

Narratives

Executive Summary

Metro DC Reading Corps (MDCRC) is a replication of the Minnesota Reading Corps (MRC), a highly-effective AmeriCorps program with 10 years of proven results, and is being implemented by The Literacy Lab, a leading Washington, DC-based non-profit. Metro DC Reading Corps is an integral part of a national effort to bring to scale a proven model that leverages the power of community service to dramatically improve students' reading levels and strengthen local communities. Over three years, Metro DC Reading Corps will provide literacy interventions to 1,875 students in DC and Virginia, resulting in 80%, some 1,500, being verified as on-track to becoming proficient readers by Grade 3. This project will address the CNCS Focus Area of Education (Tier 1) and will start August 1, 2013 and end July 31, 2016. A CNCS annual investment of \$311,864 will be matched with \$231,366 from the Target Corporation and other private funders.

Rationale and Approach

A. NEED: Children from low-income families face significant challenges in learning to read proficiently by grade three. Of the fourth graders who failed to reach grade level proficiency in reading on the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress, 83% were children from low-income families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT, 2010). This disproportionate impact makes it difficult for low-income children to succeed in school or break the cycle of poverty.

Intervention in the early grades of elementary school is critical because evidence indicates that if children are not proficient readers by the end of Grade 3, they begin to become "in-school drop outs" as early as Grade 4 (Paige, 2005). Low achievement in reading has dire consequences. Students who do not read proficiently by Grade 3 are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school (Hernandez, 2011). The National Adult Literacy Survey (2003) found that adults reading at Level 1, the lowest literacy level, were more likely to live in poverty, to receive government income assistance, to be unemployed, and/or to be convicted of a crime. At the same time, research indicates that 95% of all children have the capacity to learn to read proficiently if early and effective interventions are provided.

DESCRIBE TARGETED POPULATION AND WHY SELECTED: Metro DC Reading Corps (MDCRC) will target low-income 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). As a replication partner, MDCRC will use the Minnesota Reading Corps' (MRC) validated assessment instruments and evidence-based

Narratives

practices to identify kindergarten-3rd grade children who are reading below proficiency and are in need of supplemental or Tier II support. According to literacy experts and researchers, this population is most likely to be helped by one-on-one tutors providing targeted interventions. School systems have funding to support the lowest-scoring students and those receiving special education services. Students in Tier II, however, receive services only as funding can be located, leading to significant service gaps and placing large numbers of students on a path towards failure. MDCRC will serve the students who are currently falling through the cracks.

DOCUMENT SEVERITY OF NEED: MDCRC will target low-income communities in Washington, DC and Alexandria, VA. WASHINGTON, DC: According to the Quality Counts 2012 rankings, DC ranks last (51st out of 51 states) in K-12 achievement. District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) has particularly struggled when it comes to literacy. Nearly 60% of third graders are not reading at grade level as measured by 2011 state testing, and by the end of fourth grade 81% read below grade level vs. 68% nationwide. By the end of eighth grade, 84% read below grade level vs. 68% nationwide (NAEP, 2011). One in every five students repeats a grade, and barely more than half (56%) graduate from high school. MDCRC will offer services in "priority" schools (those scoring in the bottom 5% state-wide), which are located primarily in Wards 7 and 8 of the city. Reading proficiency levels in the schools MDCRC will target in DC range from 9% of students being proficient readers to a high of 20% (2012 DC-CAS results) of students being proficient readers. The community consequences of this crisis are dramatic. In Ward 7 alone, half (50%) of adults are classified as functionally illiterate. Ward 8 had the highest jobless rate in the country in 2011, with 25% of adults out of work vs. 8.9% nationally. Wards 7 and 8 have the city's highest rates of children living in poverty: 40% and 48% respectively. ALEXANDRIA, VA: As parts of Washington, DC have gentrified over the last decade, many low-income and immigrant populations have moved to neighboring suburban communities such as Alexandria, VA, creating pockets of poverty. From 2000-2010, the Hispanic population of Alexandria grew by 19%. Alexandria's large immigrant community faces many economic and educational barriers that impact achievement in reading. According to the KIDS COUNT Data Center, 27% of children in Alexandria were born to single parents. 42% of Hispanic kindergarten students did not pass the kindergarten readiness assessment when entering school in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). Without intervention, the literacy gap for English Language Learners and economically disadvantaged children continues to grow. By third grade, 61% of economically disadvantaged children in Alexandria scored below grade level in reading (2011 VA SOL). Schools struggle to meet the individual literacy needs of all students, particularly in a district where students speak over 100

Narratives

different languages at home.

There are 19,363 children under the age of 9 in schools in Washington, DC and Alexandria, VA who are currently on track to fail the 3rd grade reading test without effective intervention (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). MDCRC will target these children and provide them the chance they deserve to become proficient readers by the end of third grade. Without the placement of members, DCPS and ACPS would not be able to offer systemic and sustained literacy interventions to students in need. Metro DC Reading Corps is a replication of the evidence-based Minnesota Reading Corps, which has mobilized over 4,000 AmeriCorps members in tutoring nearly 100,000 students, leading to 80% of these students achieving reading proficiency by third grade. MDCRC is being replicated in the metropolitan Washington, DC area by The Literacy Lab.

B. AMERICORPS MEMBERS' ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: AmeriCorps members will provide the people power that is necessary to meet children's individual literacy needs and bolster schools in a time of shrinking budgets. Metro DC Reading Corps members will help fulfill CNCS' mission since literacy is at the heart of economic empowerment and civic engagement.

