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Executive Summary

Twenty five Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 1500 volunteers to address community development and natural resource issues in rural Oregon. Beginning in September 2013 and through August 2014, 100% of communities served will report increased capacity to expand, enhance or increase the services they provide. This project will focus on the CNCS focus area of capacity building. The CNCS investment will be \$213,200. An additional \$526,300 will be used to support the program from local funds. This program, administered by the University of Oregon, serves as an intermediary so that small organizations in rural and remote Oregon that could not support an entire AmeriCorps program, can still access AmeriCorps members.

Rationale and Approach

1. PROGRAM DESIGN

A. NEED: Economic distress is nothing new for rural Oregon. Thus economic and community development is a long-standing capacity need expressed by rural communities as they seek to replace jobs lost over the decades-long collapse of traditionally natural resourced based economies. According to Oregon State University Rural Studies, rural unemployment rates in Oregon typically trend 25% higher than urban rates, and the rural poverty rate runs about 18% higher than in urban areas. In October 2012, when the state unemployment rate was 8.6% (seasonally adjusted), 20 of 36 counties reported double-digit unemployment. This includes 14 of the state's most rural counties and 7 predominantly rural counties had unemployment rates exceeding 12%.

Several factors combine to make provision of public and nonprofit services especially difficult in rural Oregon. First, population density is low and distances are great between communities, especially on the east side of the Cascade Mountains. There are 9 "frontier counties", according to the National Center for Rural Communities' (NCRC) definition, which takes into account population density, distance from services and travel time to service markets. NCRC data is only available based on the 2000 Census. On the basis of population density alone, the 2010 Census indicates that there are 10 counties with less than 6 people per square mile. Three of those counties (Harney, Lake and Wheeler) have one person per square mile or less. Eight eastern Oregon counties actually lost population between 2000 and 2010, including some of the least densely populated. The sheer size and low population base of Oregon's rural areas make the logistics of regional collaboration especially challenging.

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Second, many rural counties have been dependent on federal payments in lieu of a share of logging revenue, informally known as "timber payments", after logging on public lands was curtailed for environmental reasons in the 1990's. Such payments have been fundamental sources of revenue for schools, public safety, and social services. In 2000, payments were formalized through the Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. Last year was the final year of scheduled payments. Local and county governments and their contract partners, including many nonprofits, are facing extreme budget cuts, which makes the need for volunteer mobilization around safety net services and new community development projects all the more important.

Third, Oregon is one of the most fiscally troubled states in the country. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Oregon ranked fourth in the nation in terms of the state's expected budget deficit in 2012. This is attributable to the end of federal Recovery Act payments to counties, the industry structure in Oregon, and the state's tax structure which, according to the Pew Center for the States, is particularly vulnerable during recession because it is highly dependent on income tax. Thus, continued state budget cuts are likely to ripple through county and local budgets, further reducing local funds for essential services and new community initiatives.

These problems are particularly acute in communities with a population under 10,000, and also in regions made up of such small communities. The RARE AmeriCorps Program will focus on these communities and regions that are experiencing economic distress as classified by Business Oregon, the state's economic development department.

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS THAT INDICATE NEED FOR FOCUSED RARE AMERICORPS PROGRAM

Three particular problems facing rural Oregon will receive initial focus for the next funding period: hunger and food insecurity in Oregon, depressed rural downtown areas, and general capacity needs.

FOOD INSECURITY: With respect to food insecurity, Oregon has become a national leader in the movement to address hunger issues beyond emergency food supplies. This system-based approach gained momentum starting in 2000, when a report by the Center on Hunger and Poverty (based on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Population Survey) gave the state the dubious distinction of having the nation's highest rate of hunger among residents. After years of progress, hunger rates are high again in Oregon due to the prolonged and particularly deep recession. A national study of 2009 data by the nonprofit Feeding America revealed that Oregon now leads all states in the percentage of children who go hungry (20.2%). In many rural parts of Oregon, a key causal factor is the high cost of food. While the average cost of a meal per person is \$2.54, that cost exceeds \$4 per meal in some rural communities. This is especially problematic because jobs, particularly family-wage jobs, are

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scarce in such communities.

With a systems-based approach, the answer is not merely more emergency food distribution, though that is an issue with some regions lacking any source of emergency food. Through improved access to income assistance programs, vibrant farms and farmers' markets, stronger rural grocery stores with access to better wholesale pricing, nutrition education and more, communities are working to build whole community food systems.

DEPRESSED RURAL DOWNTOWN AREAS: At one time, the biggest problems for rural downtowns included competition with the trend toward big box retailers, internet shopping, and functionally obsolete buildings. The national Main Street program, with which the state of Oregon is affiliated, offers a proven approach to helping communities address these issues, through organization, marketing, design, and economic restructuring strategies. Rural downtowns are also challenged by exceedingly depressed local economies with reduced consumer spending power, and municipalities that are struggling to pay for essential services with little room for discretionary spending on community revitalization.

