

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Breakthrough Austin will have 132 quarter-time, summer AmeriCorps members who will teach courses in our summer program and 7 full-time, year-round AmeriCorps members who will deliver case management services and lead summer and year-round programming for Breakthrough students in grades 6-12 in Austin, Texas, and Manor, Texas, and Breakthrough high school graduates and college students attending colleges and universities throughout the United States. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for helping Breakthrough increase the number of its students who meet academic milestones, graduate from high school on time, and enroll in college. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will continue to leverage more than 300 volunteers engaged in mentoring, tutoring, coaching, and supporting Breakthrough students year-round.

The program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$464,835 will be matched with \$234,833 in private funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

### PROBLEM/NEED

A vast achievement gap exists between low-income, first-generation students and their higher-income peers. Low-income students whose parents have never been to college meet academic milestones, graduate from high school, and enroll, persist in, and graduate from college at much lower rates than their higher-income peers whose parents have a college degree. Low-income students are much less likely to attend college than their more affluent peers, regardless of ability, and only 11% of low-income college students attain a college degree (Haskins and Kemple, 2009).

In the neighborhoods Breakthrough serves (Manor, Dove Springs, East Cesar Chavez, Govalle, and St. John), the need is pronounced. Poverty rates are staggering, with poor educational outcomes. According to 2010 Census data, the average median household income for families living in these zip codes is \$36,058, as compared to \$55,452 for Travis County as a whole. In these neighborhoods, only 18% of residents aged 25 or older have attained a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to 44% of all Travis County residents. In Breakthrough communities within Austin ISD (Dove Springs, East Cesar Chavez, Govalle, and St. John), 48% of residents under the age of 18 live in poverty. In Manor ISD, 79% of all students are economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Central Texas has seen a dramatic increase in low-income students, with 90% growth from 2002-2012, yet high school graduation and college enrollment rates remain comparatively low for this population (E3 Alliance, 2013). The need for Breakthrough is tremendous and will only grow over time.

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Academic preparation and attendance issues contribute to the achievement gaps between low-income students and higher-income peers. Although most students want to attend college, low-income, first-generation students often do not take the courses needed to prepare academically. Nationally, students whose parents don't have a bachelor's degree are less likely to have completed a rigorous high school curriculum than their peers (Engle, 2007). This trend is demonstrated locally by the numbers of low-income students succeeding on standardized and AP exams, with an average of only 11% of students meeting one or more AP exam criterion in our students' neighborhood schools, compared to the district average of 56%. At the high schools within our students' neighborhoods, only 51% of students on average meet Texas State Assessment standards, compared to the district average of 73% (Texas Education Agency, 2012). Economically disadvantaged students also have lower school attendance rates than their more privileged peers. During the 2010-11 school year, Central Texas low-income students had 13 average absences, compared to only 8 average absences for all other Central Texas students (E3 Alliance, 2013).

High school graduation rates for Central Texas low-income students are also consistently low as compared to higher-income peers. In 2010, only 73% of low-income Central Texas students graduated from high school on time compared to 92% of all other Central Texas students (E3 Alliance 2013). The problem persists at our students' neighborhood schools. For example, the four-year graduation rate at Eastside Memorial High School, serving students in the Govalle neighborhood, was only 69% in 2012 (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

In low-income communities, students whose parents have never attended college complete important college entrance steps at much lower rates than their higher income peers. These students' families often lack the knowledge, resources, and experiences needed to navigate the complicated road of completing college applications, securing financial aid, and preparing for postsecondary education (Coleman, 1988; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). For example, only 43% of high school seniors in Texas completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) in 2011-12 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), and according to the Texas Education Agency, only 54% of economically disadvantaged students in Texas completed either the SAT and/or ACT (2011). The College Board reports that on average, low-income students apply to fewer colleges than higher-income students. Being academically ready for college as determined by state standards is an important indicator of future college success as well. However, in 2012, only 33% of Austin ISD low-income high school graduates and 29% of Manor ISD low-income high school graduates were considered academically ready for college-level coursework based on state standards, compared to 80% of higher-income

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students (Texas Education Agency, 2012).

As a result, low-income, first-generation students enroll in, persist in, and graduate from college at much lower rates than their peers. Only 61% of low-income Austin ISD and 60% of low-income Manor ISD students in the Class of 2012 enrolled in college directly after high school. In the neighborhoods Breakthrough targets, the odds are stacked against students. According to data from the Central Texas Student Futures Project, only 33% of Eastside Memorial High School graduates, 34% of Reagan High School graduates, and 35% of Travis High School graduates directly enroll in college. Only 67% of low-income Central Texas college students in 2010 persisted to their second year, compared to 85% of non-low-income students. Only 10% of low-income Central Texas students go on to complete a college degree, compared to 37% of their non-low-income counterparts. (E3 Alliance, 2013). This local data mirrors the national trend that regardless of ability, only 11% of low-income college students complete a college degree (Haskins and Kemple, 2009).

Breakthrough's AmeriCorps program addresses three key causes for the poor education outcomes of low-income, first-generation students: unequal out-of-school time academic opportunities, lack of a mentor or advocate, and absence of important non-academic skills needed for college success.

School is the primary source of academic learning for low-income students. While higher-income students continue to build their knowledge and skills through experiences such as camp, classes, or travel, low-income students have limited access to similar learning opportunities. Because of this learning loss, by the time these students reach middle school, they are already 2.5 to 3 academic years behind their peers (Miller, B.M., 2007).

