations. Mile High United Way has set a goal to ensure that 84 percent of Colorado's third graders are reading at grade level by 2020 (currently, 74 percent are reading at grade level according to 2012 state assessments) and to achieve this goal the entire community must become engaged in the solution. The Power Lunch program allows companies and organizations to 'adopt' third grade classrooms and pair employee volunteers with individual students. Volunteers are screened and trained as reading tutors. Once recruited, volunteers are matched with a student and, along with their co-workers, volunteer for a weekly 45-minute one-on-one reading session. The sessions are an opportunity to build a positive mentor relationship and to encourage corporate and community involvement in early grade reading.

One AmeriCorps member currently coordinates the Power Lunch program and reports to the Director of Volunteerism. In addition, the program is supported by Denver Public Schools with a full-time program coordinator and a Parent & Community Engagement staff person at each school. (DPS was

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selected to launch the program instead of Jeffco due to its geographic nearness to the business community). Power Lunch currently engages over 150 volunteers from five companies and reaches over 90 students (some volunteers choose the option to partner with another volunteer and alternate weeks). Power Lunch is replicated from the Working in the Schools (WITS) model out of Chicago. WITS' program has demonstrated improved oral reading fluency, attention, confidence, and an increase in attendance with students participating in the Power Lunch program.

The volunteer training component is adapted from the WITS' model and improved with the help of Denver Public Schools literacy expertise. With the staff support and experience from Denver Public Schools, along with their plans to place an additional AmeriCorps member, the two CRC members will be fully equipped to administer their specific volunteer coordinator requirements. Support and interest is also available for expansion into Jeffco and Aurora Public Schools. The 48 AmeriCorps member tutors will also shape the program through their literacy expertise and experience. Monthly roundtables will engage members to develop program enhancements, provide supplemental trainings for volunteers, and develop methods for volunteer recruitment. CRC member speaking engagements will be a critical recruitment tool for community/corporate volunteer participation.

i. Organizational Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: The CRC program is synonymous with AmeriCorps. Mile High United Way has created a branding strategy that incorporates the CRC and AmeriCorps name and logo including supporting information about national service. CRC members wear shirts, vests or jackets with the AmeriCorps logo to their assigned elementary schools to be easily identified by students, teachers and parents. Mile High United Way has placed the AmeriCorps logo on its website in the section that specifically talks about the CRC program. The AmeriCorps logo is prominently placed on the member application, brochures and fliers describing the program, recruitment materials, a video released to the community which already has over 500 views, as well as a banner created for job fairs and information sessions. Each member receives a Literacy Handbook that prominently shows the AmeriCorps logo and discusses the history of AmeriCorps, NCCC, Vista and National Service. During orientation and trainings, CRC members are instructed on service requirements and expectations as AmeriCorps members, including presentations to Mile High United Way networks (at fundraisers and volunteer recruitment activities), to be knowledgeable of and use the AmeriCorps name, brand and language. CRC has shown to be a welcomed addition among parents of students enrolled in the program.

"CRC is more of a friendship instead of that teacher-based relationship, so the kids feel more comfortable...They're not getting graded, they don't feel pressured, they feel more like someone is

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there to be a friend to them, be a mentor and help them through the things they may be struggling with and just have fun with reading." Parent of a CRC student at Peck Elementary

### Organizational Capability

#### a. Organizational Background and Staffing

Mission and Brief History -- Mile High United Way's mission is "Uniting people, ideas and resources to advance the common good." For the past 125 years, Mile High United Way (MHUW) has worked directly with families, neighborhoods, and hundreds of partner agencies in metro Denver and throughout Colorado to help people of all ages and stages of their lives by maximizing the collective power of donors, experts, and community partners to create positive change in our community. MHUW also advocates on policy issues relevant to its three focus areas: School Readiness, Youth Success, and Adult Self-Sufficiency. MHUW has strategically evolved from solely operating as a fundraising organization to an organization convening and creating measurable impact in our community through direct services such as the CRC.