Rural downtowns have the challenge to not only revitalize themselves, but reinvent themselves for new market conditions. In order to participate in the Main Street program, communities must be able to organize downtown stakeholders, build public awareness, assemble resources for implementation, and take action on priority projects. Particularly for small communities, this requires capacity to even get started, and then to move beyond planning to manage project implementation in areas such as "buy local" campaigns and streetscape improvement.

GENERAL CAPACITY NEEDS: Beyond having specific capacity needs related to food systems and downtown development, rural communities suffer from the professional development limitations of isolation and the lack of project implementation resources (such as volunteer recruitment, marketing and outreach, needs assessment, facilitation and planning). This affects their ability to build capacity to launch, implement and sustain projects. Based on an outside evaluation we contracted for in 2009, rural communities share the following challenges: it is difficult to attract quality professional people to the communities. RARE AmeriCorps provides a vehicle for them to access such people; the population of rural communities is significantly older than the statewide average, and seasoned employees can lack the fresh perspective of outside, "next generation" professionals; small communities have more technology challenges, and RARE AmeriCorps members generally come with strong technology skills that they can and do pass onto others; and small communities have few ways to connect with the myriad of resources in the state university system. The RARE AmeriCorps program provides a portal

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to new networks and sources of expertise, and could do more of that in the future.

We selected to serve rural Oregon through this program because there are few other national service resources available and the needs in food security, downtown development and general capacity building are so high.

B. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY

PROBLEMS: Approximately 40% of the RARE AmeriCorps placements in the next funding period will address the specific focus areas related to building community food systems and promoting downtown revitalization. However, placements are flexible based on the most pressing needs as identified by communities. As an intermediary, we ask the communities what specific projects they need addressed.

To illustrate, we provide an example of specific tasks relating to food systems through the development of a community garden. Tasks would include recruiting and coordinating volunteers to build a community garden; gathering donated materials for the garden; developing outreach materials and training for the volunteers; and coordinating both a one day, large event to build the garden, as well as long term volunteers to maintain the garden.

We also provide an example of a project and the tasks related to downtown revitalization, in which the RARE AmeriCorps member coordinates streetscape beautification. This project would begin by recruiting and then facilitating a design committee over several months to develop design standards. This might include identifying and engaging a volunteer professional landscape designer. After design standards are agreed upon, the member would plan for installation of new streetscape elements, such as bicycle racks, benches, and plant features. This would include gathering donated items, working with the city's public works department to build the elements, and then coordinating a one day event to install the elements.

Work on the two focus areas can lead to powerful synergies on the ground, a value added component of the program. The focus areas also connect with more general capacity building placements. For example, two RARE AmeriCorps members, one working on community food systems and the other on natural resource planning, are combining forces to connect beginning farmers and local customers in one rural community.

Approximately 60% of the RARE AmeriCorps placements in the next funding period will respond to general community and economic development capacity needs proposed by applicant communities. In the recent past, the focus of such placements has included: volunteer mobilization and education to raise community action around invasive species removal; market research and marketing outreach

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materials for a port to update a community strategic plan; educational outreach for sustainable fishing methods; and an action plan to address youth development for a Native American tribe. As an illustration, a member volunteering with the local soil and water conservation district would start an invasive weed project by developing outreach and educational materials for middle school and high school students as well as adults. She would then do outreach and education in schools and at events. Through this, she would develop a cadre of volunteers who she would then coordinate to go out and identify and then remove invasive weeds.

For an action plan for youth development, the AmeriCorps member would begin the project by developing a volunteer RARE Board of tribal members representing varying interests, such as education, workforce development, social services, economic development, and traditional arts. This Board would help to design a Youth Focus Event at which tribal members, young and old, would provide input on youth needs. At this event, 30 volunteers would help to facilitate topical groups such as Financial Management, Nutrition, Substance Abuse and First Foods. After the event, the AmeriCorps member and his board would develop an action plan based on the input at the event, and then present the action plan to the Tribal Council for adoption. Following adoption, the AmeriCorps member would work with the tribe to begin implementation.

These flexible placements build community capacity, and enable RARE AmeriCorps program staff to identify emerging trends and opportunities across communities that may warrant targeted focus in future years. For example, a 2009 RARE AmeriCorps placement in Pendleton, Oregon, led to development of an innovative community based renewable energy project called "Solarize Pendleton". The RARE AmeriCorps member creatively leveraged resources and expertise from within and outside of the community, and this surfaced opportunities for other rural communities to work with some of the same partners and resources. It is also gaining national interest as a replicable model because it is well-scaled for a small community.

RARE AmeriCorps members are placed in organizations with limited capacity to implement projects or to train and support volunteers. To address these significant needs, we are requesting 25 full-time slots.

C. EVIDENCE BASED/EVIDENCED INFORMED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

The most significant impact of the RARE AmeriCorps program is that the organizations we serve will report that they are more efficient and effective as a result of the capacity building activities our members provide. This is the foundation of our performance measure and will be evaluated extensively. Secondarily, our members will implement community identified projects.