As previously mentioned, students who do not have a parent that has attended college are at a significant disadvantage. Without a mentor to encourage them toward college or role models who have graduated from college, they may lack an academic advisor to hold them accountable for their work and encourage them to take challenging courses (Coles & Blacknall, 2011). While more educated and affluent parents are often able to help their children overcome the challenges of navigating the bureaucracy of secondary education, for less educated and less affluent parents, or for those who do not speak English, this process is unfamiliar and can be very intimidating. These challenges regularly divert even the most motivated and hardworking low-income and minority students off the path to higher education.

Non-academic factors also play a part in college success. Even when low-income first-generation students are highly qualified academically for college, without mastery of specific non-academic skills, such as academic perseverance, learning strategies, and social skills, they may have trouble meeting

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multiple demands of the college environment and have difficulty persisting toward graduation (Farrington et al, 2012).

Breakthrough believes that education is the key to replacing the cycle of poverty with self-sufficiency. Our comprehensive program makes a long-term commitment, beginning in middle school, to help low-income students become the first in their families to graduate from college. In our 2014-15 project year, Breakthrough will serve more than 800 students in Central Texas's neediest neighborhoods. More than 91% of Breakthrough students are low-income and qualify for free or reduced lunch. More than 60% of Breakthrough families speak a language other than English at home. All Breakthrough students have no parent who has graduated from a four-year college or university, and 73% are Hispanic, 19% are African-American, and 8% are Asian-American, multi-racial, white, or other. Breakthrough follows the income eligibility guidelines for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program when determining income status.

### AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS/ EVIDENCE-BASED/EVIDENCE-INFORMED, MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

AmeriCorps members are critical to helping Breakthrough address this pressing community problem. Breakthrough's AmeriCorps program will target low academic achievement, college-ready milestone completion, high school graduation, and college enrollment rates for low-income students in Manor and Austin whose parents have never been to college. Our program is based on best practices in the field and research that demonstrates the interventions low-income, first-generation students need to make it to and through college.

Breakthrough admits students through an application process, annually recruiting 60 7th grade Austin ISD students and 100 6th grade Manor ISD students. Breakthrough students primarily live in the Greater Austin neighborhoods of Govalle, Cesar Chavez, Dove Springs, St. John, and Manor and have no parent who has graduated from college.

Demand for Breakthrough's program is enormous. For three years, we have had a waiting list of student applications and in 2013, because of Manor ISD's desire to increase Breakthrough's presence on Manor campuses, we grew our incoming Manor cohort by 33%, accepting 100 rising 6th grade students. Using AmeriCorps members will enable us to keep our student to case manager ratio low and maintain the high quality of our program while increasing the number of students served, ensuring individualized attention and a strong college-going culture of learning.

Breakthrough also needs AmeriCorps members to provide our students with diverse role models who

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connect personally with our mission. Becoming an AmeriCorps program in 2011 allowed Breakthrough to recruit exceptional and diverse AmeriCorps members with similar backgrounds to our students, a key contributor to our programmatic success. These members will serve as positive role models and develop close, near-peer relationships with students. For the past three years, more than 80% of our full-time AmeriCorps members were first-generation college graduates. As an AmeriCorps program, Breakthrough also gains the capacity to recruit, engage and coordinate more than 300 volunteers annually, supporting all organizational aspects.

### Theory of Change and Logic Model

**Inputs:** To address the previous needs outlined and achieve the outcomes in our logic model, we request 36.629 MSY: 112 quarter-time members and 7 full-time members. Quarter-time members will serve a 9-week term as summer teachers for Breakthrough's approximately 500 middle school students in academic summer programs held on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin and a school campus in Manor ISD. Full-time members will serve an 11.5 month term to support Breakthrough's overall program, including case management, summer and Saturday academic programming, and support for our students in college.

**Activities:** Breakthrough AmeriCorps members will directly address the issues outlined in our needs section. Because research demonstrates that low-income students often lose academic ground during the summer compared to their more affluent peers, a hallmark of Breakthrough is our rigorous summer program. The summer program includes six full weeks of intensive, full-day academic programming. The majority of our AmeriCorps members serve in the middle school summer program because AmeriCorps member support of this program is critical to overall program success. With a 1:5 teacher-student ratio, our rising 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grade students receive the individualized support and attention that very few programs can offer. The program provides instruction in all core subjects, teacher-crafted electives, a nutritious breakfast, lunch and snack, access to teachers in the evening, and well-organized workshops, field trips, and counseling sessions. The goals of the summer program are to address the academic deficits experienced by low-income, first-generation students, while fostering mission-critical relationships between students and staff and boosting motivation for college at an early age. By serving as teachers in the summer program and completing the activities described in our Logic Model chart, Breakthrough quarter-time (QT) AmeriCorps members become role models, mentors, and educators who change the lives of hundreds of low-income, first-generation students, launching them on the path to success throughout high school and college.

In addition, seven full-time (FT) members will support our Program Coordinators by delivering year-

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round interventions, providing individualized counseling and mentorship, and helping to plan and implement Saturday, after school, and summer programs for students in grades 6-12 and college. Through the activities detailed on the Logic Model, FT members will provide critical academic support, help students build college-preparatory non-academic skills, and ensure students take necessary steps to enroll in and succeed in college. Members also support our Volunteer Coordinator in recruiting and training volunteers by presenting at community fairs, universities, and corporations, assisting in orienting volunteers.