WHAT WILL MEMBERS DO? MDCRC's member roles and responsibilities follow the methods and systems that have been researched and honed by Minnesota Reading Corps over the past 10 years. MDCRC members will serve as reading tutors in high-need elementary schools providing one-on-one tutoring five days per week with service hours of 8AM-4PM. Members will tutor targeted K-3 students 1:1 during school hours for 20 mins/day/student and then use the final hour to input and track student data. Members will be highly trained to provide ten individualized literacy interventions to build phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension skills following a series of structured, scripted lessons. Given the highly-scripted nature of the interventions, AmeriCorps members can quickly and effectively be trained to deliver them. Members will collaborate with an Internal Coach (school-based site supervisor) to determine which interventions to utilize based on the unique needs of each child. Each member will tutor 25-30 children over the course of each school year. Members will collect benchmark data three times per year and progress monitoring data weekly to guide tutoring interventions. Members will provide interventions until the student has achieved the specified target score on the weekly assessment for 3-5 weeks. This is an indicator that the student is on track to achieve proficiency by Grade 3, and the student will be exited from the program and monitored for three months, and a new student will begin. Additionally, members will help families reinforce their students' progress by using the Read at Home family involvement tool.

WHAT WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED THAT WOULD NOT OTHERWISE OCCUR? The Literacy Lab

Narratives

has partnered with both DCPS and ACPS since 2009 to provide targeted reading interventions to struggling readers through an afterschool model that employs paid reading instructors. The number of students served has been constrained by the cost of this model (\$1,800 per student) as well as by its scheduling; students often have other afterschool commitments. Through the creation of MDCRC, The Literacy Lab will be able to serve more than 900 students per year vs. 300 currently and will be able to provide them with a more frequent dosage of services at a lower cost per student. Furthermore, the introduction of a third-party evaluator and improved data systems will enable The Literacy Lab to systemize its continuous improvement process and support scaling efforts. Members fill a critical gap by focusing on children in need of additional supports (Tier II) while freeing teachers to intentionally focus on core instruction for all (Tier I) and intensive instruction for those students with the greatest needs (Tier III).

HOW MANY MEMBERS? The Literacy Lab is requesting 25 full-time members (25 MSYs) to serve in MDCRC (DC/16, VA/9).

C. EVIDENCE-BASED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT: Metro DC Reading Corps is a replication of the Minnesota Reading Corps, an evidenced-based AmeriCorps program that has demonstrated measurable community impact in Minnesota for 10 years. The model has been validated by the US Education Department as having demonstrated significant evidence in support of its interventions. CNCS commissioned the University of Chicago's Opinion Research Center to conduct a multi-year impact study of MRC, including the ability to replicate the program. The study found the program to be "highly replicable" and went on to say, "If implemented in a scripted and rigorous manner in other locations, MRC can be transformed into a model for the development of other successful literacy enrichment and/or reading tutoring programs for young students." The Reading Corps model has also been shown to keep at-risk students on track: Heistad (2011) found that students who did not receive Reading Corps tutoring were three times more likely to be referred for special education than Reading Corps participants (5.4% vs. 1.5%) by the end of one school year.

Each of the ten reading interventions used by members is designed to provide additional practice that is supplemental to the core reading instruction provided by schools. The interventions correlate to "The Big Five Ideas" reported in the National Reading Panel Report (2001) and have an extensive scientific base for their use. Vaughn et. al. (2007) described three essential elements for any model that addresses prevention and early identification of students with reading disabilities. All of these elements are present in MDCRC's model: (a) Valid and reliable measures for assessing student growth: MDCRC members use AIMSweb to administer benchmark assessments in the fall, winter

Narratives

and spring using instruments with a moderate-to-high degree of validity and reliability data supporting their use. (b) Evidence-based instructional interventions: Strong early language and literacy experiences in the early years as well as early intervention for any reading difficulties within the first few years of school is the most successful and efficient method for ensuring reading proficiency (Vellutino et al., 1998; Torgesen et al., 2003). (c) Using data to provide evidence-based interventions based on student response: The design of the MDCRC model is aligned with Response to Intervention (RtI), which is a framework to support educators in using data to best meet individual student needs (Vaughn et al., 2007)

WHAT CHANGE DO YOU EXPECT OVER THREE YEARS? Over three years, MDCRC will provide interventions to 1,875 struggling readers, all of whom are on pace to fail the 3rd grade state reading test. Based on the success of the MRC model, we predict that 80% of these targeted students, or 1,500 children, will be on track to becoming proficient readers by Grade 3. This is significant in that students are not merely making incremental gains, but are making gains that bring them all the way to grade level.

HOW WILL YOU MEASURE IMPACT? Increases in reading proficiency will be measured using the following four measures: 1) AIMSweb Benchmark assessments: Members will conduct benchmarks with students three times per year to include: a) Letter Naming Fluency, b) Letter Sound Fluency, c) Nonsense Word Fluency, and d) Oral Reading Fluency. 2) AIMSweb Weekly Progress Monitoring: One-minute assessments intended to ensure the student is on track to meet spring grade-level targets. 3) Intervention Integrity Checklists: Master Coach will observe members conducting interventions and assessments to ensure fidelity. 4) Performance Dashboard: Web-based reporting system to track data.