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Interventions: Our interventions are based on two elements. First, RARE AmeriCorps members use an asset based approach to the community development projects. In "Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets" (Kretzmann, John and John L. McKnight, 1993), the authors state, "All the historic evidence indicates that significant community development takes place only when local community people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort". For example, a member who is addressing economic development in a small town on our coast is placed at a local nonprofit. Rather than focusing on the needs of the community (decreased access to timber, closure of timber mills) with outside resources, they are focusing on assets (a waterfront that can be rebuilt to support increased commercial fishing and a downtown that can be revitalized for tourism) which the community has identified.

Second, RARE AmeriCorps members not only provide direct service through project implementation, they also work on capacity building to ensure new systems are in place so after they serve in their community, the organizations are better able to provide services long term. A specific example of that is the work we have been doing in food systems with Oregon Food Bank. Not only are RARE AmeriCorps members completing on the ground projects such as community food gardens and new farmers' markets, they are also leaving the community with resources, such as ensuring that the farmers' markets are set up to accept payment through the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps. This increases the amount of income for farmers and greatly increases the access to fresh foods for low income families. According to the report "Effective Capacity Building in Nonprofit Organizations" by McKinsey and Company (2001), "Capacity building does matter, and it does make a difference in a nonprofit's ability to fulfill its aspirations. The sooner nonprofits realize this and start assessing their capacity needs...the better off nonprofits -- and society as a whole -- will be."

Not only does the research overall support these two interventions, our evaluation data support it as well. Over the past 5 years, 100% of the organizations at which our members served indicated that their capacity was significantly or greatly increased as a result of members' service.

Overall Change: At the end of this three year grant cycle, we will have had 75 MSYs in rural Oregon. These members will have recruited 4500 volunteers and produced 400 deliverables (plans, assessments, maps, surveys, etc.). All organizations will indicate that this increased capacity made their organization more efficient and effective.

Demonstrable Impact: We know that our program will have demonstrable community impact for two reasons. First, in 2009, an outside contractor conducted an evaluation of the RARE AmeriCorps

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program. In it, he evaluated the long term impact of RARE placements on communities by gathering data from former supervisors. Over 70% indicated that the RARE AmeriCorps member had a significant impact on their community. The evaluator stated "many RARE projects initiated years previously are continuing to have benefits for target communities, and substantive changes in these communities have taken place due to RARE involvement."

To ensure that we are able to continue to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the program, the evaluator assisted us in designing a longitudinal survey to track impact over time. In the two years we have utilized the survey, 100% of supervisors have indicated a measurable community impact due to the placement of a member, with 86% strongly agreeing with the statement.

In the last program year, we met both of our Performance Measures, as well as all other program impact objectives. Members created 696 resources. These include: 251 marketing materials, 13 websites, 54 other on-line resources, 10 databases, 36 surveys, 49 maps and 283 other resources. In terms of plans implemented, supervisors indicated 12 have been implemented which was the outcome to be reached. At the end of the year, 100% of supervisors indicate that the community's capacity has increased, with 82% indicating they strongly agreed. We define increased capacity as "significant impact on the capacity of the system, organization, individuals within my organization, or on the community." In the current program year, we are on track to meet all targets.

Through our Quarterly Progress Report, we will provide Oregon Volunteers and CNCS with our progress. We will collect data from members and supervisors through quarterly surveys. In addition, to more fully assess impact, we will conduct site visits with communities at three and five year intervals as well as interviews of former members, to get a more in depth perspective on the impact.

D. MEMBER RECRUITMENT: A stated goal of RARE AmeriCorps is to develop the next generation of leaders in public service. To that end, we partner with the International City and County Management Association, the Oregon City and County Management Association and the American Planning Association to recruit the next generation. Part of that includes working directly with their affinity groups for underrepresented professionals (e.g., Latino Planners, Planning and the Black Community) to engage traditionally underrepresented populations. The umbrella organization for RARE AmeriCorps has a diversity plan in place, which includes guidance for inclusive communication, management, and service environments.

RARE AmeriCorps will use a variety of recruitment mechanisms: advertisements on listservs (over 45 used currently); listings on the CNCS web-based recruitment system; and direct advertisement in newsletters and web-based platforms, including the Peace Corps Hotline, American Planning

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Association website and Idealist. Targets of this outreach include appropriate undergraduate and graduate programs (planning, public policy, natural resource management, geography, sociology, etc.) nationwide and more specifically on the campuses of colleges and universities in the Pacific Northwest; and Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs). We will also coordinate with the Oregon Commission for Voluntary Action and Service and other AmeriCorps programs in these efforts and sharing contacts for potential members that may be more appropriate for other programs, such as programs in urban areas or that focus on tutoring in schools. Because the RARE AmeriCorps program has a solid reputation, we are also able to recruit through our partner organizations who share the information with interns currently working with them. Furthermore, because of our history and member satisfaction, many of our applicants have heard of RARE AmeriCorps from past members. We have been extremely successful with recruitment in the past; over the past five years we have received three member applications for every position. Because the goal of the program is to bring assets to the under-capacity communities, our recruitment focuses outside of the communities in which the members serve.

E. MEMBER TRAINING: Because of the rich training component of the program combined with the service learning opportunity during the members' service year, the faculty in our affiliated academic department confer nine graduate credits for our members.