Experience to Plan and Implement CRC -- In fiscal year 2012, Mile High United Way managed over \$3.1 million in private, local, state, and federal grants. An annual audit is conducted to review for OMB Circular A-133 compliance, and the Finance team has two dedicated staff members for the financial management of grants and contracts. The organization has experience managing federal funds, having been awarded under the Department of Health and Human Services' Assets for Independence program six times and having received a two-year, \$3.6 million Social Innovation Fund grant from CNCS in 2011. In the year ending June 30, 2012, Mile High United Way raised over \$31 million: 84.5 percent from individuals and corporations, 6.6 percent from foundations, 3.3 percent from government sources, and 5.6 percent from other sources.

CRC will build on the expertise dedicated to early literacy under Mile High United Way's School Readiness Initiative, with the goal that children from birth to third grade from low income families enter school ready to succeed and are prepared for a lifetime of learning.

As CRC expands, it is expected to become a statewide literacy tutoring program, contributing to a statewide literacy movement. In 2011, CRC was included in the Lt. Governor's Colorado Reads: Early Literacy Initiative, the framework for the passing of the Colorado Read Act. MHUW is working with the Colorado Department of Education to continually update and work with them as a strategic partner.

Organization management structure, staff and board support -- Mile High United Way's management and staff structure is in place to implement the CRC program. Led by President and

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CEO Christine Benero, Mile High United Way has 99 full-time employees. (See Staff Roles and Experience for more information.)

The Board of Trustees, administrators and staff members will provide support and expertise in fundraising, grant making, community engagement (particularly with the business and foundation communities), service on Boards and Commissions, and evaluation processes. Mile High United Way's 40-member Board of Trustees is composed of a diverse group of community leaders from across the business and nonprofit communities.

Evaluation Capacity -- Mile High United Way's five member evaluation department has over 55 years of combined experience in program evaluation with connections to numerous external evaluators in the community. The department conducts evaluations on 108 grantees annually.

Staff Roles and Relevant Experience -- Christine Benero (President and CEO): Former CEO of American Red Cross/Mile High Chapter and former Director of Office of Public Liaison for CNCS; four years at United Way-Provides strategic direction for organization and promotes programs/initiatives in the community.

Jerene Petersen (VP Community Investment): Master's Degree in Social Work and 25 years of experience in nonprofit sector; three years at United Way-Guides strategy for community investments and internal programs; facilitates partnerships with government and nonprofits.

Cindy Eby (Director of Evaluation): Master's Degree in Sociology and 15 years of experience in implementation of evidence-based programs; two years at United Way-Oversees evaluation plan for CRC and supervises staff members responsible for internal/external evaluation of program.

Adeeb Khan (Director of Volunteerism): Master's in Business Administration candidate and former Director of Health & Safety/Community Services at the American Red Cross; 1.5 years at United Way-Guides volunteer engagement strategy and oversee CRC Program Manager.

DJ Close (CRC Program Manager): Former El Pomar fellow working on statewide literacy initiative with Lt. Governor's office-Oversees day-to-day management of CRC and supervises Program Coordinator and Master Coaches.

Open (Program Coordinator): Bachelor's Degree required-Oversees membership management compliance, site coordination/visits, recruitment, and marketing for CRC.

Jessica Waldman (Master Coach), consultant: Master's Degree in Curriculum and Instruction and 6 years of experience as a special educator to students with disabilities-Provides coaching support to Internal Coaches/CRC members; supports implementation and fidelity to model; reviews student performance and solves problems around program implementation.

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Open, .5 FTE Master Coach

Darren Dodson, CPA (Director of Finance): 12 years of experience at a Big 4 public accounting firm, auditing federal grant compliance in accordance with the Single Audit Act and OMB Circular A-133 and two years at United Way-Oversees fiscal administration/compliance for AmeriCorps grant.