Outputs: As detailed in our Logic Model chart, with AmeriCorps member support, Breakthrough can ensure students meet important benchmarks on the path to college graduation.

Outcomes: By achieving the stated outputs, we anticipate high numbers of students achieving the outcomes in our Logic Model chart. Breakthrough continuously monitors student progress and intervenes as necessary. We anticipate our program will lead to the long-term outcome of attainment of a bachelor's or associate's degree within six years of high school graduation. Our ultimate goal is for students to achieve their academic promise, with the potential to break the cycle of poverty in their families for generations. Breakthrough has selected the following National Performance Measures: ED1, ED2, ED5, ED9, and ED10.

### Evidence Base

Our program is evidence-informed, based on best practices in the education field, internal and external evaluations, research on what works for college preparation and college access programs as published in What Works Clearinghouse, and research shared by other organizations that work in dropout prevention, college access and college persistence, such as the E3 Alliance, Con Mi Madre, College Forward, KIPP, AVID, Austin Partners in Education (APIE) and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation Dell Scholars Program. Our program also follows the common measures for college access and success recommended by the National College Access Network, including academic, testing, admissions, and financial aid indicators. The following research suggests that our interventions will lead to our desired outcomes.

### Out-of-School Academic Support

There is evidence that middle school intervention programs providing extensive academic supports reduce the likelihood of truancy, grade level retention, and dropout (Schargel & Smink, 2001). Breakthrough's program begins during a student's middle school years because research demonstrates that middle school is a critical time to set college-going expectations. Johns Hopkins University found that "during the middle grades, students in high-poverty environments are either launched on the

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path to high school graduation or knocked off-track" (2009). By making learning fun and having courses taught by relatable role models (AmeriCorps members), Breakthrough builds aspirations for college and enthusiasm for learning. Studies also show that students who participate in after school tutoring programs that, like Breakthrough, provide a substantial dose of tutoring services (more than 45 hours each academic year), are more likely to enroll in college than other students (Beckett et al, 2009; Constantine et al, 2006).

### A Case Management Model

Case management support can increase school attendance rates and improve course grades among low-income and minority students (Dynarski et al, 2008). A 2011 Stanford University research study found that college students who were assigned a caring adult to regularly check in with them by phone, email, and text message were 15% more likely to stay in school, with 31% of them earning a college degree within four years, a graduation rate four percentage points higher than that of their classmates. Each Breakthrough student is assigned a case manager who provides year-round academic advising and support. Case managers serve as advocates for students, helping them navigate the process of applying to preparatory high schools and ultimately colleges. When Breakthrough students enroll in college, they are also assigned a "college coach," a volunteer who checks in with them regularly and provides mentorship. Breakthrough case managers monitor student academic progress, hold students accountable for their work, and connect students to academic and social resources as needed.

### Non-Academic Skills for College Success

Research shows that non-academic skills are important to student success. Factors such as study skills, work habits, time management, and social and academic problem-solving skills affect how well students successfully navigate college life and meet new academic and social demands (Conley, 2007). Participating in Breakthrough programming teaches students to value their education and learn time management and study skills. In a 2006 Pell Institute study, first-generation college students cited "the structure, discipline, and commitment required to participate in pre-college programs (i.e. attending workshops every Saturday morning during the school year) helped them to prioritize academics over socializing with peers" when they went to college. Breakthrough's programs and interventions intentionally embed instruction of specific non-academic skills, attitudes, and behaviors identified as critical to future college success.

### College Knowledge Needed to Reach College Readiness Milestones

AmeriCorps members will provide the support navigating the admissions process that Breakthrough

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students' family members cannot provide. In the 2006 Pell Institute report, first-generation college students cited the following activities as crucial to getting them to college: starting the college research process early and meeting with program staff continuously; learning about the college application process; becoming informed about financial aid and scholarship options; and family involvement. These steps are also supported by research conducted by David Conley of the Educational Policy Improvement Center who reports on the importance of contextual skills and college knowledge to a student's college success, citing that students need to become aware of college admissions requirements, college and financial aid costs, college culture, professor expectations, and the challenge level of college courses (2007).

In addition, Breakthrough has internal evidence to support its program. Breakthrough has a performance management system through which we closely measure and track each student's progress against the outcomes listed in our logic model. Yearly, students attending the summer program demonstrate significant academic gains in math, reading fluency, reading comprehension and writing, based on norm-referenced pre- and post-examinations. During the 2012-13 school year, more than 90% of Breakthrough students attended school 90% of days or more and 84% passed all their classes. Ninety-five percent of Breakthrough's first six classes of seniors graduated from high school in four years--exceeding the average completion rate of low-income students in Central Texas (73% in Austin ISD; 76% in Manor ISD). Every senior in the 2013 Breakthrough Class graduated from high school in four years. The college readiness rate of Breakthrough seniors (79% in 2013) far outpaces the Austin averages (less than 30% for low-income students). On average, 85% of Breakthrough seniors submit the FAFSA. Breakthrough students' average direct college enrollment rate (80%) is much higher than that of their Central Texas low-income peers (39%) (Ray Marshall Center, 2011). Breakthrough has six classes of high school graduates in college, and based on their current enrollment rates, we anticipate that just under 50% will graduate from college within six years, outpacing the national average college completion rate of 11% for low-income students (Haskins and Kemple, 2009). We also have qualitative evidence of our program success. According to surveys administered at the close of the 2013 Summer Program, at least 93% of our families feel their child is more successful in school because of Breakthrough.