At the beginning of each year, RARE AmeriCorps members participate in a three-day orientation. During this time we provide information on the overall program and expectations and responsibility of all parties (members, supervisors, and RARE AmeriCorps program staff). RARE AmeriCorps staff orients the members to the National Service Family, Ethics of Service and Program Requirements, including AmeriCorps regulations and prohibited activities. We also orient members to rural Oregon and discuss entering their community with integrity and cultural competency. We also utilize this time to build the cohort as a team, using team building and reflection activities. Finally, we provide training on government and civic engagement.

During their first three weeks of service, members complete the "Treasure Hunt." This is a formal way of getting them oriented to their community, site and the service they conduct. The Treasure Hunt consists of thirty questions they need to answer, everything from "Who is the mayor of their town?" to "What organizations are partners in their projects?" to "What is the economic history of their community?". They are required to interview five community members to complete the Treasure Hunt. The deliverables of this are a memo and a presentation at the second training. More importantly, it is a facilitated way for them to get oriented. During the same time frame, site

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supervisors provide further orientation when they meet with members to complete their first quarter work plans. It is also in this time frame that we require supervisors to provide safety training to their members.

Following the initial orientation, RARE AmeriCorps members gather multiple times throughout the year for trainings and events. RARE AmeriCorps specific trainings occur in October and December. We train them in the following core skills: Technical Writing; Public Presentations; Group Facilitation; Leadership; Grant Writing; Developing Needs Assessments; Geographic Information Systems; Conflict Resolution; Social Media; and Effective Communication. We provide Volunteer Management training, which includes addressing prohibited activities with the volunteers our members recruit. We also provide opportunities for members to attend other trainings and conferences throughout the year (in late winter and spring), such as the Oregon American Planning Association, League of Oregon Cities, ESRI Geographic Information Systems, Oregon Main Street and Association of Oregon Counties. In spring, we also begin our on-line Life After AmeriCorps training. At the end of the year, we gather for a two-day retreat where we reflect on the year and do some final Life After AmeriCorps sessions.

Our partner organizations, including Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Main Street Program and the Oregon Partners for Disaster Resilience, will also provide specific technical training to members working on these subject areas in conjunction with our regularly scheduled trainings. These partners also provide ongoing mentorship and support to the AmeriCorps members.

F. MEMBER SUPERVISION: Day-to-day supervision is provided by the local site supervisor. Supervisors are initially identified by the placement site in the pre-application. A RARE AmeriCorps staff member visits each site prior to placement to determine if the proposed supervisor understands the requirements of the program and is prepared to supervise. During this time, we train them on the requirements of being a RARE AmeriCorps supervisor and prohibited activities. We also conduct reference calls regarding the supervisor with partner organizations. Each supervisor attends an orientation to ensure they understand expectations regarding their role and program regulations, including prohibited activities. RARE AmeriCorps staff provides on-going support and supervision to both members and supervisors through site visits (two per site per year), regular phone contact, weekly electronic newsletters, quarterly assessments, and quarterly work plan progress reports.

G. MEMBER EXPERIENCE: Each RARE AmeriCorps member will learn about, implement and reflect upon civic responsibility during their year. They will expand upon their knowledge, skills and attitude regarding citizenship to bring about lifelong citizenship and service and to participate in our

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democracy.

Civic engagement is an integral component of member learning and development. RARE AmeriCorps is closely affiliated with the University of Oregon's Department of Planning, Public Policy and Management (PPPM), and therefore civic engagement is at the core of all projects and programs. The community partners and organizations that the members work with are public agencies or nonprofit organizations. The members' direct interaction with civil servants and nonprofit staff puts their projects into perspective, providing an opportunity to see the impact their work has on a community. This experience changes their attitudes regarding civic responsibilities and shows them they can make a difference. Through their projects and through training, members will learn how government works and how to better navigate the local, state and federal systems. One of the greatest learning components of RARE AmeriCorps' efforts is that members learn how to be engaged within the governmental system, how governmental funding works and how governmental processes are regulated. A component of the members' experience will involve exploration of the state or federal policies that affect the projects on which they are working. It is with this civic knowledge that members will reflect on their learning and will be effective in their future work.

Members engaged in RARE AmeriCorps will have the unique opportunity to explore how the projects they are implementing on the ground, which have a clear public service component, are related to the broader concepts of civic participation and democracy. These concepts are most often implemented at the local level. Members will explore individuals' roles and responsibilities in both public discourse and public service at the local level. Questions to be explored during these reflective activities include: As participants in public service, what is their role in bringing such concepts as democracy to their future professional work? How do issues around public involvement interact with concepts such as freedom of speech and public discourse? How can access to information be ensured across economic and social status as a component of community capacity? What role do specific social policies have in influencing issues of poverty and hunger? What is the role of individuals versus the role of government in improving community?