HOW WILL YOU REPORT ANNUALLY? An annual evaluation report will be created by evaluators through our partnership with MRC to identify outputs (e.g., # receiving tutoring and # exiting) and outcomes, including student growth in literacy skills, improved academic performance, achievement of spring targets and pass rates on Grade 3 reading exams. The final report will be distributed to CNCS and all key stakeholders.

HOW DID YOU DETERMINE YOUR PERFORMANCE MEASURE (PM) TARGETS? The PMs for MDCRC were determined in consultation with MRC evaluators and in consideration of The Literacy Lab's local historical student progress data. The evaluators from MRC have a 10-year track record of setting and achieving performance measure targets for CNCS.

D. MEMBER RECRUITMENT: Metro DC Reading Corps has developed a plan to recruit a diverse

Narratives

corps of members through: (1) Outreach at local colleges with high percentages of minority students: Howard University, Morgan State University, Lincoln University, and Northern Virginia Community College (2) Media outreach targeting diverse audiences. Targeted publications will include the Washington City Paper, Alexandria Times, El Tiempo Latino, and Washington Afro. (3) Community Referrals: Presentations made to community organizations such as Urban Alliance, Latin American Youth Center, and Defeat Poverty DC.

LOCAL COMMUNITY AND UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS: The recruitment plan will attract applicants from the local communities by conducting outreach to local places of worship, holding information sessions at local Family Support Collaboratives, and making presentations to school PTAs. MDCRC will recruit and engage traditionally underrepresented populations including low-income individuals, people with disabilities, older Americans, veterans, and people of color by partnering with trusted local organizations such as Hands On Greater DC Cares and Volunteer Alexandria. Recruitment efforts will use inclusive language and will accommodate disabilities by, for example, ensuring recruitment activities take place in easily accessible locations. The Literacy Lab has a history of working with underrepresented populations; people of color make up 43% of The Literacy Lab's current staff.

E. MEMBER TRAINING: ORIENTATION/PRE-SERVICE TRAINING: Metro DC Reading Corps members will be prepared for their service through the following three tiers of orientation and training, all of which will be replicated from Minnesota Reading Corps with fidelity and the support of MRC staff. 1) Six-day pre-service training: Part 1: AmeriCorps Orientation (Days 1-2): Topics covered include AmeriCorps 101, national service, program expectations and requirements, and prohibited activities. Materials include AmeriCorps Handbook, sample timesheets, and AmeriCorps org chart. Members sign their contracts during this portion. This portion of training to be provided by experienced MRC trainer and MDCRC Program Director. Part 2: Metro DC Reading Corps Training (Days 3-6) Topics to include: 1) Mission and history of the Reading Corps, 2) Introduction to schools and communities in which members will serve, 3) Introduction to reading pedagogy, 4) A day in the life of a Reading Corps member, 5) Student assessments, 6) Benchmarking, 7) Progress Monitoring, and 8) Intervention training and practice. Members will conduct a site visit to their placement school. Materials to include: Intervention binders, research articles, video clips, sample assessment materials. This portion of training to be provided by an experienced MRC trainer and MDCRC Master Coach. Trainings will involve interactive elements such as role-playing, small group practice, and demonstrations to provide hands-on experience to members and to cater to various learning styles. 2)

Narratives

Ongoing Training: On-going training will be held quarterly and is designed so that members scaffold their knowledge over the year. Topics will include: Student Data Management, Data-based Decision Making, Cultural Competency, Working with Challenging Behaviors, Active Citizenship, and Life after AmeriCorps. Master Coach and Literacy Lab staff will deliver ongoing trainings. 3) Individualized on-site coaching provided by Master Coach.

SKILLS MEMBERS WILL DEVELOP: Members will develop the following skills: (1) Data-informed instruction, (2) Literacy interventions, 3) Data collection, and 4) Professional experience. With literacy being one of the foremost issues in education today, members will develop a skill set that can be applied in a variety of service-oriented professions and in daily life as engaged citizens.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE MEMBERS ARE PREPARED? 1) Training will be based on the successful MRC model for content and delivery, and trainers from Minnesota will support MDCRC in providing the first member training in August 2013. In 2012, 95% of Minnesota members reported feeling prepared to perform the functions of their position after pre-service training. 2) Every member must achieve fidelity in delivering the assessments and interventions (per standardized fidelity checklist) before he or she can begin tutoring. 3) Members will be asked to respond to a Training Needs Survey to request additional training topics that may strengthen their skills.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE ADHERENCE TO PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES POLICIES? Prohibited activities and other key regulations will be reviewed with members and volunteers at their pre-service orientation and will be reinforced in member communication throughout the year. Members will be required to sign a contract before they begin their year of service; this contract will outline prohibited activities, along with other AmeriCorps policies. The Program Director will monitor for prohibited activities during scheduled site visits (3x/year/school) and member timesheet audits (monthly).