In 2011, independent researchers at Technology & Education Consulting Associates published a longitudinal research study on Breakthrough's program. The study was a quasi-experimental study that examined three cohorts of Breakthrough students to determine program impact on students' likelihood of high school graduation and college enrollment. The study participants were 3,487 Austin

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ISD 6th grade students across the 2001-2002, 2002-2003, and 2003-2004 school years. Within the study population, 131 students were participants in the Breakthrough program. The study found that after accounting for demographic, academic, and behavioral characteristics, Breakthrough students were 3.5 times more likely to graduate from high school and almost 2 times more likely to enroll in college in comparison to other students from the same 6th grade campuses.

### **MEMBER TRAINING**

All members will receive two weeks of intensive training at the start of their placement, reflection and evaluation at the close of their service, ongoing professional development, and ongoing opportunities for civic reflection. The initial two-week training for both QT and FT members will be led by the AmeriCorps Program Coordinator with support from Breakthrough staff on selected topics and will include an AmeriCorps and National Service overview; professional reflection and goal setting; Breakthrough and AmeriCorps policies/procedures; an introduction to Austin; an overview of Breakthrough, its mission, strategy, vision, and results; cultural competency, diversity and conflict resolution; and team building activities. The initial training for QT members will also include an orientation of their summer program site; and lessons on classroom management, instructional strategies and assessment, with time to develop lesson plans, review curriculum, observe model lessons, and practice teaching classes. Working side-by-side with an assigned Program Coordinator, FT members will read student files; review plans for programs they will help lead; meet students and school personnel; and shadow experienced staff on case management interventions in practice. FT members will participate in an ongoing professional development series, presented in the Breakthrough office by staff and external experts, on the topics of management and prioritization, teamwork, leadership, and giving/receiving feedback. QT members will receive ongoing feedback through weekly faculty and department meetings where topics include service learning, time management, motivation, stress management, technology integration, learning styles, grading and rubrics, and communicating with families. All members will prepare a Presentation of Learning at the close of their service term, sharing their service experience and lessons learned with other members and staff. Members and generated volunteers will review the rules/regulations listed in their service agreement on their first day of training. Through ongoing supervision by the AmeriCorps Program Director, Breakthrough will ensure members and generated volunteers adhere to the rules regarding prohibited activities.

### **MEMBER SUPERVISION**

Each QT member will be supervised by two summer Breakthrough Site Directors, with additional

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support offered by a Breakthrough Instructional Coach (an experienced educator from the community). Summer Site Directors, experienced Breakthrough staff members, will observe QT members' work and provide ongoing support and feedback. Instructional Coaches will focus their supervision on members' classroom teaching, observing them on at least two occasions, providing verbal and written feedback. At the end of the summer, Instructional Coaches will craft an evaluation letter to the member, describing strengths and growth opportunities. Each FT member will be supervised by the AmeriCorps Program Coordinator and an assigned Program Coordinator. The Program Coordinator will supervise their day-to-day work and direct service with students, schools, and volunteers. The AmeriCorps Program Coordinator oversees the member experience as a whole, and will meet with FT members monthly, providing ongoing training and support. FT members will meet with their assigned Program Coordinators weekly for guidance and feedback. In February, members will receive a formal mid-year performance review. Breakthrough Site Directors and Program Coordinators have experience managing interns and AmeriCorps members and are supervised and supported by our experienced Director of Programs.

### **COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION**

Breakthrough staff places a high priority on promoting AmeriCorps as a key resource that makes change happen for first-generation college students. The name, logo and mission are always in front of what we do and we ensure that our members are fully trained in "what is AmeriCorps" and how to identify themselves as AmeriCorps members serving at Breakthrough. Breakthrough AmeriCorps members will wear member gear daily, promoting the AmeriCorps logo and name. To ensure what they do will be conveyed to our stakeholders beyond their year of service, we will provide the space and support so all members can create a Great Story to share their personal experience as an AmeriCorps member at Breakthrough.

### **Organizational Capability**

#### **ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING**

As a successful AmeriCorps grantee from 2011-13, Breakthrough has the experience, infrastructure, and staffing needed to implement this AmeriCorps program. Breakthrough's Executive Director, overseeing the entire program, brings 30 years of experience in corporate, community, and non-profit environments and has held numerous positions of leadership in the field of education. An experienced master teacher, the Director of Programs has experience managing and supporting a team of employees. He was named an Emerging Leader by Bank of America's prestigious national leadership initiative. He will ensure the quality of Breakthrough programs and services and supervise the

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AmeriCorps Program Director. The Director of Operations, highly skilled in fiscal management, will oversee the financial reporting requirements with close attention to detail. Breakthrough's AmeriCorps Program Coordinator has previous experience leading successful AmeriCorps programming and was the program lead for our 2011-14 AmeriCorps program. She will implement training, supervision, and evaluation of members. Our Program Coordinators, who will each be assigned one FT AmeriCorps member, are educators dedicated to the AmeriCorps goals and ideals. Summer Site Directors are experienced staff members with high levels of professionalism and leadership. They include former Teach for America teachers, a former Breakthrough teacher, and a former instructional coach. Each Program Coordinator and Summer Site Director has experience managing an AmeriCorps member. Our Administrative Coordinator is highly organized and will handle administrative duties, including maintaining accurate member files and running background checks. Our Volunteer Coordinator is a former Breakthrough AmeriCorps member who has experience motivating and supervising volunteers. Instructional coaches are experienced teachers who set the standards of classroom teaching in our program. Our systems of communication, supervision, and reporting are well established, as demonstrated in our high enrollment and retention rates, and our record of meeting our national performance measures. Through our 2011-14 AmeriCorps operating grant, Breakthrough staff demonstrated the capacity to maintain clear and appropriate financial and performance records, manage and submit accurate reimbursement requests, and submit timely and accurate data.