Members will have exposure to service within the context of their professional education and training, as well as through contact with organization staff engaged in public service and community volunteers. As a result, members will have the opportunity to begin or, in many cases, continue exploring their individual commitment to service. For many of our members, the service-learning experience related to this proposal is just one of many service experiences: many have served in AmeriCorps and/or Peace Corps. We utilize several methods to encourage members to identify with

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the national service efforts in general, and AmeriCorps more specifically, including training activities and provision of identification items. We will utilize reflection activities to further explore these issues. Issues of ethical practice are critical for planners and community development professionals. To that end, members will have the opportunity to learn about and reflect on the American Planning Association's Code of Ethics, an ethical conduct guide for all who participate in the process of planning as professionals, advisors, and decision makers. We also discuss and reflect upon the International Community Development Society's Best Practices in Community Development.

From the beginning, RARE AmeriCorps members will be identifying with the broad AmeriCorps brand. Our updated website emphasizes the logo. At orientation, members are given AmeriCorps gear (clothing, a placard for their office, etc.). At that time we discuss the entire national service universe, including their role as AmeriCorps members, so they connect to the broader picture. We require them to use AmeriCorps on their business cards and e-mail signatures. In any press interactions, they are to state they are part of AmeriCorps.

RARE AmeriCorps members will also be engaged in activities with other AmeriCorps programs. These will include state commission sponsored activities, such as the AmeriCorps Kickoff, as well as efforts to link with other AmeriCorps and VISTA programs in the local community in which the member is serving. During the Kick Off, members from different programs (including VISTA) meet in regional groups so that they can begin networking. They are also provided with contact information for each other for follow up. Within our program, we create a network immediately during orientation and subsequent trainings. We have a listserv and use conference calls for topical subgroups. We have a strong alumni network as well that current members can access. For each training, we bring in alumni for a meal to network with current members.

H. VOLUNTEER GENERATION: RARE AmeriCorps members will receive training in volunteer recruitment and management and members will develop their own volunteer recruitment and management plan and will identify specific outcomes for the engagement of volunteers in their projects. All will be engaged in volunteer management or recruitment directly through their projects. Opportunities for volunteer recruitment and management are an evaluation criterion for the community RFP process. On average, each member will recruit 60 volunteers. Because the placements vary, we ask for an average. Some will recruit significantly more, some less.

Because the specific positions are not known until the RFP process, the roles of community volunteers cannot be fully described. However, in the past, volunteer roles have included: serving on committees; providing design services; volunteering for annual events; and trail building.

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To ensure that volunteers are not engaged in prohibited activities, we train both members and supervisors in what those activities include. Members report on what the volunteers they have recruited are engaged in and this is reviewed by program staff to ensure compliance.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS: Our program has become extremely committed to AmeriCorps branding over the years. We discuss AmeriCorps extensively with all partners, potential communities or members and internal staff of our organization. We encourage our members to partner with other AmeriCorps members across the state. We require members to participate in national service days. We now include the AmeriCorps logo on anything we produce, whether in paper form or as electronic media. Anything we provide to members, such as gear and business cards, include the logo. We provide each member with a placard with the AmeriCorps logo which we require them to hang in their office space. We ask them to put "AmeriCorps" in the signature of their e-mail. We provide boiler plate language to members and supervisors regarding AmeriCorps to be used for press and other materials. In our office, we have signs and banners with the AmeriCorps logo. We require in the contract that supervisors use the AmeriCorps logo on documents, websites, etc. and we provide them with an AmeriCorps pin.

Organizational Capability

A. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING

Mission and History: The RARE AmeriCorps Program is housed in the Community Service Center (CSC) at the University of Oregon (UO). The mission of the CSC is "to link the skills, expertise, and innovation of higher education with the economic development and environmental needs of communities and regions in the State of Oregon, thereby providing service to Oregon and learning opportunities to the students involved." RARE AmeriCorps is affiliated with the Department of Planning Public Policy and Management (PPPM). A history of the UO, PPPM, the CSC and related programs will provide context for RARE. Established in 1876, the UO is a world-class teaching and research institution that offers a broad spectrum of opportunities for learning in the liberal arts and professional programs in architecture, arts, business, education, journalism, law, and music and dance. At the UO, both students and faculty members reach out to make connections that serve communities, from small local groups to large international organizations. The UO, PPPM and the CSC (which will implement this grant) have extensive experience in national service programs. In 1978, PPPM began to offer the first of its applied courses, Community Planning Workshop (CPW). CPW has grown from five students on one project to its current form, 50+ students from multiple disciplines involved in more than 12 projects each year. The staff has also increased from .25 FTE of

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one faculty member to 4.25 FTE for faculty and five graduate level project managers, advanced students that work with the CPW student teams. In 1994, RARE AmeriCorps was established to meet two needs: first, students expressed an interest in a more intense experience, similar to CPW, but longer and in the field. During that time, the rural areas of Oregon, and indeed the entire Pacific Northwest, underwent significant economic transition due to shifts in the management of federal lands. Through consultation with rural development practitioners, the staff of the CPW developed RARE AmeriCorps to address both of these needs. In 1998, the PPPM Department and the UO recognized that the existing service programs, CPW and RARE AmeriCorps, as well as emerging programs, needed to be housed within a single center on campus. Between 1998 and 1999, a strategic planning process was conducted to develop this center. In 2000, the Community Service Center (CSC) was officially established on the UO campus. In addition to CPW and RARE AmeriCorps, the CSC also houses the Oregon Partnership for Disaster Resilience (OPDR) established in 2000 and the Economic Development Administration University Center (EDAUC) established in 2009.