F. MEMBER SUPERVISION: DESCRIBE YOUR PLAN FOR SUPERVISING MEMBERS: Members will receive support and guidance on three levels: 1) Each member will be assigned an Internal Coach, a site-based school employee who will supervise and support members' daily activities. The Metro DC Reading Corps site agreement requires that principals commit 5% of this staff person's time to supervising and supporting each member (10% is required for 2 members, 15% for 3 members, etc). Internal Coaches are required to observe and provide written feedback to the member twice a month. Internal Coaches help members ensure that tutoring is aligned with classroom instruction. On the 2011-12 Minnesota Reading Corps year-end member survey, 95% of members reported feeling supported by their Internal Coach. 2) Members are given further supervision regarding student progress, assessment, and reading pedagogy from a program-wide Master Coach with a high degree

Narratives

of expertise in literacy and assessment. The Master Coach will visit each site monthly to conduct member observations and provide written feedback, participate in student progress graph review meetings to support data-based decision making, and provide any other literacy support and/or guidance needed by the school and its members. 3) The Program Director supports and supervises members in terms of AmeriCorps requirements and reporting. The Program Director will monitor performance data (e.g., student caseloads, tutor logs, program requirements), maintain member files and other documentation required by CNCS, support sites in handling member disciplinary issues (if needed), and visit sites regularly to ensure that members are meeting program goals and requirements.

WHO WILL SUPERVISE MEMBERS? Members will be supervised on-site by the Internal Coach. This individual is a reading specialist/teacher, school psychologist, or intervention specialist employed by the school. Internal Coaches approve member time sheets and complete mid-year and year-end performance evaluations. In addition to the day-to-day supervision of the Internal Coach, members are also supervised by the Master Coach and the Program Director as described above.

SUPERVISOR TRAINING AND SELECTION: Individual school principals select the Internal Coach and allocate sufficient time for them to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. Principals must designate 5% of this person's time for each member placed at the school. ACPS and DCPS have committed to designate Internal Coaches in all partner schools. Internal coaches receive 50 hours of training per year in the Reading Corps model and in AmeriCorps supervision during an initial 6-day training in August and on-going training. Site supervisors (Internal Coaches) are also trained by the Master Coaches in monthly sessions to help Internal Coaches diagnose student skill gaps based on data, recommend interventions for students, assist in making decisions about exiting students, and ensure members are implementing interventions with fidelity. The Program Director will support the Internal Coach through program management meetings and site visits.

TUTORING PROGRAM COMPLIANCE: MDCRC complies with AmeriCorps requirements for member tutoring qualifications. Prior to enrollment, members are screened to ensure they have the necessary literacy skills themselves and that they have earned a high school diploma or its equivalent. Additionally, all members will participate in high-quality, research-based pre- and in-service training to ensure their effective delivery of data-informed, evidence-based literacy interventions with fidelity. MDCRC's interventions are aligned with the Common Core State Standards and the Virginia Standards of Learning, and thus member training is consistent with the instructional program of the local education agencies.

Narratives

G. MEMBER EXPERIENCE: Over the course of their service commitment, members will deepen their connection and dedication to their community and grow in their roles as citizens. Since the Metro DC Reading Corps model integrates the use of data and continuous monitoring of outcomes, members will be able to see their impact depicted on individual student results graphs, providing them with a powerful service experience and constant rewarding feedback. In Minnesota Reading Corps' 10-year history, service with the Reading Corps has led members toward continued civic participation: in the 2012 MRC year-end member survey, 90% of members agreed that as a result of their participation in the Reading Corps program, they were committed to continued community service.

HOW WILL YOU PROVIDE STRUCTURED REFLECTION? School teams of members and coaches will meet monthly for structured reflection through guided discussions. Members will also complete a self-evaluation prior to their Internal Coach's evaluations at mid-year and year-end, which allows them to assess their own growth and lessons learned. Internal Coaches will be encouraged to provide recognition to members at school-based events, and a completion ceremony for all members will be held at the end of the school year where the focal point is student progress made possible by members' service.

HOW WILL YOU ENSURE THAT MEMBERS UNDERSTAND AMERICORPS IDENTITY? MDCRC will ensure that members are aware of their identity as AmeriCorps members in multiple ways: As part of pre-service training, all will receive AmeriCorps 101 training and learn how to talk about their AmeriCorps year of service. Also, members will participate in an opening ceremony where they will take their AmeriCorps pledge of service and will wear service gear and a name badge that includes the AmeriCorps logo at their service site and community events. Each site will be given an AmeriCorps sign to post prominently to identify its affiliation with AmeriCorps.

HOW WILL MEMBERS BE CONNECTED? On the local level, members will be connected to other MDCRC members through monthly discussion dinners and regular Corps updates which highlight the work taking place at all school sites. On the national level, members will be virtually connected to the network of Reading Corps members in other states through Facebook pages, blogs, and the members-only section of the MRC website.

H. VOLUNTEER GENERATION: The Literacy Lab has a track record of success in recruiting volunteers from organizations such as Georgetown University, American University, and the Junior League of Washington. Volunteers will help meet identified community needs by supporting school sites through activities including participation in the DCPS School Beautification Day and creating public bulletin boards to highlight members and student growth in reading. Metro DC Reading Corps

Narratives

will also replicate Minnesota Reading Corps' successful Target Reading Corps model. Volunteers from Target will be trained in the same techniques as AmeriCorps members and will help sustain the model.

MEMBERS' ROLES IN RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT: To expand the impact of the program in the community, each member will be required to recruit at least two volunteers to support the program. Members will be responsible for engaging volunteers and for ensuring that they have a high-quality volunteer experience. The Program Director will train and supervise all volunteers to ensure that they will not be recruited for or engaged in prohibited activities.

I. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTITY: COMMITMENT TO BRANDING NATIONAL SERVICE: The AmeriCorps brand is integral to the Metro DC Reading Corps model starting with the continuation of the word "Corps" in its program name and materials. The AmeriCorps logo will be consistently used alongside the MDCRC logo in all promotional, instructional and training materials, and in the service gear and name badges that members and staff will wear at their service sites. MDCRC will ensure that all service locations use the AmeriCorps name on all applicable materials by providing templates and samples and by making clear through site agreements the expectation to display the name and AmeriCorps logo.

Organizational Capability

A. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING

MISSION AND HISTORY: The Literacy Lab has been selected by Minnesota Reading Corps as the Washington, DC replication partner for the Metro DC Reading Corps. The mission of The Literacy Lab is to provide low-income children with individualized reading instruction in order to increase their literacy levels, leading to improved academic success and greater opportunities in life. The Literacy Lab was founded by Teach for America and AmeriCorps alumna Ashley Johnson based on the community needs that she saw daily in her classrooms.

Since 2009, The Literacy Lab has provided intensive reading interventions based on the recommendations of the National Reading Panel (2001) to 975 students attending 45 high-need, Title I public and public charter schools in Washington, D.C, Virginia, and Maryland. All (100%) of the students served to date have come from families who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. The average Literacy Lab student makes 1.5 grade levels of growth in reading in only 42 hours of instruction. The organization's current programs occur primarily after school, and the addition of the MDCRC will allow the organization to reach more children by working during the school day.

In addition to experience implementing best practices in reading instruction, The Literacy Lab also

Narratives

has extensive experience managing and providing support to large numbers of staff at diverse school sites. Over the past three years, The Literacy Lab has hired, trained, managed, and supported over 200 literacy tutors across three states. The results of The Literacy Lab's 2011-12 school year tutor survey found that 90% of tutors felt "supported" or "very supported" by Literacy Lab staff. 80% of tutors reported that they would "absolutely" work with the organization again. 80% reported that their experience with the organization made them more likely to consider a career in education.

The organization's successes have been widely acknowledged. In 2011, The Literacy Lab was chosen as the youngest-ever winner of the citywide Jacob and Charlotte Lehrman Foundation's Impact Award, recognizing the "outstanding emerging non-profit making an extraordinary difference in the city". The Literacy Lab has also been recognized by the school districts with which it partners. The Literacy Lab is the only one out of 50+ organizations to have earned a 5-Star "Excellent" quality rating from DC Public Schools for the past three years in a row. The Literacy Lab has partnered with both DC Public Schools and Alexandria City Public Schools for the past three years.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE: The Literacy Lab is led by a management team of Co-Executive Directors Ashley Johnson (Programs and Operations) and Tom Dillon (External Relations and Development). Ashley Johnson founded the organization in 2009, and the leadership team has provided vision and management to the organization for four years. Ms. Johnson has relevant experience as both an AmeriCorps member and an educator. During her time as a Special Education teacher and coordinator in DC, Ms. Johnson focused on developing reading interventions. Ms. Johnson has a Master's Degree in Special Education with a focus on reading-based learning disabilities and is a certified special education teacher. Mr. Dillon brings management experience from the private sector to The Literacy Lab. Before helping to launch the organization, Mr. Dillon founded and ran a foreign-language tutoring organization and has experience with financial management, external affairs, and securing resources. This management team, along with a committed Board of Directors, has been responsible for 40% year-to-year growth in students served as well as ending each year ahead of budget, which has allowed for the creation of a strategic reserve fund. Supporting the organization's management team are three FT program directors (one of whom is responsible for MDCRC), four site coordinators (part-time), an independent accountant, an administrative assistant, and a development associate. This team oversaw 85 reading tutors in three states during the 2011-2012 school year.

In recognition of the scale of the literacy crisis in the region, The Literacy Lab has sought to expand the number of students it serves. It has developed the following structures and partnerships to

Narratives

enhance its organizational capacity to meet this need: 1) Minnesota Reading Corps Replication Partner: MRC will provide The Literacy Lab with support and expertise in managing, training and deploying members; implementing evidence-based interventions; monitoring for fidelity; measuring impact; and implementing an effective plan for sustainability. 2) CNCS Planning Grant: In 2012, The Literacy Lab applied for and received a CNCS AmeriCorps Planning Grant to plan an elementary literacy intervention member program. Through this grant, The Literacy Lab has gained critical experience with AmeriCorps requirements and has attended trainings and developed specific plans for member activities, finance, partnerships, performance measures, disability inclusion and Life After AmeriCorps. 3) Capacity Building Consultant: In 2010, The Literacy Lab was chosen through a competitive process to be a Fair Chance partner, guaranteeing the organization two years of intensive in-kind capacity building consulting services. A non-profit management consultant meets with the management team every two weeks to help the organization build sustainability and capacity.

AMERICORPS PROGRAM STAFF AND ROLES: MDCRC will have program-specific staff of one Program Director, one Master Literacy Coach, one Internal Coach per site (total of 8-10), and a part-time administrative assistant. The Program Director (Kevin Gamba) will oversee the implementation of MDCRC with support from the management team. Mr. Gamba has two years of experience as a Program Director with The Literacy Lab, during which time he has launched four new programs and has overseen more than 30 tutors at a time. Mr. Gamba has relevant experience as a certified-ESL teacher and literacy instructor. Mr. Gamba will provide overall program oversight and quality control by regularly monitoring performance data and payroll records. He will oversee and support the Master Coach through program management meetings, site visits and trouble-shooting as needed.