### **COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Breakthrough's AmeriCorps Program Coordinator ensures adherence to AmeriCorps rules and regulations, participating in monthly OneStar meetings on compliance and best practices. We employ an Administrative Coordinator to ensure administrative duties related to grant compliance requirements are met. Since all AmeriCorps members are supervised by Breakthrough staff, compliance can be monitored closely and internally. All members are instructed in their initial training, and reminded in their mid-year review, of prohibited activities and disciplinary procedures. We take compliance very seriously and have adopted protocols for regular internal review. For example, on a quarterly basis, the Administrative Coordinator and the AmeriCorps Program Coordinator audit member files to ensure paperwork is complete and accurate. The AmeriCorps Program Coordinator monitors member hours weekly and regularly monitors member activities for instances of risk.

### **PAST PERFORMANCE**

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Throughout the 2011-14 grant term, Breakthrough consistently met or exceeded all performance measure targets. Our 2011-14 program was very successful in helping low-income students achieve important academic milestones along the path to college graduation and will have a lasting impact as students progress through school on the path toward becoming first-generation college graduates. Breakthrough had no issues of compliance or weakness/risk during our previous grant term. Breakthrough regularly submits timely APRs, FFRs, and PERs. Our Enrollment Cycle Time and Exit Cycle Time (within 30 days) have consistently been 100%.

The Breakthrough AmeriCorps program creates a pipeline of professional opportunities for our members. After the completion of each of our operating grant years, one full-time AmeriCorps member renewed his/her position, and one full-time AmeriCorps member took a position as a full-time program staff member. A third member was hired for a 6-month contract to support and improve our college persistence and completion efforts.

Demand for our AmeriCorps is very high. On average, Breakthrough receives four applications for every member slot available. During the 2011-12 year, our enrollment was 100%; during the 2012-13 year, it was 98%, as two quarter-time slots were left unfilled. One member reported for orientation but did not pass the FBI Criminal History Check when fingerprinted (on the first day of service). A second member neglected to disclose she had previously served an AmeriCorps term with another organization but did not complete her service term and was exited for cause. Both applicants were ineligible to serve. As a result, we have changed our recruitment policies. The Authorization to Release Criminal History form now requires applicants to disclose if they have been arrested, convicted, or applied for deferred adjudication for any crime. If the applicant marks no, signs the form and it is later discovered (through the Texas/FBI DPS check) to be untrue, applicants are asked to leave and will not be eligible to serve. Additionally, during the initial phone interview, applicants are now asked if they have ever previously served with an AmeriCorps program. If they have, they must submit the program name and contact so that satisfactory completion and continued eligibility can be confirmed.

Our retention rate during both the 2011-12 and 2012-13 grant years was 98%. In 2012, one FT member left her service term service prematurely to pursue another AmeriCorps program, Teach for America. In 2013, one FT member left during her service term to return home. Additionally, one QT summer member was asked to leave during his last week of service due to a behavior policy violation. Program staff spoke with him directly, documented the incident, and explained he would be ineligible to receive his education award or serve another AmeriCorps service term. We do our best to select

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committed applicants and prepare them for success during training, orientation, and ongoing support/supervision.

### **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

Breakthrough conducts the Core Capacity Assessment Tool, incorporating results into planning efforts. A 360-degree performance review tool provides feedback for members from peers and staff. Supervisors meet regularly with members to assess progress. Families and students complete annual surveys to help us gauge success and modify services. AmeriCorps members make suggestions for improvement in their mid-service and end-of-term evaluations.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

#### **COST EFFECTIVENESS**

Our cost per MSY is \$12,690, a decrease from 2013-14 project year cost per MSY of \$12,839. Our cost per MSY has consistently decreased each year of our AmeriCorps project. This program is extremely cost effective because our 36.629 MSY will impact more than 800 low-income, first-generation students. It is also incredibly cost-effective as compared to alternative approaches. Our SAT preparation program is similar to private programs that can cost up to \$1,000. Private tutoring can cost \$20-\$50 an hour, and 1 hour a day of tutoring can cost \$2,500 over a student's middle school career. A summer day camp, usually lacking the academic rigor of Breakthrough's summer program, can cost \$300-\$1,000 per week. Breakthrough leverages volunteer support for our programs and events and has formed innovative partnerships with nonprofits and businesses to provide meaningful learning opportunities for our students.