Experience, Staffing and Management Structure: The UO, and specifically the CSC, have extensive experience in fiscal management and in particular the management of federal grants. We have extensive on-site financial systems that are used to manage grants and contracts. All grants at the UO are managed through the Financial Information System (FIS). This system represents a local adaptation of BANNER Finance, one of the BANNER family of administrative software products used by the UO and other Oregon University System (OUS) institutions. FIS is linked to the UO's BANNER Student, Financial Aid, Accounts Receivable, and Human Resources systems. Our implementation of FIS also includes payroll, budget, and chart of accounts query menus. The financial management of the CSC is lead by the CSC Executive Director, Megan Smith, in cooperation with the CSC Grants Administrator, Julie Foster, and UO's Office of Sponsored Projects Services (SPS). We use mirrored systems to ensure quality control through redundancy. Approval of expenses involves an intricate process beginning with the grants manager with final approval by the program director. These are then sent through the UO Business Affairs office for implementation. All financial management is monitored by SPS. The key staff members responsible for the implementation of the projects described in this proposal are: Megan Smith, Executive Director, CSC (responsible for overall program direction, training development and staff oversight); Titus Tomlinson, Program Coordinator, RARE AmeriCorps Program (responsible for regular, continuing contact and support of field-based members including problem-solving and quick response to member needs); and Julie Foster, Grants Administrator, CSC (responsible for the day-to-day accounting and for coordination with the UO-

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wide offices, such as SPS, Accounts Receivable and Accounts Payable). Smith was a member of RARE AmeriCorps in its first year (1994-1995) and became the Program Coordinator in the 1995-1996 year. She has had progressively increasing responsibilities, and now serves as the Director of RARE AmeriCorps and the Executive Director of the CSC. Smith has a master's degree in Community and Regional Planning. In addition to her 18 years with RARE AmeriCorps and other service learning programs, she has four years of experience in community development and natural resources management prior to coming to the UO. Smith is Chair of the Oregon Rural Development Council. She was a panelist at the Corporation sponsored Forum on National Service and Community-based Development, from which policies on national service and rural communities were developed.

Tomlinson was a member of RARE AmeriCorps in 2005-2006 and again in 2008-2009. He completed his Master of Community and Regional Planning in 2008. Prior to coming to Oregon in 2005 to serve in RARE, Tomlinson worked for two years with non-profit organizations in California. Foster has been on staff at the UO for 20 years. She was an administrative assistant and graduate program secretary on campus for four years before becoming the grants administrator for CPW, RARE AmeriCorps and eventually the umbrella of the CSC. Foster has a BS in Business.

The five additional staff members of the CSC are available for technical assistance to our members in the field. Each has an advanced degree in planning, community development or natural resource management and between four and twenty years of professional work. The UO provides significant technical assistance in the areas of program and fiscal management. The staff of SPS is available for all aspects of grant development and management. The Office of Business Affairs provides technical support in contracting, purchasing, and payroll. The Office of Human Resources provides assistance in areas such as benefits (including researching options for our members' health insurance), affirmative action and supporting members with disabilities. They also provide professional training in supervision, communication and project management. In addition to these offices, the Office of the Vice President for Research provides programmatic support. Each staff of the CSC has funds set aside for individual professional development. Oregon Volunteers provides technical assistance and training to our staff.

In Section 1e, we described our training plans in depth. In terms of our capacity to provide them, RARE AmeriCorps staff provides training, especially those specific to AmeriCorps (e.g., prohibited activities, history of national service) or RARE service positions (e.g., Oregon government, food systems). Other CSC staff provides technical trainings that are part of their expertise (e.g., community engagement, land use). For trainings that our staff does not have expertise in, we have a network of

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partners that we contract with or we partner with other AmeriCorps programs in the state.

RARE AmeriCorps conducts two site visits each year and we conduct written quarterly assessments with members and supervisors. This allows us to evaluate specific placements and their compliance, as well as to assess the program as a whole, including our ability to meet performance measures. We have a robust data collection and analysis system that grew out of a previous external evaluation. We have had three external evaluations over the years. To support these evaluations, we provided contacts from former and current members, former and current supervisors, statewide partners and UO stakeholders. We provide any data needed that is not confidential. In this upcoming year, we will hire a graduate student to develop an even more robust program evaluation, which will include site visits with communities and interviews with former members at three and five year intervals.

The UO has extensive experience in administering grants and contracts. In 2010-2011, the UO received more than \$110 million in grants, of which 89% were federal or sub-federal grants. More than 17% of these were public service grants, with the remaining 83% focused on research and instruction.

The staff of the CSC has extensive experience managing federal grants, including funds from the following federal agencies: Education, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Economic Development Administration. We have been managing various CNCS grants, including Learn and Serve, VISTA, AmeriCorps State and National Directs since 1994. Each year the CSC budget is just over \$2 million.

