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Executive Summary

The Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) will have 99 AmeriCorps members who will serve as reading tutors for low-academic performing kindergarten through third grade students in 30 public elementary schools and early education centers across Mississippi. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for helping 60% of tutored students to achieve significant growth in reading skills equal to or greater than would be expected for 1 year as evidenced by student scores on the Renaissance Learning - STAR Reading Assessment (for MDE Priority Schools) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 2,475 volunteers who will be engaged in episodic AmeriCorps-sponsored service projects including national service days, with volunteer activities such as event set up, serving meals, assembling care packages, clean up efforts, and serving as guest readers.

The program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Tier 2-Education. The CNCS investment of \$1,069,948 will be matched with \$1,069,982 of projected match, \$1,054,582 public funding, \$15,400 of private funding for a total of \$2,139,930.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

A. COMPELLING COMMUNITY NEED

The Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) proposes the America Reads -- Mississippi (ARM) AmeriCorps program to continue successfully meeting two critical needs facing the communities it will serve: the need for improved reading skills of struggling kindergarten -- third grade students who reside in low-income communities where factors of high poverty and high unemployment increase the likelihood of negative outcomes; and the need for increased opportunities for educational and professional development for Mississippi residents.

The 2013 Mississippi Legislative Session included the passage of the Literacy Based Promotion Act (LBPA), placing emphasis on grade-level reading skills for students, particularly as they progress through grades K -- 3 (Literacy Based Promotion Act, S.B No2347. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>). The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) is the lead agency responsible for implementation of this legislation. "Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, a student scoring at the lowest achievement level in reading on the established state assessment for 3rd grade will not be promoted to 4th grade unless the student meets the good cause exemptions for promotion" (Mississippi Department of Education. (2013). Literacy Based Promotion

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Act Retrieved from <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/curriculum-and-instruction/literacy-based-promotion-act>). This legislation addresses the critical issue of students being unprepared for promotion to the fourth grade based on their reading proficiency. To determine which schools have the greatest need for interventions outlined in the legislation, school selection by MDE was based on data that identified 44% of third grade students as testing less than proficient in Language Arts as reported on MCT2 2012 third grade assessments (Lane, E. (2013, Oct. 6). 3rd-grade language proficiency low. Clarion Ledger. Retrieved from <http://www.clarionledger.com>). Fifty target schools have been identified in 30 school districts. A meeting was initiated with MDE establish a collaboration through this AmeriCorps program as a means of delivering interventions outlined in the legislation, including one-on-one and small group tutoring for students who struggle in Reading.

The program focus of assisting struggling students is also based on Mississippi's overall rank in education. According to KIDS COUNT indicators, Mississippi is ranked 48 out of 52 states (Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), 2012). Additionally, 78% of Mississippi fourth graders were below proficient in reading achievement compared to 68% of U.S. fourth graders (KIDS COUNT, 2013). The unemployment rate in Mississippi is 8.4% in comparison to the U.S. rate of 7.3% (Mississippi Department of Employment Security. 2013, August). Thirty-nine percent of Mississippi children lived in homes where no parent had full-time, year-round employment (AECF, 2010). For the 2013-2014 program year, ARM members are serving in 22 counties with a average unemployment rate of 10.2%. Of these 22 counties, 13 meet the Beale Code of 6, 7, 8, or 9 (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2013). Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-level-data-sets/poverty.aspx>). If funded, the ARM program plans to serve 50 schools, based in large part on the location of priority schools selected by MDE, as guided by the LBPA.

For Mississippi children ages 0-17, the poverty rate is 32.4% (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). (2011). Economic Research Service. Retrieved from <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-level-data-sets/poverty.aspx>). Additionally, 76% of fourth graders in Mississippi are eligible for the National School Lunch Program, with 45% of these students scoring at or below basic and only 15% scoring proficient in reading (National Center for Education Statistics, State Snapshot Report, 2013). When considering the counties currently served by ARM and the counties where the school districts targeted by MDE are located, the percent of students eligible for free/reduced lunch is greater at 89.6%.

With greater accountability for student academic improvement comes a greater need for highly

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qualified and effective teachers. This leads to the second critical need for increased opportunities for educational and professional development for Mississippi residents. The IHL Office of Academic and Student Affairs (OASA) has compiled a report that calculates the annual enrollment for teacher preparation programs as 5,200 students. While over 50% of the enrollment for Teacher Education programs is in the field of Early Childhood/Elementary Education, of the total annual completers, only 61% (or 1,458 students) are receiving traditional certification, compared to Interim or Emergency Certification (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Teacher Preparation Profile for Mississippi, 2013). The impact of the service term, as a type of field experience, is invaluable for 70% of ARM members each year who desire to become certified teachers. Additionally, MDE reports 236 vacancies for certified teachers and 812 interim (or emergency) licenses requested bringing the total of state vacancies to 1,048. Of the reported vacancies, 104 were reported for elementary teachers (State Teacher Vacancy Report, 2013). These shortages are occurring in the same communities that are served by ARM.

At IHL, the ultimate outcome of a program like ARM is to connect higher education to early education by addressing the literacy deficits of elementary students, while also engaging individuals in service and providing an opportunity to pursue educational and professional goals. In a survey of 100 ARM AmeriCorps Alumni, 64% affirmed being currently employed in the education field; 50% affirmed being hired by the school where they served; and 77% indicated that they currently use the skills learned during AmeriCorps service of working with children and youth (Pryor, K., ARM AmeriCorps Alumni Perceptions on the Impact of Service, June 2013). Statewide, the demographic make-up of communities served by ARM is 52% African-American, with a per capita income of \$17,362 (38% lower than the \$27,915 national average and 15% lower than the \$20,521 state average). Seventy-six percent (76%) of the community members have a high school diploma while only 17% have earned a Bachelor's degree (www.quickfacts.census.gov, 2011).

B. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS

The primary indicator of ARM program success is student reading gains. What makes AmeriCorps members the optimal choice for delivering needed tutoring interventions is the consistent/year-long, individualized, and cost effective approach to service during the school day. Tutoring will be the sole commitment during the day for full-time and half-time AmeriCorps members, enabling them to review challenging content with students while it is still fresh on their minds. National findings substantiate the use of one-on-one and small group tutoring to meet the academic needs of students.

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In the study, "How Effective Are One-on-One Tutoring Programs in Reading for Elementary Students at Risk for Reading Failure?, A meta-Analysis of the Intervention Research, authors Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, and Moody state these findings, "well-designed and carefully administered one-on-one reading instruction contributed to improved performance for many students who were struggling to read; students taught in small groups of 2-6 were able to make the same gains in reading performance as students taught in one-on-one sessions; and, certified teachers and reliably trained adult volunteers were equally able to help struggling readings in both one-on-one and small group settings" (Journal of Educational Psychology, 2000). The Mississippi Department of Education promotes the following Fundamental Beliefs as explanation for providing interventions through small group tutoring: success seems feasible; there is a trusting relationship; sessions focus on specific, identifiable problems; and help is early and engaging.

For these reasons, the proposed program will support 198 AmeriCorps members, including 150 full-time, 24 half-time, and 24 quarter-time members who will serve as reading tutors for kindergarten through third grade students during the school day and afterschool, with 50 elementary schools and early education centers as service sites. Each school site will select an AmeriCorps member as a team leader to serve as the liaison between team members, site supervisor, regional program office, and the community.

In-school tutoring for 2,610 students (15 students/ member) will include 30-minute one-on-one and/or small group sessions at least 4 days per week for approx. 30 weeks, a total of 60 tutoring hours. A recent meta-analytic report (Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Snow, & Martin-Glenn, 2006) investigated and summarized research reports and evaluation of out-of-school time (OST) programs for students at risk for school failure. Results suggest that programs of moderate duration (45 -- 85 hours) had the greatest impact on both reading and math achievement (2006). The duration stated above in the research equates to 2.83 hours/week for 30 weeks ($2.83 \times 30 = 85$ hours).

Using the standards for regular classroom instruction, based on Response-to-Intervention (RTI) findings, the program expects 60% of tutored students to show growth equal to or greater than what is expected for one year, and for 60% of 3rd grade tutored students to be prepared to meet the Literacy Based Promotion Act proficiency standards. Findings from the Response-to-Intervention Action Network (2014), indicate that schools with high percentages of children not reaching proficiency through Tier 1 instruction alone reflect actual improvement levels ranging from 50% - 70% of students with regular instruction and interventions. (RTI Action Network. (2014). Tiered Instruction and Intervention in a Response-to-Intervention Model Retrieved from

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<http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/tieredinstruction/tiered-instruction-and-intervention-rti-model>).

With guidance from the classroom teacher and MDE Reading Coaches who are assigned to priority districts, tutoring sessions will consist of interventions that target students' weak area(s) in one or more of the 5 Essential Components of Reading (Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension). Research indicates that students need to acquire skills and knowledge in at least five main areas in order to become proficient readers. Interventions will be structured in accordance with appropriate grade level instruction.

ARM AmeriCorps members will tutor students selected by the school staff on the basis of reading assessment results. Students will be tutored for one school year by the same ARM member. The selection process for a universal screener and assessment tool, required by the Literacy-Based Promotion Act, has not yet been completed by MDE. In the interim, in agreement with the school administrator, the program will administer the DIBELS Assessment at three intervals to all ARM tutored students to obtain student results for Year 1. DIBELS incorporates different measures based on grade level and testing frequency. The program will administer the measure that is assessed at all three assessment intervals. For Kindergarten, the measure will be Letter Name Fluency; first grade - Phoneme Segmentation; and second and third grades - Oral Reading Fluency. Once methods are selected by MDE, the selected assessments results will be utilized in Year 2 and 3 to report student progress.

All ARM members will serve in afterschool programs providing homework assistance and character building activities for 1,980 students at least 2 days per week. AmeriCorps members will work with students to improve their homework completion, attitude towards school/reading, and behavior as reported by the classroom teacher. In an article entitled, "Afterschool Program Quality and Student Outcomes: Reflections on Positive Key Findings on Learning and Development From Recent Research" (D. Vandell, 2014) outcomes pertaining to research on afterschool programs quoted an earlier study that revealed positive staff-child relations are important for both academic and socio-behavioral growth. The article goes on to state that "reading and math grades are associated with positive relationships between program staff and participants, and supportive interactions with non-parental adults are important for facilitating child adjustment" (Pierce, Bolt, & Vandell, 2010).

Additionally, ARM members will have an appropriate environment in the classroom setting to engage tutored students in service-learning by combining reading curriculum content with the planning and implementation of national service days as a means of extending student learning and critical

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reflection beyond the classroom. A national study indicated, "students who are more civically engaged perform better in reading, mathematics, history, and science, and are more apt to complete high school" (Davila, A. & Mora, M. (2007). Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress: An Analysis Using NELS Data. College Park, MD: University of Maryland School of Public Policy, Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)). Along with this, AmeriCorps members will recruit 4,950 volunteers to assist with school and community service projects.

C. MEMBER TRAINING

ARM will partner with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) and four public universities in the state to provide member training. University partners enable the program to provide training on campus, enlisting the expertise of faculty and staff, and encouraging ARM members to pursue higher education and advanced degrees. AmeriCorps members will receive six trainings during the program year, with content on Life After AmeriCorps incorporated throughout. Initial trainings will include Regional Member Orientation, State Service Launch, Tutor Training, CPR Training, and Team Leader Training. Follow-up trainings will include one regional training held on the university campus; on-going tutor training provided through online resources, school administrators, and MDE Reading Coaches; and the Life After AmeriCorps Training and Service Celebration.