The Master Coach (Allison Trentman, Ph.D.) will visit school sites monthly to observe, train and support the Internal Coaches and members; ensure that the model is implemented with fidelity; and help select literacy interventions for specific students. She will report to the Program Director. Dr. Trentman is an expert in literacy intervention and assessment who was a Master Coach with MRC before re-locating to Washington DC. She earned her Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota.

The accountant (Sungwon Park, Raffa PC) will provide accounting, budget monitoring and reporting, and will report to the Program Director. Ms. Park has six years of experience in non-profit accounting and budgeting, particularly with government grants including CNCS, and has experience with relevant accounting and reporting systems. Ms. Park works at Raffa PC, The Literacy Lab's accounting firm.

Narratives

The administrative assistant (Helen Cho) will provide data collection, scheduling and other program support to the Program Director. Ms. Cho has excellent organizational and communication skills and experience in research, writing, and data collection.

MDCRC staff members follow an AmeriCorps Program Operating Procedure manual to be in direct compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulations. The manual consists of 16 systems, each tailored to a particular area of programmatic or financial management (e.g. System 3: Eligibility and Enrollment for Member Files). New employees also will be required to complete online, self-paced training modules provided by CNCS's National Service Knowledge Network.

CAPACITY TO TRAIN MEMBERS: The Literacy Lab has four years of experience in training literacy tutors, and, as a replication partner of MRC, will benefit from the experienced trainers and materials already developed and proven by MRC. In the first year of implementation, an experienced team of trainers from Minnesota will join Literacy Lab staff to provide the initial 6-day training for MDCRC members and coaches. Simultaneously, MRC will be training and preparing a local Master Coach to deliver the training in subsequent years. The Literacy Lab will have access to MRC's proven training materials.

CAPACITY TO COMPLETE AN EVALUATION: MDCRC will receive an interim and year-end evaluation and report through the MRC team as a national Reading Corps replication partner. MDCRC members will input benchmark data three times a year and program data weekly that will be reviewed by the Program Director for accuracy and timeliness. All data will be uploaded into the Data Warehouse managed by MRC and then extracted and analyzed by the MRC evaluation team. The evaluation is designed to capture outputs (numbers of students, number of minutes); assess outcomes (improvements in reading as measured by scores on assessments and standardized tests); review quality and fidelity; determine movement toward systems change (school districts' adoption of data-informed strategies); and record member experience (impact of the experience on AmeriCorps members and their next steps).

MDCRC's evaluators are: Ben Silbergliitt, Ph.D, a nationally recognized leader in the field of educational psychology, and Kerry Bollman, the Instructional Services Coordinator and Reading Center Director for the St. Croix River (MN) Education District, a nationally recognized cooperative of six Minnesota school districts that trains and supports administrators and teachers in data collection and use, as well as in research-supported instructional methodology.

EXPERIENCE MANAGING AMERICORPS AND FEDERAL FUNDS: Three-quarters of The Literacy Lab's 2012 revenue of \$785,396 came from government funds, including an AmeriCorps planning

Narratives

grant in the amount of \$21,291. The organization has successfully managed US Education Department grants, SES grants in three states (DC, VA, MD) and federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funding. The Literacy Lab has four years of successful experience in administering grants, monitoring expenditures, and submitting timely and accurate reports. The Literacy Lab has further built its AmeriCorps-specific grants management skills and capacity by engaging, through the Planning Grant process, in AmeriCorps training on financial, personnel and compliance requirements.

MANAGEMENT, ADMINISTRATION, AND BOARD: MDCRC will be managed day-to-day by a Program Director, who will oversee a Master Coach and school-based Internal Coaches and ensure the effective supervision and operation of members at each site. The Program Director will be supported by an Administrative Assistant in organizational and administrative duties and by the Co-Executive Directors in integrating the program and managing programs across all school sites. The Program Director and the accountant will manage day-to-day accounting, reporting, disbursements, grant management and controls. The accountant will create monthly reports to be used in the generation of Periodic Expense Reports and other AmeriCorps requirements. The Co-Executive Directors, the Program Director, the Accountant and the Board Treasurer will meet monthly to review program budget, payroll records, monthly reconciliations and reporting to ensure effective program operations and forecast needs.

An Implementation Team comprised of DC Public Schools (DCPS) and Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) administrators, Minnesota's VP of Reading Corps National Replication, the Master Coach, and the Co-Executive Directors will meet monthly to ensure the effective operation of the program in the field, resolve operational issues, and plan improvements. The Literacy Lab's board is fully supportive of this program and has participated in planning for MDCRC through the creation of a 2012 Strategic Plan and through the CNCS Planning Grant process. They will continue to support the program strategically and operationally through monthly review of progress and by raising funds. In 2012, 100% of the board made individual contributions to the organization.

B. SUSTAINABILITY: RESOURCES SECURED: The Literacy Lab, in partnership with Minnesota Reading Corps, has secured \$200,000 of the required match for year 1 of Metro DC Reading Corps from the Target Corporation. The Literacy Lab is a current Target grantee receiving both national foundation and store grants. Target is dedicated to improving third grade literacy across the nation and their support of MDCRC is a demonstration of this significant commitment. The Literacy Lab has also secured a \$20,000 grant from the Share Fund, a local foundation, to support the implementation

Narratives

of MDCRC in 2013 and has a calendar of pending and upcoming proposals to private foundations. As such, The Literacy Lab has already secured 95% of the year 1 match, which, at 43% of total program budget, is far above the required match amount of 24%.