Management Structure and Staffing: As part of the OUS, UO is governed by the Oregon Board of Higher Education, whose members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the State Senate. The CSC currently does not have a Board of Directors. We have a Senior Faculty Advisor, Dr. Jean Stockard. She provides a link to the academic components of our program. PPPM faculty members also serve as an informal group of advisors. The UO Vice President for Research, Dr. Kimberly Espy, oversees all UO centers, and therefore is the direct supervisor of the CSC.

The CSC includes six planning professionals that serve as faculty and program managers and two program support staff. As a group, the CSC has more than 86 years of experience in implementing service-learning programs and in community development and planning.

The RARE AmeriCorps program is integrated into the organization by linking members to other resources at the UO. In addition RARE specific staff members as well as other CSC staff members are available for technical support to members and to local sponsoring organizations. For example, a member last year used Global Positioning System (GPS) units to identify specific sites for her project.

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A CSC staff member with technical expertise in this area provided assistance. In addition to CSC staff, UO faculty members at large provide technical support to RARE AmeriCorps communities. For example, in the past the Director of the UO Museum of Natural History, a faculty member in Anthropology, worked with a RARE AmeriCorps member in creating an inventory of a Native American site. From a financial perspective, we received financial support from UO's central administration. Members also receive access to the UO library system and GIS software due to their affiliation with UO.

We have had no programmatic compliance issues in 18 years. We have a 100% recruitment and a 96% retention rate for the last five years. In our most recent evaluation (2009), members overwhelmingly provided evidence that the program was an effective opportunity for them. Over 80% said they were considerably or greatly successful in their service and 83% said the RARE AmeriCorps program provided them with good or exceptional support. From the community side, the evaluation stated "Each of these outcomes, documented in RARE reports and publications as well as in the results of this evaluation, point to the many ways in which RARE has systematically added capacity in needy rural Oregon communities." Over the years, we have about 10% of members complete a second year with us, indicating that their experience is positive. We have a very strong alumni network (more than 70% of former members engage in it).

B. SUSTAINABILITY: Our most important stakeholders are the local sponsors. We have worked with more than 235 local community sponsors over the past 18 years. Each year, we develop partnerships with at least five new local sponsors. Some sponsors come back every few years as they identify new projects that can be assisted by RARE AmeriCorps. In addition to the local sponsors, stakeholders include statewide organizations, such as the Association of Oregon Counties, the League of Oregon Cities, the Oregon Rural Development Council, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, and Rural Development Initiatives; and multi-county organizations within the state, such as councils of government and economic development districts. We have received funding from government agencies, including Oregon Business Development Department, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Housing and Community Services, Federal Emergency Management Agency and US Department of Agriculture Rural Development. We have received funding from private foundations. Each year we do an assessment of the stakeholders and funders to ensure we are addressing issues that remain relevant in rural Oregon. Furthermore, because when the communities apply to host AmeriCorps they are identifying the local projects they want addressed, we know they are priorities within the community.

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CNCS funding is used to support only 29% of program costs. The other 71% is generated from local communities and state or private resources. RARE AmeriCorps has always received significant cash match from the local communities in which we serve. Each local sponsor is required to provide a cash match of \$20,000. Because the federal funding from the beginning has been relatively low, we know that communities are investing significantly in the projects. In addition, we receive diverse funding from state agencies and private foundations. A criterion in our RFP process (described in depth below) is for communities to discuss in depth the sustainability of their projects once they no longer have an AmeriCorps member.

C. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

We place a strong emphasis on compliance at all levels of the program. For the past 18 years, we have had no compliance issues. Since 1994, we have developed a very intensive monitoring and support protocol. RARE AmeriCorps staff is well versed in the requirements related to AmeriCorps funding, including regulations, financial management and prohibited activities. The Program Coordinator is assigned full time to supporting and overseeing the service sites, with the support and guidance of the Executive Director. We ensure compliance from the beginning with the RFP site visit we also address the organization's capacity to house a member, to provide day-to-day supervision, to meet AmeriCorps regulations and to enter into a fiscal agreement with the UO. Through our supervisor orientation and through regular site visits, we ensure that all sites comply with fiscal and program requirements. This includes the initial site visit during the application process, during which we discuss all program requirements, including AmeriCorps regulations and specifically prohibited activities. We have a contract with each community organization that must be sent through their decision making process to ensure the organization can provide the \$20,000 in matching cash funds and will comply with all regulations, including prohibited activities. During this process, we ensure that the community funds are local or state in nature, and not federal funds. Regulations and prohibited activities are then reviewed at orientation for members and for supervisors. We provide a program manual that describes all of the program requirements, including prohibited activities. Furthermore, the community contract and the member contract include all of these requirements. During our two site visits we track that regulations are being followed, including prohibited activities. We regularly review timesheets, workplans and any other documents to ensure compliance. If a placement is not complying, we take immediate action, which depends on the issue (ranging from not counting some of the member's hours to removing them from the placement). We conduct a statewide RFP process to identify potential sites. Sites must meet the Special Circumstances, described below. In addition,

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we review proposals for the following criterion: the quality of the activities the member will engage in, innovation of the placement, sustainability of the projects and engagement of the community in the process of identifying the projects. In addition, we ask if projects are tiered to any existing plan or assessment. We also look at the organization specifically, including the quality of leadership and supervision provided. Our vetting process includes review of the proposal, a site visit and telephone calls with other organizations, local and statewide, that are engaged in the projects proposed. We provide due diligence in this three month process.