#### **BUDGET ADEQUACY**

Breakthrough has secured the \$185,728 of non-CNCS funds needed through cash donations from foundations, corporations, and individuals, as listed on our Source of Matching Funds chart. As outlined in a written Memorandum of Understanding, Manor ISD will provide stipends for Instructional Coaches at the Manor summer site, a staff member to help coordinate the Manor Summer Program, facilities, technology, breakfast and lunch during the Summer Program and student transportation. University of Texas will provide facilities and technology access for the UT summer program site. St. Stephen's Episcopal School and St. Andrew's School will donate facilities, meals, transportation, and technology for Saturday programs at these campuses. Our experience as an AmeriCorps program has given us a clear picture of costs we must budget for in the coming year. Our budget includes member gear costs to ensure members wear the AmeriCorps logo daily. We are committed to sending an AmeriCorps member to Texas Leadership Council activities. We have not

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budgeted funds for this as no travel will be required. Because of our long-term commitment to students, we fundraise beyond our current year's operating budget and can cover grants issued on a reimbursement basis throughout the year.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

#### EVALUATION SUMMARY OR PLAN

Our AmeriCorps evaluation will include internal and external evaluations of the effectiveness of the interventions delivered by quarter-time and full-time members.

A portion of this evaluation will include results from an ongoing external, quasi-experimental impact study on the impact of our program in the Manor Independent School District. For this study, we have contracted with independent researchers Technology & Education Consulting Associates. This study will compare Breakthrough participants to non-participants with similar backgrounds through year-over-year surveys and de-identified student data, including grades, attendance, standardized test scores, and selection of rigorous courses. Breakthrough launched this longitudinal study in 2011, intentionally aligning it with the beginning of our partnership with Manor ISD, and the first year of our AmeriCorps programming. Survey questions administered to all fifth grade students in Manor ISD measure students' academic motivation, perceptions, and aspirations for college. The evaluation will examine survey results and academic outcomes over time. In our AmeriCorps evaluation, we will use the results to improve our use of AmeriCorps members in the district, ensuring we are best meeting the needs of students and schools.

For each program year, Breakthrough will also closely track the effectiveness of the interventions delivered by our AmeriCorps members as demonstrated through our students' progress toward meeting the outcomes listed in our Logic Model. As described in our Theory of Change, our AmeriCorps program includes a comprehensive set of out-of-school learning activities and individualized case management services to students in middle school through college. Anticipated outcomes include improved academic achievement, completion of college-ready milestones, on-time high school graduation, and ultimately, enrollment in, persistence in, and graduation from college.

Breakthrough will track the following metrics: Middle school students participating in the summer program make statistically significant gains over the summer in reading fluency, writing, and math; Less than 10% attrition across all cohorts; more than 90% Summer Program attendance; 80% of students pass all classes during the school year; 90% of parents, students, and teachers report high levels of satisfaction with their Breakthrough experience; more than 70% of students are college ready by the end of 12th grade; more than 90% of high school students graduate from high school in 4

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years; 80% of high school graduates enroll in college; more than 80% of enrollees persist in college beyond their first year; and more than 70% of college enrollees graduate within 6 years.

In addition to tracking our own students' progress, we will carefully compare our students' results with previous results, as well as similar Central Texas students. We will also measure our program's success by soliciting feedback from AmeriCorps members, students, and parents. We will administer teacher surveys developed by Breakthrough Collaborative and the University of Texas professors at the end of each Summer Program. We will also administer student and parent surveys developed in partnership with state and national survey experts.

Breakthrough collects demographic and academic data on our students and uses Salesforce to internally manage, analyze, and report on this data. We obtain and upload into Salesforce data collected from attendance records, report cards, staff reports, transcripts, test scores, college registrars, the National Student Clearinghouse, and satisfaction surveys from students, teachers, and parents. To assess middle school academic gains during the summer, we will administer a pre- and post test, using a validated, nationally normed standardized assessment tool.

Breakthrough has a data sharing agreement with Austin ISD that allows our staff to monitor students' attendance, homework and grade reports daily to provide timely interventions and effective support. Breakthrough has a close working relationship with Manor ISD. Breakthrough and Manor ISD have a signed Memorandum of Understanding that outlines how we will work together, and Manor provides our staff access to students' attendance, homework and grade reports. Breakthrough collaborates with Manor ISD and Austin ISD staff to closely monitor student progress and intervene as appropriate using Breakthrough's personalized case management approach.

Our Director of Programs will analyze the results of our AmeriCorps evaluation, looking for overall program impact and the effectiveness of individual components of our program, including the use of our AmeriCorps members. We anticipate this evaluation will lead to changes in curriculum development, improved practices for recruiting and supporting our AmeriCorps members, and strengthened relationships with our school partners. This analysis will be used to develop clear plans for improvement during the next school year and the next cycle of AmeriCorps funding and AmeriCorps members.

In our budget, we have included costs to engage an external evaluator to conduct our AmeriCorps evaluation, calculating these costs using the evaluator's \$50/hour fee and estimating at least 20 hours of time.

### **Amendment Justification**

## Narratives

N/A

### Clarification Summary

a.

1. Please confirm that the proposed tutoring intervention meets the requirements outlined in 45 CFR 2522.900-.950, including:

- i. Tutors will have a high school diploma or is equivalent, or a higher degree.
- ii. Tutors will successfully complete pre- and in-service specialized training.
- iii. The tutoring curriculum is high quality and research-based, consistent with the instructional program of the local education agency and with State academic content standards.
- iv. Members will be supervised by individuals with expertise in tutoring.