INITIAL TRAININGS

MEMBER ORIENTATION will communicate program policies, procedures, member supervision, and logging service hours, with careful review of the AmeriCorps prohibited activities, and will further inform members about national service and the structure of the program, using the BIG PICTURE diagram: Organization and Structure; ARM Program Management; AmeriCorps Member Service, and Member Training & Development.

The SERVICE LAUNCH, sponsored by the Mississippi Commission for Volunteer Service (MCVS) will provide networking opportunities among all AmeriCorps members in the state to share ideas and resources for future collaborations, and facilitates esprit de corps.

TUTOR TRAINING will be facilitated by Regional Literacy Coordinators from MDE. Based on the tutoring manual developed by MDE, the objectives of the training are for members to learn the roles of a tutor; know the five essential components of effective reading instruction; discuss ways in which ARM tutors support classroom instruction; and interact with a variety of research-based instructional strategies for improving reading skills that are universal and can fit with any reading model that may be used by the school. The tutoring guide book, used during the training, outlines a proven method

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for tutoring in reading based on a progression to skill development for Kindergarten (primarily Phonics and Phonemic Awareness) and first - third grade (fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Tutoring supplies, resources, and strategies will also be provided and demonstrated by the facilitator and practiced by the members. MDE Regional Literacy Coordinators serve designated regions of the state and are also available to the AmeriCorps members in their area throughout the program year as additional assistance is needed and to provide on-going tutor training and support.

ARM member Team Leaders will attend two statewide leadership trainings on team building, volunteer recruitment and service projects; and making public presentations on ARM and AmeriCorps. Training on volunteer recruitment will include information for team leaders to inform volunteers of AmeriCorps prohibited activities, demonstrating and communicating volunteer tasks, and ways to acknowledge and maintain volunteer involvement.

FOLLOW-UP TRAININGS

OTHER TUTORING RESOURCES provided to members include the America Learns Network and the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE) online tools. America Learns is a bi-weekly online survey for member service reflection, tracking student progress, reporting training needs and effectiveness, and communicating tutoring challenges. The resource provides tutoring strategies specific to the challenge submitted. Members may also submit strategies that have worked well for their students. All strategies are reviewed and approved by education experts. Some of the ARM member strategies have been promoted to the national America Learns database for all users to access! SCALE provides a monthly resource newsletter featuring ideas to improve tutoring, web-based trainings that are free for AmeriCorps members, and access to a lending library with resources related to tutoring and literacy instruction.

Each regional university office will conduct one additional educational skills training on Accessing Higher Education and Becoming a Certified Teacher. The final training will focus on life after AmeriCorps and will consist of topics such as Resume Writing and Interviewing Skills, Using the AmeriCorps Education Award, Continuing to Serve, and Financial Literacy. The final training also concludes with a banquet to recognize members for their service completion, impact on student improvement, and educational or professional accomplishments.

School service sites will provide a school orientation and on-going staff development opportunities as it relates to the members' service or any prescribed reading program that members will be expected to implement.

AmeriCorps member service and training align with many of the IHL primary initiatives and add

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value to the existing activities. The relevant initiatives are "every student who comes to us will be successful; "to increase nontraditional and part-time students", and "to produce more and higher quality school teachers and leaders". (IHL Strategic Initiatives, 2008).

D. MEMBER SUPERVISION

Member activities will be supervised directly by a classroom teacher who will regularly assess the impact of tutoring interventions on student progress. Members will also be observed by the on-site supervisor. Site supervisors will review member timesheets monthly before submitting them to the regional office for a second review and approval. Members will receive monthly service-hour reports to keep them informed of target hours and their progress towards service hour completion. Regional program staff and site supervisors will complete a mid-year and an end of year evaluation to provide feedback to the member on his/her service.

ARM Site Supervisors may be the school principal but if not, he/she will select another staff member (such as the assistant principal or lead teacher). This ensures that the ARM members are conducting tutoring activities consistent with the established interventions. Site Supervisors will receive orientation at the beginning of the program year as well as a Program Implementation Guide. An additional mid-year meeting will be held to provide a program update. The Site supervisor will devote a minimum of 20 hours per month to direct member supervision, observation, consultation, and regular communication with ARM program staff.

School service sites will be recruited, supported, and managed by eight (8) regional program staff whose offices are located on the campuses of four public universities; and by three (3) central office staff located at the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL). ARM regional staff will make by-monthly site visits to each school to meet with members and site supervisors, assist with planning service projects, and address team and individual member concerns.

E. ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION

ARM will provide each member with an AmeriCorps uniform including the AmeriCorps gray t-shirt, an ARM/AmeriCorps polo shirt, and a program nametag, to be worn daily. Each ARM service site will receive an AmeriCorps/ARM banner and mission signs to be displayed at the service site and at ARM/AmeriCorps sponsored events. Program staff will ensure that the appropriate usage and display of the AmeriCorps and ARM name/logo are maintained and checked on regular site visits. As part of the member contract, the program's social media policy will also provide guidance to members on personal conduct related to the use of social media, specifically the member's representation of AmeriCorps, ARM, the service site, and themselves. Lastly, each member will also receive "The

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AmeriCorps/ARM Name and Logo- How to Use It" guide. It outlines AmeriCorps policies regarding use of the AmeriCorps name/logo. Information on the participant uniform, social media policy, and use of the ARM/AmeriCorps logo will be provided in the member contract and on the program website.

Organizational Capability

A. Organization Background and Staffing

The Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL) operates as a strong public university system with eight distinct, mission-driven universities, and enhances the quality of life of Mississippians by effectively meeting their diverse educational needs. IHL has administered the ARM AmeriCorps grant for the past 15 years. Since its inception in 1998, IHL has ensured sound programmatic and fiscal oversight. The grant was not awarded through the competitive competition for 2013-2014, but has been maintained as a formula program on a smaller scale. ARM operates under the Office of Academic and Student Affairs (OASA). The organizational charts for IHL and OASA have been submitted with this application. OASA is organized into two groups: Academic Programs, Policy and Planning; and Student Access, Readiness and Success. ARM, GEAR UP, and College Access operate under the latter. P-20 Initiatives is also housed in this unit and provides a wide-spectrum approach to a seamless pre-K to workforce education system. This structure helps foster collaboration internally and with other state systems that serve K-12 students, and specifically K -- 3rd grade students through partnerships with ARM. The ARM program will represent all four congressional districts. Therefore, the ARM program will be supported through the efforts of the IHL Legislative Liaison to assist with maintaining support from the Mississippi Legislature.