EXPERIENCE RAISING FUNDS: The Literacy Lab's budget is 100% raised from public and private grants, competitively-awarded government funds, and individual donors. Since 2009, The Literacy Lab has raised over \$1 million in public funds from over 10 school districts (including ACPS and DCPS), the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, and the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development. The Literacy Lab also has considerable experience in raising private funds. To support the sustainability of MDCRC The Literacy Lab will build on existing relationships with the following private funders, all of which supported The Literacy Lab in 2012: Target Corporation, Gannett Foundation, Hattie M. Strong Foundation, Horning Family Fund, Jacob and Charlotte Lehrman Foundation, Junior League of Washington, Klingenstein Family Foundation, Philip L. Graham Fund, and the Share Fund.

OUTLINE PLANS FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY: The Literacy Lab's four strategies for ensuring long-term sustainability for MDCRC are:

1) Securing local public funding from DC and VA: The Literacy Lab will garner local support by engaging local officials such as the Mayor of Alexandria and DC City Council members in the success of MDCRC with the goal of obtaining city funds in each locale. Building off of its existing relationships and history of receiving funding from both DCPS and ACPS, The Literacy Lab will also seek to secure Title I or SIG funds or funds set aside for innovation, such as DC Chancellor Henderson's "Proving What's Possible" 10-million dollar fund, of which The Literacy Lab has been a recipient in the past. 2) Build corporate sponsorships and partnerships: The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a supporter of the Reading Corps model, and as such, will facilitate corporate sponsorships of its replication in the metropolitan Washington area in partnership with local chambers of commerce. 3) Increase in-kind donations and volunteers from community partners: As previously described, The Literacy Lab has successfully recruited long-term volunteers from local universities and the Junior League of Washington. Our university partnerships can help sustain the program after the AmeriCorps grant or supplement it during the grant period by providing additional Reading Corps tutors who could earn credits for their time with The Literacy Lab without adding significantly to the MDCRC costs. 4) Make members a critical part of school communities: MDCRC members will be integrated into the heart of school culture by supporting schools in their pursuit of increased reading proficiency. Members will highlight successes and seamlessly integrate into the workings of the school in such a way that local

Narratives

communities will join the effort to ensure long-term sustainability by hosting site visits, speaking to potential donors, and providing key first-hand impact data about the need for the continuation of the program.

COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS: The Literacy Lab's key community partners in implementing the MDCRC are school leaders in Washington and Alexandria. The DCPS Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Brian Pick, traveled to Minnesota in November 2011 to witness the Reading Corps in action at Bancroft Elementary (Minneapolis), a school with similar demographics to many DCPS schools. After the visit, Mr. Pick and DCPS Chief Academic Officer Dr. Carey Wright delivered a commitment from DCPS to host replication of the model. Alexandria City Public Schools also supports the creation of MDCRC. Chief Academic Officer Dr. GwenCarol Holmes, Chief of Curriculum Dr. John Brown, and school principals reviewed and vetted the program and determined that it would be very helpful for their schools. Both school systems have been involved in planning the program through visits, research, and the creation of implementation timelines.

C. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Metro DC Reading Corps will use the following structures and layers of accountability that have been proven by Minnesota Reading Corps to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps regulations as well as fidelity in program implementation: MONITORING: 1) Programmatic Level: The Program Director will conduct a minimum of three site visits per school per year to meet with Internal Coaches and members to monitor service activities on-site, including prohibited activities. A standardized AmeriCorps Site Compliance Checklist will be used during the visits. The Program Director also will conduct internal audits of member files (2x year) and member timesheets (monthly) to monitor for prohibited and allowable activities. 2) Site Level: Internal Coaches will monitor members' activities on a daily basis and will ensure that prohibited activities are not taking place. Internal coaches will observe members' sessions two times per month and will report in writing to the member and Program Director using a standardized fidelity checklist. 3) Student Level: The Master Coach will observe members with students once per month and meet with each member monthly to review and discuss student progress. 4) Data Level: A web-based dashboard data collection and reporting system will provide staff with real-time performance data at the student, member, site, and district levels to facilitate accountability monitoring.

HOW WILL YOU PREVENT AND DETECT COMPLIANCE ISSUES? Prevention strategies: 1) Site agreement: all sites will be required to have a signed site agreement, which will clearly outline the rules and regulations, including prohibited activities. 2) Member contract: all members will be

Narratives

required to sign a contract before they can begin their year of service, which will clearly outline the term of service, responsibilities of the position, prohibited activities (listed explicitly), grievance procedures, non-displacement policy, equal opportunity employment and non-discrimination statement, inclusive environment statement, and drug-free work place. 3) Ongoing training: all staff members will be trained on avoiding prohibited activities (including providing real-world examples of when prohibited activities might arise), applicable OMB circulars, and the Code of Federal Regulations. 4) Ongoing communication: reminders about rules and regulations, including prohibited activities, will be emailed and communicated during site visits throughout the year. DETECTION: The Literacy Lab will use the Internal Control Checklist from National Service Resources to detect any fiscal non-compliance at the end of the first and third quarters each year. To detect for non-compliance regarding prohibited activities, the Program Director will flag questionable situations, conduct member and site supervisor interviews, and ask open-ended questions.