Orientation/Training and Technical Assistance-- Staff orientation includes program policies and procedures, databases and systems, personnel policies, and other job-specific responsibilities. Staff members receive ongoing training and technical assistance in multiple ways, including: 1) check-in meetings with their supervisor, 2) department meetings and 3) quarterly all-staff meetings. CRC has "real-time" technical assistance in its program model and meets most T/TA needs through the contracted role of Master Coach.

b. Sustainability: As the original Minnesota Reading Corps program has demonstrated, a proven, evidence-based program aimed at improving early literacy is capable of inspiring a large degree of investment from a variety of funders. While the organization would welcome federal support of CRC for a number of years as the program is expanded across the state, its fundraising capabilities will allow the program to sustain and decrease its reliance on federal CNCS dollars as it becomes entrenched in the Colorado early learning framework. CRC is integrated and fully supported as the only direct service early literacy program existing at Mile High United Way and is built into the strategic plan. CRC was identified as one of the programs throughout the state that will support efforts to reach Mile High United Way's School Readiness goal of 84 percent of third grade students reading at grade level by 2020.

Mile High United Way's funding sources are varied and diverse. We will use our connection to over 800 corporations through employee giving campaigns, numerous high level individual donors, government, foundation and private contributors to ensure that the CRC program will be maintained if CNCS funding ends. Funds will be raised from partners who are currently supporting or have an interest in early literacy initiatives. Mile High United Way has an integrated approach to early literacy that allows funders to be involved at the level they choose. Advocacy, volunteer opportunities, and participation in learning communities and conversations at the state and community levels regarding early literacy are some ways that School Readiness stakeholders and funders are involved. Because of the inclusiveness of partnership at Mile High United Way, stakeholders can participate in CRC beyond their monetary contribution.

c. Compliance and Accountability: As an AmeriCorps program, CRC will strictly adhere to the expectations of AmeriCorps members. Schools participating in CRC will sign explicit site agreements

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with Mile High United Way prior to beginning service to define expectations of AmeriCorps members, outline the site's responsibilities under the program and be held accountable to the policies. In this agreement, the sites will be made aware of prohibited activities for AmeriCorps members and will be given a process to ensure effective enforcement of these regulations. All agreements will make explicit the necessary non-discrimination and non-displacement regulations.

These site agreements will guide any non-compliance discussions to ensure that expectations are clear from the outset and that resolutions are fair, timely, and permanent. Program staff and the Master Coach are in frequent contact with the sites to prevent compliance issues and ensure accountability. If instances of risk or noncompliance issues are identified by staff or the Master Coach, the issue will be immediately addressed by the appropriate staff. Depending on the severity of the issue, CRC reserves the right to transfer the member to another site.

All members are required to sign a contract before they can begin their year of service. The contract outlines the terms of service, responsibilities of the position, prohibited activities, grievance procedures, non-displacement policy, equal opportunity employment and non-discrimination statement, inclusive environment statement, and drug-free workplace.

The Program Manager reviews any new AmeriCorps regulations and addresses any compliance issues that need attention with staff and members as appropriate. The Director of Volunteerism, Program Manager and the Director of Finance provide oversight and guidance. The Mile High United Way Human Resources Department is available for consultation on disciplinary actions.

Operating Sites and Member Service Sites- CRC will operate in approximately 30 elementary schools in Jeffco Public Schools and Aurora Public Schools. At least one AmeriCorps member will be assigned to each elementary school. The school sites will be selected with guidance from the school district and with the knowledge that a majority of kindergarten through third grade students are not reading at grade level. Each site will be served with the same proven CRC programmatic framework and expectations as is currently in place. Because CRC is currently a free service to the elementary school sites, the site does not need to provide financial capability to host the program. Current programmatic relationships are established with the Jeffco Public School sites as the CRC program currently exists at those elementary schools. Future sites within the Aurora Public Schools school district will be identified in conjunction with school district administrators. Sites will be determined in June 2013, before AmeriCorps members join the program in August 2013.