For the 2014-2015 program year, ARM will operate from the central office and four regional offices. The central office will have 3 full-time staff. The State Director will guide the overall program implementation, member and staff training, program and tutoring evaluation, partnerships, reporting, and supervision. The Assistant Program/Finance Director will oversee the statewide fiscal and budget management and general programmatic implementation. The State Program Assistant will be responsible for general office management, communications, and assisting with statewide coordination program events. The ARM State Director will report to the OASA Associate Commissioner.

Three of the four regional university offices are current partners, including Jackson State University (JSU), Mississippi State University (MSU), and the University of Southern Mississippi (USM). IHL is communicating with Delta State University (DSU) as possibly the fourth partnering university. DSU

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served as a university partner from 1999 -- 2012 but was discontinued due to lack of funding for ARM for the 2013-14 program. ARM worked hard to maintain AmeriCorps service to schools in the Delta region, retaining six schools. Re-establishing the DSU region will provide better support in closer proximity to the school sites, and will continue services to meet the academic challenges of this region. Of the 82 counties in Mississippi, 13 had at least 50% of children living in poverty in 2010 with most located in the Mississippi Delta. (U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2011).

For the 2014-2015 program year, each region, except for the JSU region, will support 50 full-time AmeriCorps members with a full-time Regional Coordinator and a full-time Program Assistant. The JSU region will support 24 half-time and 24 quarter-time members a full-time Regional Coordinator and a full-time Program Assistant. The JSU region has had great success with recruitment, management, and retention of half-time and quarter-time members. Regional Coordinators will oversee the daily office operations, supervise staff, manage the regional budget, and reporting. Program Assistants will be responsible for local member development, monitoring of sites, and general office management and support.

Staff development will be ongoing, including in-service training, programmatic/fiscal management training provided by MCVS and IHL, and national service conferences. Staff performance appraisals are conducted annually by university and IHL administrators who serve as the immediate supervisor and specific training needs are addressed for individual staff through this process.

B. Compliance and Accountability

IHL is led by a Commissioner who reports to a Governor-appointed Board of Trustees made up of a diverse statewide group of state leaders from the public and private sectors. The Board meets monthly and governs the state's public universities. IHL receives an annual audit and has several layers of financial and budget oversight in place. The IHL Office of Contracts and Grants provides guidance and training as well as regular monitoring to ensure compliance.

Compliance at service site level will be maintained through host site applications, host site supervisor orientation, a mid-year meeting, and site monitoring. In instances of risk or non-compliance, IHL or the ARM program director will assess the severity and take corrective actions.

C. Past Performance

During the 2010 -- 2013 grant cycle, the ARM program developed strategies to improve the collection, reliability, and reporting of reading gain. The program also took a close look at whether the expected improvement targets (of 80% - 90% of tutored students) were realistic. Formal evaluation and deeper

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research on standards for expected outcomes have resulted in more realistic targets. Additionally, the results from the evaluation report helped determine that AmeriCorps member service attributes to greater student growth, rather than increased reading levels because of the variance of assessments, as well as the fact that students are reading so far below grade level when they begin tutoring. Although the intended goals listed under each program year were not reached, the outcomes are consistent with expected standards. This is encouraging. If funded, the program will strive for continuous improvement and greater accuracy by working more directly with the Mississippi Department of Education, as well as partnering school districts, and the external evaluator, Professional Associates, Inc. to develop a better, more consistent strategy of collecting and reporting student gains.

2010-2011 PERFORMANCE: TUTORED STUDENTS: 5,356 K-3rd grade students

READING GAIN: Principals responded to questions about student improvement including: number of students tutored; grade level; and level of reading improvement. Reading Gain Improvements were reported for 2,731 tutored students: 51% improving by 1 reading grade level; 8% improving by 2 reading grade levels; 3% improving by more than 2 reading grade levels; and 7% with no change. No data was reported for 31% of the tutored students. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT: 21,159 volunteers recruited (84% of target) who served 57,039 hours, benefitting 81,563 people (86% of target). ARM did not meet this performance measure due to a great number of weather emergencies, displacing many of the individuals who regularly volunteer.

MEMBER TRAINING: ARM members rated program-sponsored trainings at a high satisfaction rate of 98%, exceeding the target of 95%.

2011-2012: PERFORMANCE: TUTORED STUDENTS: 3,273 K-3rd grade students were tutored during the day, with 93% (3,043) completing tutoring by the end of the program year. This target was not met due to the number of members who exited the program early, thus reducing the number of students who received tutoring.

READING GAIN: The program received complete and useful results for 1,395 students. All 1,395 students (43%) made at least 1 reading level of improvement based on data from STAR, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), or Measure of Academic Progress (MAP). ARM members recruited 51,729 volunteers who served 103,930 hours assisting with community service projects and national service days that benefitted 154,809 people. ARM members rated trainings at a high satisfaction rate of 98% (excellent and good).

2012-2013: PERFORMANCE: STUDENTS TUTORED: 4,280 students were tutored during the day.

READING GAINS: Reading gain results were reported for 2,374 tutored students, of which 1,861 (or

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78%) were K-3rd grade students. Program Evaluation results indicated the drastically low beginning reading levels of ARM tutored students. At the end of the year, many students were still below reading grade level. And while students in all six regions demonstrated growth, these results also confirm the need for continued individualized tutoring if the ultimate goal of reaching the benchmark goals can be achieved. Three assessments tools were most widely used with K-3rd grade (ARM Program Evaluation Report, page 8).