The proposed tutoring intervention offered by Breakthrough's AmeriCorps program will meet the requirements outlined in 45 CFR 2522.900-.950. Tutors will have a high school diploma or equivalent, or a higher degree. Breakthrough's tutoring curriculum will be high quality and research-based, consistent with Texas state academic standards, as well as the academic content standards of each school. Members conducting tutoring will be supervised by Breakthrough staff members who have expertise in tutoring.

b. Please make the following changes/updates in narrative in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants:

1. K-12 Success PM - ED2: Please indicate the amount of time (how many days or hours) required for a beneficiary in order to be considered having completed.
2. K-12 Success PM - ED5: Please indicate the amount of progress required to count as "improved academic performance." Please revise the description for this measure to indicate the level of gain expected per each individual beneficiary, such as an increase in score or the number of equivalent months of academic instruction, etc.

We will update our Performance Measures in eGrants to include further description, as included below:

Objective: K-12 Success

## Narratives

ED 2: Number of students who completed K-12 education programs

Instrument Description: This output pertains to Breakthrough students who remain active in the Breakthrough program throughout the grant term. Breakthrough considers a student active in our program if they participate in at least 200 hours annually of Breakthrough programming as a middle school student, or at least 100 hours annually of Breakthrough programming as a high school student. Breakthrough's methods for this output include our enrollment forms, case notes in a database, attendance rosters, study surveys, and reports from ParentConnect and Skyward -- school district online grade and attendance reports

ED 5: Number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math

Instrument Description:

This performance measure target pertains to Breakthrough students participating in the middle school summer programs, whose average gain scores in Reading, Writing, and Math, as measured by pre- and post-tests, will be statistically significant at the .05 level. Academic gain on the individual level is defined as a 5% increase of correct responses on the post-test. We anticipate using norm-referenced pre- and post-examinations in Math, Reading Fluency, Reading Comprehension, and Writing. The Math assessment tool is the Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project, a nationally recognized assessment. The Mathematics Diagnostic Testing Project is used by numerous school districts and institutes of higher education throughout the United States with a concentration within California. Within that state, it used by more than 40 community colleges as a placement exam for mathematics classes. It has also been validated externally by numerous studies by such universities as University of California at San Diego. The Reading and Writing assessments will be derived from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, which was the standardized test for every child in the state of Texas and validated by the Texas Education Agency. Our use of these former exams is also validated by a professional diagnostician, contracted from a local research and evaluation firm.

3. Post-HS Education Support - ED2: Please indicate the amount of time (how many days or hours) required for a beneficiary in order to be considered having completed.

## Narratives

Objective: Post-High School Education Support

ED 2: Number of students who completed K-12 education programs

Instrument Description: This output pertains to Breakthrough students who remain active in the Breakthrough program throughout the grant term. Breakthrough considers a student active in our program if they participate in at least 100 hours annually of Breakthrough programming as a high school student, or 15 hours annually of Breakthrough programming as a post-secondary student. Instruments include enrollment forms, case notes in database, attendance rosters, National Student Clearinghouse, student surveys, and reports from ParentConnect and Skyward -- school district online grade and attendance reports, school visits, family conferences.

c. Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification. Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled *Clarification Summary*.

1. What percentage of your slots will be targeted to recruiting members with disabilities? What is your program's plan, if any, for outreach and recruitment of members of the disability community?

Breakthrough does not target members with disabilities during recruitment, nor does it discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, ability, sex, secular preference, sexual orientation, marital status, age, political affiliation, or religion.

2. In order to increase the number of individuals with disabilities serving as AmeriCorps members, CNCS is offering applicants the opportunity to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities. The additional MSYs would be funded at the clarification cost per MSY level. Applicants must describe their intent to recruit, engage and retain additional members with disabilities and provide a detailed outreach plan for how these members will be recruited and supported (e.g. established recruitment partners or strategies.) In addition, programs receiving these additional member positions will be required to report specific details on the success of the recruitment, supervision and retention of AmeriCorps members with disabilities in semi-annual progress reports. If you would like to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members

## Narratives

with disabilities, please describe your intent as requested above. Also indicate how many MSYs your program would like to request, the number of slots by slot type, and where the additional members will serve. Add these additional MSYs to your budget.

We will not be requesting additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities.

d. MSY With No Program Funds Attached Clarification. Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled ¿Clarification Summary¿.

1. Applicants may request No-Cost MSYs. These additional no-cost MSYs are national service positions in which no grant funds will be awarded. In other words, grantees could receive additional AmeriCorps positions but no additional grant funds. Programs will be responsible for using their own or other resources to pay program costs, member support costs and other operating expenses. Keep in mind that full-time AmeriCorps program costs include expenditures for the AmeriCorps living allowance, health care and criminal history checks. Programs are not required to pay living allowances or cover health care for less-than-full-time members.

If you would like to request No-Cost MSYs, please edit your budget as appropriate (for example you may need to revise line items for member gear or criminal history checks). Please ensure your performance measures align with these additional MSYs. Lastly, you must include a response to each item below in the Clarification Summary field:

- i. The number and type of slots requested. Please confirm that for the MSYs requested, the additional members will only engage in activities aligned with the proposed member activities outlined in the application narrative.
- ii. A description of resources that will be provided to adequately support the additional members and how they are sufficient to: support the member support costs, management, oversight, program operations, and the program activities.
- iii. Source(s) of non-CNCS funds. Provide a brief description of the amount, classification (cash or in-kind), source(s) (State/Local, Federal, Private) for all resources secured to manage, monitor, and support these additional members.
- iv. The organization¿s capability and capacity to successfully implement, manage, and monitor the additional members.