RARE AmeriCorps focuses on resource-poor communities that are remote and rural. We plan to serve communities that have been placed on the Oregon Business Development Department's Distressed Communities list and are rural, based on Beale codes 6 through 9. We also focus on communities that have been impacted by changes in the management of federal lands by the US Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management.

We have had no programmatic compliance issues since the program started in 1994. We have a 100% recruitment rate for the past 19 years. Our retention rate last year was 93.3% and for the past five years has averaged 96.2%. One member left immediately after Orientation when she decided she could not move from her home community. We were able to place another person in that slot. The second member left midyear when she was offered a job. Both left for personal reasons and not programmatic; they both apologized and acknowledged they were giving up a great opportunity and not remaining true to a commitment. Our extensive placement process and support systems ensure our high retention rate. In any case where we lost a member and could not replace them, it was because the member left too late in the year for another person to come into the slot. Most of the members that have left the program this late did so because they were offered positions at their placement site. We will continue to remind sites that this is not allowable.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

A. COST EFFECTIVENESS: Our cost per member will be \$8,528, which is 64% of the full, maximum amount, ensuring great cost effectiveness for CNCS funds. The total cost of the program is \$739,503. The request to CNCS is \$213,200 (29%). The total amount needed in addition to CNCS funds is \$526,300 (71%). Each community that has a RARE AmeriCorps placement provides \$20,000 in cash match, or \$500,000. When communities apply to the program, we ask them to identify the sources of their funding. Before they receive a member, they must sign a contract stating they have secured the funds. We also receive funding from the UO (\$26,300). Per the NOFA (Announcement of Federal Funding Opportunity for, CFDA: 94.006) outlining the application process the estimated total

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program costs are being provided at the request of the sponsor for information purposes only and do not indicate a matching commitment or a matching documentation requirement on the part of the University of Oregon. The RARE AmeriCorps program represents 37% of the CSC budget. In the past five years we have received both Competitive and Formula funding from AmeriCorps State/National. We received the following amounts over the past five years: 2007, \$147,131; 2008, \$147,131; 2009, \$149,125; 2010, \$187, 425; 2011, 187,425. This current funding request will represent 11% of our organization's budget. Our members are highly educated and trained. They are serving at a professional level that the rural, disadvantaged communities need. As discussed in the Need section, rural communities simply do not have the resources to bring this high level of capacity to their communities. They have asked for RARE AmeriCorps members. The communities have stated that this is the most cost effective way for them to get projects done, and are willing to match the placements with \$20,000, a significant amount, relatively.

Special Circumstances: As discussed earlier, the RARE AmeriCorps program focuses on economically distressed rural and remote communities. Additionally, each year we expand to new sites, averaging 25% new sites each year. We are increasing our cost per member this year by \$528 due to anticipated increases in health care costs as a result of the Health Care Reform Act, as recommended by our insurance provider.

B. BUDGET ADEQUACY: Through the knowledge and skills the CSC has gained in administering RARE AmeriCorps over the past 18 years, we are certain the budget is adequate to meet the needs. The Program Director and Program Coordinator provide 1.50 FTE (full time equivalent) for the program, which is perfect for a program with 25 members across the state. The program support is .60 FTE (across two people). Staffing is adequate for the program. We have budgeted sufficient funds to support member stipends and related costs (e.g., FICA) and health insurance for 25 members. We have budgeted funds for criminal history checks, FBI checks and health insurance, including the potential increase in health insurance due to Health Care Reform, for 25 members and for any new staff. Because of the distances in our state (some of our placements can be 500 miles from the main office), travel costs are a significant portion of our program costs. We support part of the costs for members to interview in the communities prior to placement. These travel costs are needed to ensure successful matches at the beginning. We also must pay for travel to ensure staff support throughout the year and training opportunities for members. Our total programmatic budget includes just over \$20,000 per member for their living allowance, taxes and health insurance. This is provided by the communities. CNCS funds will be used for training costs including travel, trainers, materials, and

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required site visits (just under \$2000 per member) and just over \$6,000 per member for staff support (salaries and fringe benefits). For each member, \$585 will be used for miscellaneous costs (e.g., staff travel to site visits, etc). This is a total of total of \$28,528 per member.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

The evaluation plan will have two components. First, regular surveys at the end of each year to evaluate short term outcomes as identified in performance measures and position descriptions. These surveys will be of the supervisors and one other community members (e.g., board member, mayor) as well as the members. They will assess both member and community impacts. In addition, through working with a graduate student in the upcoming year, we will be developing a robust evaluation plan that looks at long term impacts and will include site visits to communities and interviews with former members at 3 and 5 year intervals. These will assess long term impacts on communities, community capacity building and member professional development.

Amendment Justification

NA

Clarification Summary

NA

Continuation Changes

NA