MAP results 29.8% of tutored students (ARM Supplemental Evaluation, pages 4-5) were as follows: Kindergarten -- Beginning 139.5, Ending 157.8 (a gain of 18.3 points); 1st Grade- Beginning 157.8, Ending 174.8 (a gain of 17 points); 2nd Grade -- Beginning 174.2, Ending 186.7 (a gain of 12.5 points); 3rd Grade -- Beginning 179.8, Ending 189.0 (a gain of 9.2)

DIBELS COMPOSITE results 17.5% of tutored students (ARM Supplemental Evaluation, pages 8-9) were as follows: ARM Kindergarten -- Beginning 14.4, Ending 90.4 (a gain of 75.9 points); 1st Grade - Beginning 34.4, Ending 62.3 (a gain of 28.0 points); 2nd Grade - Beginning 54.3, Ending 73.7 (a gain of 19.4 points); 3rd Grade -- Beginning 96.0, Ending 124.9 (a gain of 28.9 points). These gains, however, continue to identify students as "Well Below Benchmark" according to DIBELS Score Interpretation Reports.

STAR results 31% of tutored students (ARM Supplemental Evaluation, pages 9-10) were as follows: 1st Grade - Beginning .8, Ending 1.8 (a gain of 1 point); 2nd Grade - Beginning 1.5, Ending 2.5 (a gain of 1 point); 3rd Grade -- Beginning 2.2, Ending 2.9 (a gain of .7 points).

ENROLLMENT: ARM maintained 100% enrollment for 2010-2012 and was 95% enrolled for the 2012-2013 program year. The program was unable to fill 10 stipend slots and seven education award only slots. The main factor in this occurrence was the change in district-level leadership in many of the partnering school districts. The program made presentations to the new superintendents and was able to retain partnerships with nearly all of the districts. However, a few of the districts were not able to fill all of the slots originally requested. To address this, ARM requires confirmation of school board approval of the district's partnership and to ensure the districts commitment to remitting matching funds for the requested slots.

For the 2013-2014 program year, as a formula grant, ARM has enrolled 73% (140) of the 192 half-time service slots awarded. The program was unable to fill the remaining 52 half-time slots due to the drastic change to the program structure from full-time to half-time and the ability of partnering service sites to recruit applicants. Consequently, ARM successfully pursued the continuance of the program to ensure that the presence of a strong and effective tutoring program was maintained and

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35 out of 74 schools desired to continue the partnerships. Four new school partners were added! RETENTION: For the 2012-13 program year, ARM retained 84.3% or 309 members for the full program year, and 84.3% of the completers or 301 members earned a full or partial education award (297 full and 4 partial). ARM developed a Service Action Plan policy that requires a service plan for all members. The plan outlined specific service activities for members to be on track by December 31. Program staff assisted members in completing the service plan and reviewed the plan each month. The program has maintained its efforts to effectively communicate the program requirements to potential members and school partners who conduct member recruitment and to support and train members for the service obligation. Early exit is sometimes due to school district decisions to hire ARM members to full-time employment. While the program desires that the member be able to complete the service year, it is very encouraging to know that ARM members are highly sought after by school partners.

D. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

ARM sought input from stakeholders specifically related to the rationale for submitting this application. This ensures that the organization is applying for an AmeriCorps program to meet identified community needs; confirms that AmeriCorps members would continue to be the most effective way to address the needs and implement the interventions; and confirms that the long-standing commitments and partnerships are still invested. Satisfaction surveys will be distributed to school and community partners and to parents of tutored students to obtain feedback on program effectiveness. ARM conducts mid- and end-of-year evaluations of AmeriCorps members, completed by AmeriCorps members, service site supervisors, and program staff.

An evaluation report reflecting the findings will be prepared at the end of the school year by the external evaluator. Evaluation results will be used first and foremost to inform program improvement, as well as member training. Findings will be shared during staff meetings, member training and other appropriate internal venues, as well as with ARM partnering schools and stakeholders.

As previously stated, the America Learns website provides the opportunity for ARM members to reflect on their service experience and offer suggestions for continuous program improvement. ARM members submit information on national service days and member development and training to reporting training needs and effectiveness.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

The ARM program is a cost effective approach to providing needed reading tutoring to elementary age

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students. When compared to private tutoring, The Tutor Guide: Tutoring Fees (an online guide to researching costs and availability of private tutoring), estimates the cost of tutoring by a certified teacher at \$75 per hour, and tutoring services through a tutoring center (which will conduct a tutor match) at \$25 per hour (The Tutor Guide: Tutoring Fees, What to Expect, <http://www.care.com>, January 7, 2013). Using the \$13,300 Corporation cost per member, the cost of implementing the ARM program equates to \$7.82 per hour when the member costs are divided by 1,700 hours of service hours (including tutoring, training, volunteer recruitment, and community service projects). When the amount of cash match contributed by partnering school districts is considered (\$5,300), the amount per hour reduces to \$4.71. ARM has maintained the cost per member equal to or lesser than the CNCS requirement each year. The cost per member for the first year of the program for this application is \$13,091.

The budget was carefully designed to support the ARM program while keeping the cost per member down. The budget includes adequate funding for key components of an AmeriCorps program such as: personnel, staff and member travel, staff and member training, member support costs; program performance tracking and evaluation, equipment, and administrative costs.

IHL is prepared to meet the required federal/grantee match requirements, by committing 52% of the total budget under grantee share (\$1,200,495 cash and \$1,201,653 in-kind = \$2,402,148). The cash portion of the match (non-CNCS resources) will be generated from cash match from partnering school districts (\$5,300 for each full-time AmeriCorps member and \$2,312.29 for each half-time member (\$850,495)). There is no cash match required for quarter-time members. Partnering schools that request the use of another federal source will be carefully monitored to ensure that no more than 30% of the cash match comes from another federal source. Additionally, partnering school districts submit a Source of Funds Letter providing the required information for the other federal source. IHL views the work of the ARM program as integral to the student success continuum to promote an effective, efficient and seamless pre-K to workforce (P-20) education system in Mississippi and will request continued level funding from the Mississippi Legislature for \$350,000.