## Narratives

i. We are requesting 5.29 additional no-cost MSYs. This equals an additional 20 quarter-time members, who will serve as summer teachers in our middle school summer programs, as outlined in our application narrative. These quarter-time AmeriCorps members will serve in the same capacity as the other 112 quarter-time AmeriCorps members already requested. The reason for this additional request is that Breakthrough received an opportunity for expansion and a new partnership after the original application was submitted in November of 2013. Breakthrough's Board of Directors and staff are committed to this avenue of growth and know that additional AmeriCorps members will be instrumental in this expansion effort.

ii. Breakthrough's Board of Directors has committed to allocating additional funds and resources necessary to supervise and support AmeriCorps members as well as an increase in the amount of materials and supplies members will use during their service period. Breakthrough leadership also supports allocating resources to the creation and refinement of systems needed in this expansion effort.

iii. Breakthrough will use funds from its General Operating Fund to pay for the resources needed to adequately support the additional members. Breakthrough has secured funds from a mix of private foundations and corporations for this General Operating Fund, which will support these additional members. As documented in our application, Breakthrough has secured a cash match from Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, a portion of which will directly fund this AmeriCorps program.

iv. As a successful AmeriCorps grantee from 2011-14, Breakthrough has the experience, infrastructure, and staffing needed to implement this AmeriCorps program with the additional no-cost MSY requested. Summer Site Directors are seasoned staff members with experience managing an AmeriCorps member and/or experience mentoring and supervising Breakthrough AmeriCorps summer teachers. Our systems of communication, supervision, and reporting are well established, as demonstrated in our high enrollment and retention rates, and our record of meeting our national performance measures. Through our 2011-14 AmeriCorps operating grant, Breakthrough staff demonstrated the capacity to maintain clear and appropriate financial and performance records, manage and submit accurate reimbursement requests, and submit timely and accurate data.

## Narratives

e. Healthcare Clarification Items For All Applicants (unless the grant type is professional corps, EAP, or grants without full-time members):

1. Please provide the name of the health insurance provider you are proposing to use to insure your AmeriCorps members.

Summit America

2. How did you select the provider? (for example, direct marketing ,through the Health Insurance Marketplace or other means)

We selected this provider based on its positive reputation and expertise in delivering health care coverage to AmeriCorps programs.

3. Does your proposed budget for member healthcare provide for Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC) coverage, as defined by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), for your full-time members?

Our proposed budget does not meet the MEC coverage at this time.

4. If not, what adjustment to your budget is necessary in order for you to provide Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC)?

In order to provide healthcare coverage that meets the MEC requirement, we would need to increase our budget by about \$17,000 per year. This would give our members the same type of coverage that staff currently have. This option would cause our program to be out of compliance with the AmeriCorps Provisions.

However, at this time, we do not feel that we can make an informed decision about what level of health insurance to provide our full-time members for the 2014-2015 program year because no decisions have been made regarding how a program can be in compliance with both the AmeriCorps

## Narratives

Provisions and the Affordable Care Act.

5. If you do not have enough information to answer question (4), please explain why not and/or what prevented you from being able to obtain the necessary information.

N/A

Please revise the MSY and member totals in the application budget to reflect the request for additional (no-cost) MSY. Please edit the application budget as appropriate if changes are necessary to line items such as member gear or criminal history checks. If changes are made to line items in the budget, please clearly indicate in the Clarification Summary what changes were made. Please note--the total budgeted CNCS share should remain at \$464,835 and may not change even if line items are revised.

We have made necessary adjustments to the budget to reflect the request for additional no-cost MSY. Specifically, we have adjusted the following line items:

In the section I.E Supplies, we have increased costs for member service gear from \$1,785 to \$2,085. We have increased costs for instructional supplies from \$14,900 to \$24,900. We have increased costs for printing and publication from \$5,600 to \$6,600.

In the section I.I Other Program Costs, we have increased costs for state criminal background checks from \$2,380 to \$2,780. We have increased costs for FBI and Texas background checks from \$4,933 to \$5,762.

In the section II.A Living Allowances, we have adjusted the living allowance costs for quarter-time members, increasing this cost from \$224,000 to \$264,000.

In section II.B, FICA costs increased from \$23,616 to \$26,676. In this section, Workers Compensation increased from \$3,982 to \$4,498.

## **Narratives**

We have adjusted budget section III to show that we secured \$234,833 in private funding as matching funds.

Please ensure your performance measures align with the additional requested MSY.

We have adjusted our performance measures to align with the additional requested no-cost MSY. In the K-12 Success Objective, we have adjusted our target for ED1 from 450 to 550 to reflect additional students served in this measure. We have adjusted our target for ED2 from 380 to 450. We adjusted our target for ED5 from 300 to 360. We have edited this section to show 41.92 MSY, with 38.92 assigned to the K-12 Success Objective and 3 MSY assigned to the Post-HS Education Support Objective.

Please revise the Executive Summary to reflect the updated number of requested members.

We have revised the Executive Summary to reflect our request of 132 quarter-time members and 7 full-time, year round members. We have also edited the Executive Summary to indicate that we will match the CNCS investment with \$234,833 in private funding.

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A

### **Grant Characteristics**