HOW WILL THE ORGANIZATION HOLD ITSELF ACCOUNTABLE IN THE EVENT OF NONCOMPLIANCE? The organization holds itself accountable by providing the report of the Internal Controls Checklist to the Board two times per year. The Literacy Lab will review instances of noncompliance and take appropriate actions regarding staff and sites. The site agreement is explicit and outlines the procedure for transferring a member to a new site, if necessary.

MULTI-STATE APPLICANTS. The Literacy Lab has submitted State Service Commission consultation forms to the DC and VA commissions for MDCRC. The proposed operating sites are DCPS and ACPS with specific schools to be determined in concert with a site selection committee including MDCRC staff and school district officials for a total of 8 schools. All MDCRC service sites will be within a 10-mile radius of and will be administered from The Literacy Lab offices in DC. The Literacy Lab has worked with 25 DCPS schools and 7 ACPS schools over the past three years and received funding from both districts. Sites are prioritized according to level of need based on school district results, poverty levels, and diversity of student population. Selection criteria also include evidence of the ability to provide sufficient member supervision and support. The member service sites selection process will begin in March and sites will be selected by May.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

A. COST EFFECTIVENESS: For a cost of just \$869 per student served, Metro DC Reading Corps is proposing to deliver a quadruple bottom line result: 1) Helping students on a trajectory of failure to achieve reading proficiency by Grade 3 and advance in the general education population; 2) Providing members with valuable career skills while deepening their connection to their communities and

Narratives

national service; 3) Building school and community capacity to use data-informed instruction, assessment and evidence-based literacy interventions; and 4) Producing special education savings by reducing by two-thirds the number of children needing referral for reading difficulties. Furthermore, as a replication partner of Minnesota Reading Corps, MDCRC creates economies of scale by sharing costs on the data warehouse, assessment systems, evaluations, and trainings. This produces overall savings for both MRC and MDCRC and allows more funds to be spent mobilizing members. Finally, MDCRC is cost-effective because it secures commitments from school districts, reducing program costs.

AMOUNT PER MSY: MDCRC is requesting \$12,475 per MSY and is able to offer such a rigorous program design because of the in-kind support of partners and the already-secured investment of \$200,000 from the Target Corporation. For only \$12,475 per MSY, MDCRC is committing to: serving at least 25 children per member for a total of 1,875 students served over three years, generating at least 50 community volunteers, and providing at least 37,500 hours of one-on-one reading tutoring, making this a highly cost-effective program.

SOURCES OF FUNDING AND PERCENT OF TOTAL BUDGET: The request for federal funding from CNCS (\$311,864) represents 27% of The Literacy Lab's 2013 operating budget. Sources of organizational funding are: (1) DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education; (2) DC Public Schools; (3) DC Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development; (4) Private Foundations (see "Experience Raising Funds"); (5) Corporations, including the Target Corporation; and (6) Individual Donors, including board members. The Literacy Lab was awarded a CNCS Planning Grant in the amount of \$21,291 to plan for the implementation of an elementary literacy intervention program that extends through April 2013.

MATCH: MDCRC requires \$231,366 of funding from non-CNCS sources to support the project. The Target Corporation has committed to provide \$200,000 towards the match requirements for MDCRC in grant year 1, and Share Fund has committed \$20,000. The remaining \$11,366 will come from individual donors. MDCRC will provide a 43% match, a full 19% over the required match amount of 24%.

DOCUMENT THE COSTS AND BENEFITS: The total proposed cost of the program is \$543,230 or \$869 per student to be served. In Washington, DC and Alexandria, VA 19,363 children nine years old and younger are currently on a trajectory of failure to achieve reading proficiency by Grade 3. MDCRC will target these students, bringing at least 1,500 of them up to grade level in reading over three years and building a foundation to reach thousands more in the future. MDCRC is aligned to

Narratives

current economic thought advanced by the Federal Reserve (2006) that investments made in quality early education provide the greatest return to individual students and families, schools and communities, in excess of 10% annually. MDCRC provides proven literacy interventions at a pivotal age, when a correction can most cost-effectively prevent a persistent skills gap, and provides a significant savings at \$869/student as compared to \$1,800/student for a paid tutoring model or approximately \$10,000/student per year for special education services. The Reading Corps model has been proven to keep educationally at-risk children on track in general education: Heistad (2011) found that students who did not receive Reading Corps tutoring were three times more likely to be referred to special education than Reading Corps participants (5.4% vs. 1.5%) by the end of one school year. Based on these results, MDCRC will prevent 73 students from needing to be referred for special education services, amounting to a 3-year local cost-savings of \$796,941.

B. BUDGET ADEQUACY: Metro DC Reading Corps' budget was developed based on the 10-year experience of Minnesota Reading Corps and the 4-year experience of The Literacy Lab. The Literacy Lab's Board of Directors follows a careful quarterly budgeting review procedure that has allowed the organization to end the past three years ahead of budget and to create a one-year reserve fund. MDCRC's budget expenditures are based on the historical actual costs incurred by MRC while taking into account local factors. The budget is clear, detailed, reasonable and makes efficient use of resources and facilities to keep per-student costs at \$869. The budget supports program activities with a focus on the delivery of services to classrooms through an investment in member stipends, supervision, evidence-based reading interventions and high-quality training, all of which amounts to 94% of the overall program budget. Administrative and organizational costs are limited to \$35,878 or only 6% of the total program budget. Background checks for members and staff are included in the budget. MDCRC is providing a 43% match, leveraging CNCS resources at a level far above the requirement and ensuring that more members have a national service experience and that more children reach reading proficiency.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

Narratives

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A