In-kind match is committed or expected from the following sources: University partners at JSU, MSU, and USM providing office space for regional program staff, as well as a portion of personnel costs for some staff (\$35,103); partnering schools providing classroom space for tutoring (\$950,400); service site supervisors providing member supervision (\$200,000); and MDE and America Learns providing member training (\$16,150). IHL expects to collect in-kind throughout the program year, with 100% collected by the 10th month. For the current program year, ARM has collected \$598,900

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or 81% of cash match from school partners and will have 100% collected by January 31, 2014.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

IHL contracted with Professional Associates, Inc. (PAI) to conduct a program evaluation for the America Reads -- Mississippi AmeriCorps program. The results of the most recent program evaluation are referenced throughout this application and summarized below.

The conceptual framework is the foundation which undergirds the design, implementation and evaluation of a program. This framework has significant practical utility. In fact, it serves as the "road map" for carrying out all aspects of the program. As a part of the 2012 evaluation, the ARM Theory of Change was developed and includes a goal, objectives, strategies, outcomes and impact, as well as contextual and external factors.

PROGRAM INTERVENTION: The program intervention consists of two primary strategies: reading tutoring and member training and development. As a part of the proposed evaluation, the Theory of Change will be revisited, updated consistent with the revisions of the program. Student outcomes however, will be assessed through the use of standardized assessment tools used by the participating schools. The intervention and outcomes include:

Reading Tutoring - AmeriCorps members (N=198 (150 Full-Time, 24 Half-Time, 24 Quarter-Time)) providing one-on-one and small group tutoring sessions of 30 minutes 4 times per week (in school) and twice per week (after school) in Reading for 2,970 K-3rd grade students. The expected change and outcomes are:

- * 80% of tutored students completing 60 hours of tutoring during the school day;
- * 60% of tutored students showing growth in reading equal to or greater than the standard average for 1 year's growth.

Member Development -- Members will attend 6 Member Training and Development 1-day sessions focused on: 1. Program operation and tutoring skills and techniques; and 2. Educational and professional skills (i.e. goal setting, public speaking, time management, etc.).

- * The expected outcome is that 95% of AmeriCorps members will report better preparation for service obligations, and educational and professional pursuits as a result of member training and development.

EVALUATION DESIGN/METHODOLOGY: ARM is a multi-dimensional program, as a result, the evaluation includes measures specific to the varied program areas. The conceptual framework, Theory of Change, is the foundation on which the program will be evaluated. A mixed-method approach will be used. Quantitative methods will be used to collect child outcome data in reading. Specifically, the

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reading/language assessments used by the schools (as described below) will be used to measure changes in children's reading proficiency at three observation points--beginning, middle and end, during the school year. Also quantitative data on member development will be collected through three surveys as described below. These data will be supplemented qualitatively. A focus group of members will be conducted for the purpose of examining in greater depth their ARM AmeriCorps experience in terms of the perceived child outcomes, perceived quality and usefulness of their ARM experience, as well as the impact on their educational interest, motivation, pursuits, and career aspirations. Member satisfaction will also be explored.

IHL contracted with Professional Associates, Inc. (PAI) to conduct the 12-13 program evaluation for the America Reads -- Mississippi AmeriCorps program. A considerable investment of time was contributed by the evaluator in developing the conceptual framework which undergirds the program. PAI subsequently developed the data collection instruments and aggregated reading gain data provided by partnering school service sites for the 2012-13 program year. PAI also developed a questionnaire and surveyed AmeriCorps members for member development outcomes. The results of the most recent program evaluation are referenced throughout this application and summarized below. If funded, IHL desires to continue the contractual agreement with PAI based on its current conceptual and programmatic knowledge of the program as well as their working relationship with the program staff and partners. Informed by the Theory of Change developed for ARM and in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the impact of America Reads -- MS, the evaluation will be guided by the following questions:

- * How has ARM affected the reading/language arts skills of students at the elementary level in ARM partnering schools?

- * How has ARM impacted the educational and professional pursuits of AmeriCorps members?

DATA COLLECTION: Student outcome data will be collected through use of the DIBELS reading assessment tool with data collected at three observation points: beginning, middle, and end of year. Data will be computerized using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, ed 16. Descriptive statistics will be used for the demographic analysis. Analysis of variance using t-test and ANOVA will be used to determine whether change has occurred over the program year.

Member Development: Data measuring member development is collected through the use of three instruments: Member Demographic Profile and the Member Perceptions Survey. Data collected using these tools includes demographics, training participation and ARM placement. Data on current education, program status and Praxis I and II status are collected on the Future Teacher Corps

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Member Survey. The Member Perception Survey is a five-item Likert Scale assessment of services, training, supervision, and benefits.

USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS: An evaluation report reflecting the findings will be prepared at the end of the school year by the external evaluator. Evaluation results will be used first and foremost to inform program improvement, as well as member training. Findings will be shared during staff meetings, member training and other appropriate internal venues. Further, findings will be shared with ARM partnering schools and stakeholders. As the opportunities become available, evaluation findings will be presented at conferences and professional meetings.

Amendment Justification

NA

Clarification Summary

JUNE 12, 2014 2014-2015 CLARIFICATIONS

The performance measures, executive summary, and budget narrative have been updated to reflect the CNCS funding decision.

2014-2015 CLARIFICATIONS

I. Budget Response: The following changes impacted one or more categories disproportionately and are explained below:

* Personnel/Fringe Expenses: One full-time position (State Program Assistant) was eliminated and the position of USM Regional Coordinator (salary and fringe) was moved from the Federal Share to the Grantee Share.

* Administrative Costs: Federal amounts were re-calculated based on the changes to sections I and II.