### **Budget/Cost Effectiveness**

a. Cost effectiveness (for fixed amount grants): The cost per MSY for this program is \$13,000. To

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operate a program with rigorous training, coaching, and data management requirements, the total cost of the CRC program is estimated at \$1,425,800, with a Corporation share of \$650,000 and a Mile High United Way share of \$775,800. The CRC program represents 4.1 percent of Mile High United Way's FY13 budget, but with existing funding streams, Mile High United Way will only need to raise \$376,000 in additional funding for CRC, which represents 1.1 percent of the organization's total budget. The organization has received funding support from CNCS through the 2011 Social Innovation Fund focused on early literacy; however, this funding does not apply to the CRC program.

MHUW's portion of the CRC budget will be funded through a diverse source of non-federal funds, cash and in-kind, using the organization's long-standing unique strength in securing resources from a diverse swath of community members across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors in metro Denver and across the state. Serve Minnesota, the entity that administers the Minnesota Reading Corps, received a \$500,000 replication grant from Target Corporate. Colorado has received \$150,000 of this replication funding for support of the CRC. To date, the organization has secured funding from Jeffco Foundation and CRC has received in-kind support from the Minnesota Reading Corps through ongoing technical assistance support and staff and member training. In-kind contribution provided by elementary school sites (supervision and space) currently totals \$85,700.

CRC is a cost--effective and evidence-based approach that has been shown to effectively meet the needs of struggling readers and get them reading proficiently at grade level. The CRC is a unique literacy tutoring strategy because students are given at least one reading intervention every single day at their elementary school site. On average, each CRC member will work with 30 students throughout the school year. With 48 AmeriCorps members, the CRC program can provide 151,200 reading interventions, reaching 1,425 students at the federal cost (not including the education award) of \$4.29 per intervention (\$650,000/151,200). This is a federal cost of \$76.86 (\$4.29x18 students) per member per day. As a comparison, the average cost of providing a special education teacher to administer similar interventions is \$307 per school day (\$53,718 / 175 school days) and \$17 per intervention (\$307/18). Power Lunch also serves 12,500 additional students with one-on-one reading sessions. The following are reasons the CRC program is cost-effective: 1) Members are provided a high degree of support, with a low supervisor to member ratio (7:10); 2) To bring a struggling reader to a proficiency level, it takes an average of 13.5 weeks of structured Reading Corps tutoring (2010-2011 Minnesota Reading Corps Statewide Evaluation), at the federal cost of \$287.43 per student; 3) We are able to serve 30 students per MSY, consisting of daily 20 minute one-on-one evidence-based literacy

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interventions for each student; 4) We have the capacity to serve multiple schools in various school districts at no additional cost to the school itself.

Mile High United Way reviewed 38 early literacy programs and strategies in Colorado through a Request for Funding process in 2011. CRC was an impressive and cost effective literacy model, prompting Mile High United Way to invest in and host the program internally. This is a testament to not only the support CRC has within the organization, but also as the strongest model among many impressive literacy programs in the state.

b. Budget Adequacy: The total cost of the CRC program is estimated at \$1,425,800 and represents 4.1 percent of the organization's budget. With 10 years of Minnesota data and six months of Colorado data, we have a high degree of confidence that we understand the costs and the budget is clear, reasonable and in alignment with the program narrative. MHUW's ability to raise its share of the program's cost is outlined in both the Organizational Capability and Cost Effectiveness sections, above, and includes a strong history of raising awareness and funds at the intersection of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Desired outputs and outcomes are incorporated into service delivery and supervision, facilitated through the use of management information systems, and measured annually with an evaluation completed by the Minnesota Reading Corps. The cost of criminal history and FBI checks are included in the budget.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

N/A

### **Amendment Justification**

Not Applicable

### **Clarification Summary**

Not Applicable

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A