* Increased the cash match by \$187.71 per member for affiliate fees collected from service sites for half-time members.

* For clarity, the NEW LINE ITEMS are a breakout of what was originally all in one line item

-NEW Travel for staff to attend Regional Member Service Orientation that staff attend/facilitate -- mileage only for this event, added meals

-NEW Travel for staff to attend Regional Member Tutor Training -- mileage only for this event, added meals

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-NEW Travel for staff to attend Regional Member Life After AmeriCorps Training/Service Celebration that staff attend/facilitate -- mileage only for this event, added meals

II. Narrative Response:

a. Please revise the executive summary to reflect the amounts of which you are under consideration. The Executive Summary has been revised.

b. Please articulate the criteria you will use to select and qualify tutors and certify that the selected members will meet AmeriCorps requirements in 45 CFR Sec.2522.910.

In order to serve as an ARM tutor, the program will require applicants to provide documentation of the completion of a minimum of 48 college hours in the form of a college transcript. Historically, 80% of ARM members have at least an Associates or Bachelor's Degree. Interested applicants who do not have these credentials must take and pass the ACT WorkKeys test -- the state assessment required to be a Teacher Assistant (and the program's requirement to serve as an ARM member) and pass the Reading for Information section with a score of 4.

c. Please explain how the program will identify and recruit qualified and committed applicants to be AmeriCorps members. Provide a corrective action plan for improving retention.

1. All ARM partnering school service sites are responsible to recruit qualified individuals who meet AmeriCorps guidelines to serve as AmeriCorps members/ARM tutors. Using the America Reads-Mississippi AmeriCorps Member Recruitment Procedures document, the ARM Program provides in-depth training to school service sites regarding Member Recruitment to ensure that the advertisement, application process, applicant eligibility (including the completion of 48 college hours or passing the ACT WorkKeys test to qualify as a reading tutor, and passing the required criminal history checks), interview process, and member selection are in compliance with AmeriCorps policies and regulations. Service sites and program staff conducts information sessions to insure all potential applicants understand the history of AmeriCorps/ARM, application requirements and timeline, service expectations and benefits, and the interview process.

2. Upon receipt of a completed member application packet, the ARM regional office carefully reviews the application and required documents. The staff must complete a Child Abuse Registry Check and the National Sex Offender Public Registry Check for each potential applicant. Applicants must also submit a signed Applicant Certification Form with the completed application, acknowledging their

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understanding of the application process, policies on previous AmeriCorps service, if any, and that the applicant has not been released from an AmeriCorps program for cause. This is completed before the applicant will be considered for site interviews.

3. The school Site Supervisor and/or principal select the applicants to be interviewed. Where possible, current and/or former AmeriCorps members are part of the interview process. School sites are asked to look for individuals who: (1) have been active at the school site or in the community; (2) have a desire to work with children; (3) have a desire to attend/complete college; and (4) reflect qualities of being responsible, mature, and demonstrate leadership abilities. ARM staff is available to assist with the interviews at the host site's request. None the less, program staff is actively involved in each step of member recruitment.

4. Partnering schools must complete and submit fingerprint background check results for the preferred candidates for the program staff to review. ARM program staff in all regions gives a final confirmation that the applicant(s) meets AmeriCorps eligibility requirements to serve as an AmeriCorps member and gives the approval for the school to select the member. ARM program staff completes the programmatic aspects of the application and enrollment process within 30 days of the member start date.

CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN FOR IMPROVING RETENTION

In addition to the narrative on page 14 of the grant application regarding member retention, the ARM program plans to enhance member orientation with training that seeks to develop a performance culture. Performance culture creates a level of commitment and goal-oriented effort that makes service more about the development, and sustains the willingness to persevere and finish well. What is different about this approach, compared to what the program has done in the past, is that the program's logic model and theory of change will be used so that ARM members will become well-versed in the specific outcomes the program is seeking through their service.

d. Please explain why achieving an improvement in reading skill equal to (or greater than) one year of education is a reasonable target for success. Explain how students who are drastically below grade level in reading will ultimately achieve grade level skills. Please explain why data from past performance is an indication of academic gain beyond what would be expected without the tutoring intervention.

The program feels that the target outcomes are reasonable, because they were designed to be more realistic about the percentage of students who would show growth and to also establish longer range

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outcomes that align with the current state legislation on reading skills. Research shows that in order to ensure that struggling readers make expected yearly growth, as well as accelerate learning and make the additional growth needed to achieve grade-level proficiency there must be additional intensive instruction. It should be "in small enough groups for enough time and with enough skill" (Torgesen, J. K. (2007, July). Monitoring Instructional Effectiveness in Grades 1-3 with the purpose of guiding school level initiatives and classroom instruction. Presented at National Reading First Meetings, St. Louis, MO.), and this intensive, small-group instruction is precisely what ARM tutors provide. The program is following research-based models of tutoring implementation that incorporate well-trained tutors, school-approved interventions, and appropriate dosage that lead to improvement in reading skill equal to (or greater than) one year of education. In response to the research, ARM has secured training facilitation by the state lead education agency, the Mississippi Department of Education, as well as revised its logic model to include appropriate dosage and a uniform literacy assessment. Understandably, it is extremely difficult for struggling readers who are already below grade level to achieve grade level skills in a given year but ARM tutoring has proven effective in moving students closer. The first year of implementation will provide clear indication of the need to continue with the expected targets or make adjustments. ARM has been successful in providing tutoring that assisted struggling students in achieving reading gains comparable to one year's growth based on student improvement plans. This is reflected in student outcome data, grades K -- 3, for program years 2011- 2012 and 2012-2013. Additionally, partnering schools consistently report levels of student academic improvement that would not have been accomplished without ARM tutoring. School partners who submitted letters of commitment also acknowledge these outcomes.

e. Please describe the continuous improvement plan that will be put into place to ensure that the program achieves its objectives.

The continuous improvement plan involves utilization of the logic model and theory of change as a specific means of tracking progress towards program targets and objectives. On page 7 of the grant application, under Member Training, the narrative notates the BIG PICTURE diagram. This was developed by the program as a summary of the program's structure and implementation but it did not address specific short, mid, and end outcomes. The first step in the continuous improvement plan will be to replace this diagram with the program's logic model and theory of change for use during member orientation. Additional intervals of progress tracking using the logic model and theory of change will be quarterly progress reporting, state staff meetings, regional monitoring visits conducted

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by state program staff, and regular service site visits conducted by regional staff.

f. Please provide additional details about how the program will ensure that members and volunteers are trained to ensure compliance with AmeriCorps requirements including prohibited activities. The ARM AmeriCorps Member Contract includes all AmeriCorps requirements and a special section on prohibited activities where members initial each statement to document understanding and commitment to compliance as the contract is reviewed prior to beginning the service term. Program staff will also review AmeriCorps requirements including prohibited activities at the Program Orientation for AmeriCorps members and Service Site Supervisors. This information will also be located on the program website. Additionally, the Monthly Member Hours Report will be revised to include the prohibited activities on the back page. The program will develop a volunteer packet that includes information on AmeriCorps requirements and prohibited activities to be provided to volunteers. AmeriCorps Team Leaders will be trained to communicate these details to volunteers.

g. Please explain how the applicant will ensure better and more consistent data collection over previous years.

The ARM program will use a student data collection process that includes establishing a calendar to denote the three observation points referenced on page 17 of the grant application; scheduled site visits conducted by ARM regional staff that include a meeting with the school literacy specialist to review and collect student data reports, program reporting periods, and intervals of expected short term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes as indicated on the program logic model. In an effort to develop a shared performance culture among school partners, the program logic model and theory of change will be reviewed during the site supervisor orientation, as well as a review of the data collection process. The program plans to continue the contractual relationship with Professional Associates, Inc. and will enlist the agency's expertise in the development and communication of the data collection process.

h. Please explain why each of four regions needs two full-time staff when members have site supervisors plus three full-time state staff. Provide a more detailed description of responsibilities for each of the 11 full-time staff for 198 members in addition to site supervisors.

The program is committed to the effective stewardship of grant resources and has taken this question under serious advisement. ARM will provide service statewide which is more efficient when program

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staff is located in close proximity to school service sites. School site supervisors serve voluntarily and have other primary school responsibilities as paid school employees while providing on-site supervision (maintaining member attendance sign-in logs and conducting regular team meetings). While site supervisors are made aware of and do help members maintain compliance with AmeriCorps policies, there is a intentional focus of their efforts devoted to reading tutoring; observing and guiding members in the tutoring role and the use of appropriate literacy-related interventions. The regional program staff, however, ensures that both the school service site and all AmeriCorps members maintain compliance with AmeriCorps policies. The Regional Coordinator will be responsible for school partner recruitment, providing guidance to school sites for member recruitment, confirming member eligibility, member enrollment, managing the regional budget and program expenditures, submitting budget and program reports, reviewing site supervisor monthly in-kind timesheets, conducting school site visits, and regular communication with each school service site and with the supervising official of the regional host university. The Regional Program Assistant will be responsible for the monthly review and logging of member timesheets, generating and distributing monthly member hour reports, planning and implementing member trainings, conducting school site visits and member evaluations, and assisting AmeriCorps teams with the planning and implementation of community service projects. In an effort to meet the budget amount for which ARM is being considered and to retain the needed staffing at the regional level, the state program office has deleted the position of State Program Assistant and will absorb these administrative duties between the remaining two state staff positions, thus bringing the total to 10 program staff. The State Program Director will be responsible for overall program/budget implementation, compliance, and management, staff supervision and training, monitoring of regional offices, reporting, program evaluation, data collection, and communications with key partners including the Mississippi Department of Education, and the legal applicant. The Assistant Program/Finance Director will oversee statewide fiscal and budget management, review, approve, and submit regional and state fiscal reports, overall budget expense tracking, cash and in-kind match collection, member living allowance distribution, and the planning of state staff meetings.

i. Based on a review of the cost effectiveness section in your application, we feel your program did not make a compelling case for the requested cost per member service year (MSY). Please consider decreasing your cost per MSY by revising your CNCS share of the program budget or explain why your program is cost effective in terms other than what exists in the application.

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The cost per member service year (MSY) has been reduced to \$12,711.

j. Grant Start Date and Member Enrollment Period: Please review your desired grant award start date and member enrollment period start date in the Applicant Info section of your application. Please make any corrections necessary. It is not permitted for an applicant to re-submit with an earlier start date than previously submitted.

The program originally requested and plans to continue with the Grant Start Date of August 1, 2014 and an 11-month member service term, beginning August 1, 2014 and ending June 30, 2015.

3. Strategic Engagement slots: At this time America Reads-Mississippi is not requesting any Strategic Engagement slots.

4. No Cost MSYs: At this time, America Reads-Mississippi is not requesting any no cost MSYs.

5. Healthcare:

a. We are currently seeking a health insurance provider that is in compliance with both the AmeriCorps Provisions and the Affordable Care Act. We have conducted phone meetings with representatives from Humana, AmeriCorpsBenefits, The American Worker, and the Human Resources Director of the MS Institutions of Higher Learning.

b. The program budget was originally developed based on information from a direct marketing piece received in the mail from AmeriCorpsBenefits which appeared to have a less expensive rate than the previous provider, which was the Corps Network. However, neither of the AmeriCorps providers have plans that meet the MEC, therefore we are still searching.

c. Our proposed budget for member healthcare will not provide for MEC.

d. The Corps Network has estimated that to be ACA compliant there could be a potential increase of 20% to 25% in rates. Our application budget proposes \$150 per member/per month. Our proposed budget does not compensate for that increase.

e. We would need to increase our health insurance cost to (approximately) \$190 per month per member for a total of \$342,000, an increase of \$72,000.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics