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Executive Summary

Project Transformation will have 133 AmeriCorps members who will lead afterschool and summer day camp programs for children and youth in ten low-income communities in north Texas. At the end of the 1st program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improving academic achievement in literacy of low-income children. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 1,100 volunteers that will provide one-on-one summer reading and homework assistance to children.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$550,550 will be matched with \$1,097,502 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

a. PROBLEM/NEED

Project Transformation AmeriCorps (PT) addresses the chronic problem of academic underachievement among children and youth living in low-income and severely distressed neighborhoods. Our programs focus specifically on improving students' academic performance in literacy through high-quality afterschool and summer day camp programs. While a host of interrelated factors contribute to the racial and socioeconomic disparities in student achievement, it is well documented that children and youth living in poverty and low-income communities perform far below their counterparts in middle- and upper-class communities. According to a 2009 report by McKinsey & Company (The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools), impoverished students (defined as those receiving federally subsidized lunches) lag academically behind their more affluent counterparts by roughly two years. As the income gap has widened, so has the achievement gap, which has grown 40% over the past three decades (Reardon, S., 2011). A significant achievement gap also exists between English language learners (ELL) and non-ELLs at all socioeconomic levels, but this gap is most severe for students at the lowest socioeconomic levels (Garcia & Frede, 2010). The number of students entering U.S. schools speaking little or no English has grown exponentially over the last decade. From 1998 to 2009, the number of ELLs enrolled in public schools increased from 3.5 million to 5.3 million (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2011). The vast majority (60%) of the low-income students served by PT also have limited English proficiency.

It is also well documented that proficiency in reading by the end of third grade is critical to a child's educational success and likelihood of graduating high school. Yet America's literacy rates, especially

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among low-income children, remain a national challenge. Based on the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress, more than two-thirds of the nation's fourth graders are not "proficient" readers, including 34% who scored below "basic." For low-income children, more than four out of every five scored less than "proficient," including 54% who scored below "basic" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Seventy-five percent of students with literacy problems in the third grade will still experience literacy difficulties in the ninth grade (Creating a Culture of Literacy 2005, National Association of Secondary School Principals).

Addressing the academic "summer slide" for low-income students remains a significant problem. Summer learning loss, particularly in reading, is cumulative, so that over time these different learning rates contribute substantially to the achievement gap, which cannot be made up during the school year alone. A 2007 National Center for Summer Learning (NCSL) research report found that two-thirds of the ninth-grade reading achievement gap between low- and higher-income students can be attributed to unequal access to summer learning opportunities. By the end of 5th grade, low-income students are up to 2.5 years behind in reading compared with their higher-income peers, largely because low-income students' reading skills decline over the summer break. However, recent research from the RAND Corporation has demonstrated that quality summer learning programs can prevent summer learning loss and even boost student achievement (McCombs et al., 2011).

Access to high-quality affordable summer and after-school learning opportunities is among the most crucial issues that face all low-income families, and no less so in the communities that PT serves. Only 14% of school-age children in the city of Dallas are enrolled in after-school programs, while 27% of all children (58,680) care for themselves after school during a given week (Afterschool Alliance's Dallas After 3pm report, 2010). Numerous national studies consistently show that "latchkey kids" are more likely to be involved in violent crime, substance abuse, tobacco use, and other high-risk behaviors. Likewise, despite a growing awareness that summer learning loss is a major contributor to the achievement gap, the number of children nationally participating in summer enrichment programs is startlingly low. According to the NCSL, only 25% of children (approximately 14.3 million) participate in summer learning programs. While there are many high-quality summer learning programs across the country, there are simply not enough to meet the growing need. Based on NCSL parent surveys, 56% of non-participating children would likely participate in a summer learning program, and nearly half of those children who are likely to participate are low-income students.

Though each of the ten neighborhoods surrounding the PT sites has its own distinct challenges, all share similar characteristics, according to statistics gathered from the 2010 U.S. Census, the Texas

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Connector, the Dallas Independent School District (DISD), and the Texas Education Agency (TEA). According to the Census, an average of 41% of adults in the ten communities served have not completed high school, far above the national average of 14%. Also, over 53% of families speak a language other than English at home, compared with 21% nationwide. These statistics are both a fair indicator of parents' confidence and ability to assist their children with their studies. The Census also shows the number of households living below poverty in the ten neighborhoods is more than two times higher (23%) than the national average of 10.5%. The TEA provides the most telling statistic demonstrating financial need: Of the schools in neighborhoods served by PT, an average of 94% of the enrollments qualify for a low-income subsidy of free or reduced-price lunches. Results of standardized testing show most of the schools are struggling to educate their students. On the 2012-13 state-mandated STAAR test, the percentage of students who scored unsatisfactorily on 3rd grade reading (39%) from schools in the neighborhoods served by PT was nearly twice as high as the average state unsatisfactory levels (21%). At two of the elementary schools, over 50% of students had unsatisfactory scores. Unfortunately, these low scores often lead to lower educational attainment. A 2012 report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that students who are not reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to not graduate high school on time. Children living in poor neighborhoods and are not reading proficiently in 3rd grade are about three times more likely to fail to graduate from high school than those who have never been poor. The 2012 graduation rate for DISD was 81%, below the state-wide average. The odds are even grimmer for many of the groups living in low-income communities -- 74.8% graduation rate for African American students in DISD and 60% graduation rate for ELLs.

Health and nutrition are additional poverty-related issues addressed by PT that have an impact on children's educational success. A growing body of evidence demonstrates that children lag academically when they eat poorly or engage in too little physical activity. A 2008 study in the *Journal of School Health* documented a direct correlation between poor nutrition and poor literacy. About 28% of Dallas County children (over 183,000) suffer from food insecurity and inadequate nutrition (*Beyond ABC: Assessing Children's Health in Dallas County*, 2011).

b. AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS; EVIDENCE-BASED AND MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT

Addressing the complex issue of closing the achievement gap in reading for low-income students demands a collaborative response, and PT is uniquely positioned to bring together various community groups to help close this gap and create positive change: By basing the programs in urban churches

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that were otherwise vacant, PT turns neighborhood liabilities into assets by providing safe spaces for children and youth to grow and develop; by partnering with dozens of United Methodist churches, other faith-based groups, and local businesses, PT attracts the volunteer support of over 1,100 individuals as a cost-effective way of giving children individualized reading assistance; by training AmeriCorps members to take the lead in implementing the program, a new generation of leaders emerges with hands-on experience and a passion for improving the education of underserved children and youth; and by actively seeking AmeriCorps members from the communities served, PT empowers youth to invest in the education and development of their own communities.

PT recruits AmeriCorps members who are currently enrolled in or have recently graduated from college. This makes them well suited to deliver our programs since college students are proven to play a critical role in helping K-12 students prepare for higher education (Campus Compact report, 2010). Among the major reasons college students volunteer is their desire for an understanding of the world and a desire to put their values into action (CIS: Using College Students as Mentors and Tutors, 2009). PT offers an ideal environment for young adult AmeriCorps members to learn firsthand about the educational challenges of low-income children and youth, to make a difference in the children's lives, and to be inspired to use their own unique gifts and talents to continue making a positive impact. In addition, by seeking college-age young adults to serve as AmeriCorps members, it creates a powerful incentive for youth growing up in the program to graduate high school, enroll in college, and return as AmeriCorps members. To date, twelve former participants have served as members and dozens more return to volunteer.

Through engaging 133 AmeriCorps members in service, PT effectively uses out-of-school learning opportunities to meet the needs of over 900 children and youth (grades 1-12) in low-income Dallas neighborhoods and underserved communities in outlying areas. AmeriCorps members implement free afterschool programs and summer day camps to help participants improve literacy skills and have a greater chance of achieving their full potential. PT's activities are composed of two interrelated projects that are divided into the school year and the summer:

- 1) The afterschool program operates at seven sites, serving 150 children, grades 1 through 6, four days a week, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., during the fall and spring semesters.

The sites, consisting of seven urban churches in low-income communities, are staffed by a total of 36 members (8 FT, 7 HT, 14 QT, 7 MT). Seven of the full-time members serve as "site coordinators" and are responsible for all aspects of the planning and implementation of the programming, as well as assisting in overseeing the efforts of the volunteers. One additional full-time member serves as the

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reading curriculum coordinator, overseeing the reading diagnostic assessments at all sites and ensuring each team has age-appropriate, targeted reading enrichment activities. The afterschool program is designed to improve academic performance in reading by providing targeted reading enrichment, homework assistance, arts and other enrichment activities, and interaction with young adult role models.

PT's evidence-based afterschool program design is effective in improving academic outcomes in reading. A 2008 research brief by the Harvard Family Research Project noted that balancing academic support with a variety of engaging, fun, and structured extracurricular activities that promote youth development in a variety of real-world contexts appears to improve academic performance. According to this same report, research and evaluation point to three primary factors that are critical for creating positive outcomes: 1) Children experience greater gains when they have sustained participation. The average attendance rate by PT's afterschool participants over the last three years was 60%. 2) Programs must be of high quality, focusing on features such as appropriate supervision and structure, well-prepared staff, and intentional programming. PT's afterschool and summer programs have demonstrated consistently high quality programming, as monitored by Dallas Afterschool's Quality Initiative. 3) Developing strong community partnerships with a variety of stakeholders is a key component of program quality. PT partners with over 100 community groups and institutions, including Dallas Afterschool, North Texas Food Bank, Southern Methodist University, Volunteer Center of North Texas, churches, high schools, the Dallas Regional Chamber, and many local businesses.

Two specific studies best support PT's evidence-based approach for afterschool programming: 1) A Yale University study of afterschool participation found that children who had strong afterschool program attendance had significantly higher reading achievement than children in three alternative types of care (parent care, combined parent/self or sibling care, and combined other-adult/self or sibling care). The afterschool programs included 599 elementary children from a disadvantaged city in the United States and were part of a citywide afterschool initiative. Programming was carried out between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m., and the goals were to a) provide a safe and supportive environment after school and b) to promote the academic and social competence and physical health of the participants. The staff consisted of a lead teacher, additional adult staff, youth workers, and volunteers. Content areas included homework assistance, snack, enrichment learning, supervised recreation, and art. Based on an independent program quality rating, the median overall quality of the programs was 3.82 on a scale of 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent). Children who participated in the afterschool programs

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had significantly higher reading achievement (DRA scores) than did those in three alternative care arrangements (Mahoney, J.L., Lord, H. & Caryl, E., 2005). 2) A two-year, quasi-experimental evaluation of the Foundations, Inc., afterschool enrichment programs found that participants increased reading performance compared with students who did not participate in the program. The curriculum emphasized academic subjects as well as experiences designed to foster physical and emotional development. Participants also spent time on field trips, homework assistance, and in computer lab, and family involvement was encouraged. Its evaluation of 19 elementary school sites in three states found highly statistically significant improvement in both reading and math scores between pretest and post-test (Klein, P. & Bolus, R. 2002).

2) The summer program operates at ten sites, serving over 900 children and youth, grades 1 through 12, four days a week, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., from June through the first week of August.

The sites, consisting of ten churches in low-income communities, are staffed by 112 members (97 OT, 8 FT, and 7 HT). Members serve among the ten sites in a manner that maintains a minimum of an 8:1 student-to-member ratio. Certain members on each team serve in specific roles, such as site coordinator, reading curriculum coordinator, reading coordinator, and high school Leaders In Training Experience (LITE) program coordinator. The summer program, which is divided into three age groups (elementary, middle, and high school) is designed to maintain or improve low-income children's reading skills and, for the older participants, prepare them to graduate high school on time. In addition to leading programming during the day, members make weekly home visits to get better acquainted with the children's families and gain a deeper understanding of their needs and challenges. A unique component of the elementary program (grades 1-5), which serves the majority of participants, is pairing individual reading volunteers with children on a daily basis. At least 15 reading volunteers are needed per site each day to read with children, so a minimum of 3,240 volunteer slots or 9,720 hours of reading must be provided to ensure each child has one-on-one reading assistance on a daily basis. In 2013, PT filled all 3,240 of the volunteer slots needed by recruiting 1,151 reading volunteers (many served multiple days) who provided 10,780 hours of reading assistance during the summer. The volunteers are trained each morning by AmeriCorps members serving as site coordinators and reading coordinators so that they are equipped to help children improve their fluency, vocabulary, accuracy, and comprehension.

The youth, grades 6-9, participate in reading and enrichment activities designed for their specific age group, which includes a book club (group reading and discussions with age-appropriate books), journaling, teambuilding, mountain bike excursions, current events discussions, leadership

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development, and service learning.

High school youth, grades 10-12, who grew up attending PT's summer programs, participate in the newly formed Leaders In Training Experience (LITE) program at four of the summer sites. Eight quarter-time members train these high school LITE participants to serve as reading volunteers with the elementary children, providing the older participants with opportunities to serve as role models. Members lead the LITEs through an eight-week curriculum, focusing on leadership development, writing workshops, critical thinking, personal asset building, college and career exploration, professional skills, and service and social justice issues. At the end of the summer, participants embark on a statewide college tour, exposing them to higher education opportunities outside the Dallas area, a new experience for most of our participants. The LITE program provides high school students with the experience, knowledge, and tools they will need to become well-rounded citizens and to pursue higher education or employment following high school graduation. By investing in the children we serve from first grade through the high school years and by connecting them with college-age young adults, PT prepares students for college, and several have returned to the program as AmeriCorps members.

PT's summer program is also evidence-based. A 2011 RAND Corporation study searched for rigorous studies documenting the effectiveness of summer programs in preventing summer learning loss. Ten experimental or quasi-experimental studies of nine programs were identified that measured the effects of attending against not attending using a pre-post comparison or a comparison of outcomes between the two groups. Three studies correlate well to PT's program design. 1) A randomized field trial of KindergARTen Summer Camp, a six-week summer enrichment program in literacy and fine arts, analyzed the summer learning outcomes of 93 treatment and 35 control students from high-poverty schools in Baltimore, MD (Borman, G.D., Goetz, M.E., and Dowling, N.M., 2009). The experiment yielded evidence concerning the causal effect of the program on five measures of students' literacy achievement. Researchers found treatment effects during the summer months that were of both practical and statistical significance on the DRA. 2) A quasi-experimental study of BELL Summer Program found that children in the program gained about a month's worth of reading skills more than a comparison group that did not participate (Chaplin, D., & Capizzano, J., 2006). The BELL programs are held in four cities nationwide and are designed to increase children's knowledge and mastery of reading, writing, and math; raise children's academic expectations and self-esteem; and develop effective mentoring relationships between children and positive adult role models. The program, which is similar to PT's program, targets youth living in low-income urban communities

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who are performing below grade level; operates eight hours a day, five days a week for six weeks; and provides youth (grades 1-7) with academic instruction; hands-on educational, cultural, artistic, and recreational activities; guest speakers; community service projects; and field trips. 3) An experimental study of Read to Achieve Summer Literacy Day Camp found that the day camp had a significant effect on five of the six outcome reading variables assessed compared to a control group who did not participate in any summer learning (Schacter, J. & Jo, B., 2005). The day camp took place five days per week, eight hours per day, for seven weeks. Children participated in two hours of daily reading instruction with the remainder of the day dedicated to summer camp activities (sports, arts and crafts, swimming, etc.). The study analyzed the reading outcomes of 162 first graders from three low-income elementary schools.

c. MEMBER TRAINING

Before members enter the field, they undergo a week of training by professionals in these areas: child development, team-building, CPR/first aid, classroom management, conflict resolution, anti-bullying, child-abuse identification and reporting, curriculum planning, volunteer recruitment and management, parent engagement, communication skills, risk management, social networking policies and procedures, food program management and national service topics. Also, PT staff thoroughly train members on program objectives. Former members and site supervisors offer training, as well as insight into the communities' need for PT's service. Members complete training evaluations and provide ongoing feedback throughout their service regarding the effectiveness of the training. PT staff meet regularly to review the members' feedback and make any changes to improve their preparedness for service.

A crucial component of member development during the summer is a weekly half-day visit to community-based organizations. Top administrators and program staff at each destination discuss the needs and resources of the populations they serve. These sessions also introduce members to role models of community service, as well as to opportunities in a host of service fields such as education, social outreach, counseling, and public health.

During the school year, ongoing training occurs weekly through PT's leadership course, with topics such as leading literacy, enrichment and physical activities. Community experts are also recruited to lead social-awareness training on topics such as immigration, poverty, nutrition education, and illiteracy. During this time, members have the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their community service and civic engagement.

Prior to beginning service, all members participate in an AmeriCorps training that details prohibited

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activities during their AmeriCorps service. In addition, all volunteers receive an orientation and training prior to service, which addresses prohibited activities. Program staff visit service sites on a weekly basis to ensure members are adhering to these rules.

d. MEMBER SUPERVISION

Members are supervised by an employee on site, who also interacts daily with site coordinators and partner organizations. Site churches select a staff member to serve as supervisor, as well as a leadership team of other staff or members of the community to provide support for the program and for members. Prior to the start of the after-school or summer program, all site supervisors receive comprehensive orientation and training. Training topics include: responsibilities of the site supervisor, PT staff, and members; program objectives; agendas for pre-program and weekly meetings between site supervisors and members; participant registration procedures; AmeriCorps guidelines; and important program events. Each site receives regular PT staff visits to ensure proper member supervision and provide ongoing support to site supervisors.

PT's director of programming and leadership development provides additional supervision and support to members. All members receive a mid- and end-of-term formal evaluation, besides ongoing informal feedback and one-on-one meetings. Evaluations are conducted by program administrators, allowing the opportunity to highlight member growth, discuss member or staff concerns, identify additional training needs, and set future goals.

e. COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION

PT AmeriCorps members will be provided with T-shirts that are co-branded with the PT and AmeriCorps logos, as well as AmeriCorps buttons and nametags with the AmeriCorps logo. Members serving in the afterschool program will also receive cobranded sweatshirts and messenger bags. All participants are trained to identify themselves as AmeriCorps members by wearing the gear daily and introducing themselves to volunteers, community members, and program participants. AmeriCorps members receive training on speaking about their AmeriCorps experience to partnering organizations. PT staff members listen to members' presentations and coach them on public speaking skills to ensure they are prepared to represent PT and AmeriCorps.

Organizational Capability

a. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING

PT has over 11 years' experience successfully administering an AmeriCorps grant. Four of the key staff bring extensive experience planning and implementing AmeriCorps programs: Eric Lindh, executive director, is responsible for management of the operations and fiscal oversight. He has successfully

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managed an AmeriCorps grant for the past nine years. He holds a master's degree in business/nonprofit arts management from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Casey Mellody-Camacho, director of programming and leadership development, oversees all aspects of the afterschool and summer programs, including supervising and training AmeriCorps members, as well as planning and implementing the leadership course for members. Before joining the staff in 2010, she served two AmeriCorps terms in PT's afterschool and summer program. Daniel Canafax, program manager, oversees member recruitment and manages all programs serving middle school youth. He is also an AmeriCorps alumnus and brings several years' experience working with youth. Janalee Wiles, volunteer coordinator and LITE program manager, recruits and manages an annual roster of over 1,200 volunteers and oversees the high school leadership program. She brings eight years of experience on the PT staff and also has worked extensively with other inner-city organizations in Philadelphia, St. Louis, New York City, and Jackson, MS. PT's eight-member staff has demonstrated a high level of engagement and investment in the program. All staff members involved with the AmeriCorps program have attended at least one commission or CNCS-sponsored conference -- a demonstration of their passion for the program and their interest in continuing their development in the organization. All staff members are thoroughly trained on the importance of our AmeriCorps relationship and given proper orientation of all grant requirements by the executive director.

The PT budget has been developed in accordance with AmeriCorps principles since the program's founding in 1998. Every facet of the program narrative, budget, and budget narrative interrelate. The budget reflects PT's emphasis on the members and their development, which account for more than half of all program expenses. The budget also reflects a reliance on volunteers and in-kind contributions, which keeps PT focused on the goal of building community around each host site. Since PT's inception, we have raised matching funds, apart from federal dollars, to support the service activities of the organization. Sources of support include individual donors, private foundations, corporations, churches, and community partners.

A 14-member board of directors supervises the executive director and provides additional oversight to the AmeriCorps program. This active, diverse, and experienced board has been essential to the growth and success of PT. Several board members are on staff with PT partner organizations and assist in forging new relationships in the community.

b. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PT ensures compliance with AmeriCorps rules and regulation through staff, member, and site supervisor training, as well as regular site visits. PT's executive director has over eight years'

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experience in successfully learning and interpreting the legal guidelines, regulations, and OMB Circulars that are required to manage a large federal grant. PT's board members bring additional legal expertise and oversight. All staff members receive individual orientation to the AmeriCorps program from the executive director, and they also attend commission-sponsored conferences relevant to their roles. PT's program staff conduct weekly monitoring visits to detect compliance issues and ensure program objectives are being met. Monitoring visits include completing checklists related to safety, environment and climate, relationships, programming, and prohibited activities. AmeriCorps rules and regulations, as well as consequences for any violation of these rules, are clearly detailed in all member service agreements and training. If risk or compliance issues are identified with any members, disciplinary actions will be taken, including fines, suspensions, and termination. If compliance issues are identified with service sites, PT staff will work closely with site supervisors to correct the issues. If services sites are unable or unwilling to resolve these issues, Project Transformation will terminate the agreement and place AmeriCorps members at a new site location.

c. PAST PERFORMANCE FOR CURRENT GRANTEES

During the last three years of program operations, PT's afterschool and summer program measured enrollment, completion, improved academic performance, and increased academic engagement. PT has been successful in improving the academic performance of low-income children by meeting or exceeding every performance measurement in the last three years with one exception. In 2010-11, the output (number of students receiving homework assistance and completing the afterschool program) was unmet, but it was within 98% of the target goal. We fell two students short of the goal, which was primarily due to turnover in two of the afterschool program sites. To respond, we increased the program's presence in the community to recruit new children for the program and strengthened our attendance policy to encourage regular attendance. As a result, we exceeded this performance measure in each of the subsequent years.

We have high expectations for our members and emphasize the need to make a full commitment to fulfilling their term of service. In 2012-13, PT had a 100% enrollment rate and 95% retention rate. Our retention rate was less than 100% because, of the 113 members, four were exited for cause and two were exited for personal compelling reasons. The members who were exited for cause had unforeseen conflicts with school or other work schedules, preventing them from finishing their terms. PT will continue to emphasize the importance of commitment during the selection process to further increase retention rates.

d. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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Program performance, including attendance, volunteer support, homework completion, grade improvement, and reading progress is evaluated on a monthly basis to inform continuous improvement efforts. At the end of each term, members offer feedback about the program sites by completing written evaluations, allowing them to reflect on their service, recommend improvements, and assess training. Evaluations are also completed by participants' parents and volunteers to solicit their impressions of the program and its impact on the children and community. All aggregated data is used to identify program strengths and areas for improvement. All data is tabulated and reviewed by staff and board members annually for use in continuous improvement planning.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a. COST EFFECTIVENESS

PT embraces a highly collaborative approach in helping low-income children and youth improve academic performance in reading and reach their full potential. PT's cost effectiveness is most evident through our service delivery method and program design. To deliver PT's services, ten United Methodist churches located in the heart of low-income communities host PT's afterschool and summer programs. In 2012-13, these churches donated a total of 133,258 square feet and utility costs in-kind, which was valued at more than \$305,000. Since other similar programs may need to pay rent to provide their programs in other buildings or schools, PT's service delivery proves to be extremely cost effective by securing program space at no cost. In addition, partnering churches, businesses, schools, and civic groups donate the majority of program supplies, including new children's books, art materials, and recreation equipment. The value of these supply donations was more than \$14,000 in 2012-13. The North Texas Food Bank serves as another important community partner that donates healthy meals and snacks for the children daily, an in-kind value of over \$86,000 annually. Second, a key component of PT's program design is volunteer support. Members actively recruit, train, and manage more than 1,100 volunteers to read one-on-one with children and assist with homework. According to a 2011 report by the Independent Sector, the hourly value of a volunteer in Texas is \$22.57. In 2012-13, 10,780 volunteer hours were dedicated to providing reading support for a total value of \$243,305. Providing individualized reading and academic assistance is often difficult for out-of-school learning programs, given the high cost of hiring the adults or teachers needed to work with a large number of students, but PT's collaboration with the faith-based community, corporations, and civic groups provides this individual assistance for no cost. Finally, PT's AmeriCorps members receive significant support that equips them to lead effectively, deliver high-quality programming, and reflect on their own service experience. PT partners with experienced

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schoolteachers, teambuilding trainers and child development therapists from the Salesmanship Club of Dallas to train AmeriCorps members on effective classroom management and discipline strategies, a \$4,000 value that is donated annually. PT's community living program for members, which creates an environment for more intensive member development and reflection, is provided at a significant discount. In 2012-13, over \$115,000 of campus housing was donated by Southern Methodist University and Austin College to support our members.

b. BUDGET ADEQUACY

PT will secure \$1,097,502 of matching funding from foundations, individuals, corporations, churches, and community partners to support the project. There are 6.31 full-time-equivalent permanent staff persons and 4.96 full-time-equivalent summer support staff persons to support 42.347 Member Service Year positions (133 members). The majority of members serve during the summer in quarter-time positions, so additional support staff is necessary only during this limited time. Material resources (program supplies, computer equipment, literacy assessments, food supplies, office supplies) and facility resources (ten site churches, administrative office space, community housing) will be secured through fundraising efforts and community partnerships.

With 11 years' experience successfully managing the program in partnership with AmeriCorps, our organization fully anticipates the budget will support the program design and objectives. PT has well-established support from churches and other faith-based organizations throughout north Texas. About 14% of the current budget comes from these committed organizations. PT secures much of this support by matching many AmeriCorps members with a sponsoring partner church, which then commits to assisting the member's work through volunteer and financial contributions. PT has also experienced a steady increase in private and corporate foundation grants, which now make up 24% of the budget. Individual contributions, which account for 16% of the budget, are another important stream of income for PT, and the new comprehensive funds development plan calls for increased investment in major gift cultivation and events. Also, 27% of the overall budget is met by in-kind community support.

In accordance with PT's long-range funding development strategy and the AmeriCorps matching requirements, the organization continues to diversify its funding sources. Funding is pursued year-round through grant proposals to corporate and private foundations, which has grown 91% over the last three years. The level of individual contributions has increased 34% over the past three years, and we plan to continue nurturing this growth by expanding the development staff by two positions over the next two years. PT was recently named the sole beneficiary of an established fundraising event,

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Polo on the Lawn, which is expected to attract at least \$60,000 of corporate sponsorships in 2013-14. We expect this event to increase corporate giving 15% each year. PT continues to broaden its support base in the community by connecting several AmeriCorps members with a church congregation or civic group, thus offering a focus to the member's commitment to provide reading volunteers, financial support, and in-kind resources. The member speaks to the congregation or civic group at least once to share program needs and ways to get involved. In 2012-13 alone, PT engaged over 800 new volunteers in the afterschool and summer programs.

The grantee share of costs is 74% for Sections 1 and 3, and 49% for Section II. Overall, 67% of the budget will be supplied by the grantee. Because of the breadth of community support, the grantee match far exceeds the required amount.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research has shown that low-income children lose more than two months in reading achievement during the summer, while higher-income students make slight gains (Alexander, Entwistle, & Olson, 2007). This achievement gap widens over time, so that by ninth grade, summer learning accounts for two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading between low-income students and their higher-income peers. The centerpiece of Project Transformation (PT)'s summer program is pairing reading volunteers with elementary children on a daily basis, helping to prevent the academic "summer slide" that occurs for low-income children. This evaluation plan details how we will examine the summer program's impact on reading achievement and test whether children maintain or improve their reading ability throughout the summer. Further, they will be compared to a control group of children who do not participate in the summer reading program to provide a comparison of how reading ability may have changed (likely declined) without the reading program. The one-on-one reading component of the program will be a particular focus of the evaluation.

PT's evaluation planning team included: Eric Lindh, PT Executive Director; Casey Mellody-Camacho, PT Director of Programming & Leadership Development, and Krista Ranby, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology, University of Colorado Denver.

BACKGROUND

Seventy-five of PT's AmeriCorps members provide an eight-week summer day camp for approximately 600 low-income children (grades 1-5) at nine sites throughout the greater Dallas area. Children rotate through three 40-minute activities in the morning: 1) reading aloud with a volunteer one-on-one, 2) arts enrichment, and 3) supervised recreation. A nutritious meal is provided each day,

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and additional reading enrichment and other activities are provided in the afternoon. Teams of eight young adult AmeriCorps members implement the day camps for elementary children, leading enrichment activities and coordinating the one-on-one reading program. Through receiving individual reading support and participating in additional enrichment activities, we expect at least 70 percent of regular participants (attending at least 60 percent of the possible 30 program days) to either maintain or improve their reading level over the summer.

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of PT's summer day camp program is to improve the literacy outcomes for low-income children and bring their reading achievement levels closer to their higher-income peers. This evaluation will build upon PT's past evaluation, which utilized participant surveys to measure children's confidence in their own abilities to read. The purpose of this evaluation is to systematically collect reading outcome data on PT participants and a control group of students who do not participate in a summer learning program to measure the effectiveness of PT's summer day camp in improving academic achievement in literacy.

Process Question:

1) How many hours of individual reading assistance do children actually receive each summer?

Outcome Questions:

- 1) Does PT's summer program for elementary students (entering grades 1-5) have a positive effect on student achievement in reading as anticipated, by either producing academic gains or mitigating summer reading loss as compared to students who do not participate in summer learning programs?
- 2) Is there a link between attendance or dosage and reading achievement outcomes?
- 3) Do students who participate in consecutive summers show more reading achievement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research from the RAND Corporation has demonstrated that high quality, engaging summer learning programs can prevent summer learning loss and even boost student achievement (McCombs et al., 2011). Furthermore, summer programs that intended to provide individualized instruction have been found to be more effective than programs without this intention (Cooper, Charlton, et al., 2000). While access to books during the summer remains a struggle for low-income children, research demonstrates that simply providing access to books is not sufficient to prevent reading loss. Summer reading is most effective when adults can provide reading guidance and make sure kids understand

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what they are reading (Kim & White, 2008)

METHODOLOGY AND TIMELINE

The three-year evaluation is process and outcomes oriented. Year One of the grant will be dedicated to finalizing our data collection methods and gaining parental and school approval to use student reading assessment data. The process evaluation will examine the degree to which elementary children spend one-on-one time with reading volunteers each summer. Student reading logs will be used to record the actual number of hours each participant reads with a volunteer each summer. In concert with the process evaluation, the outcomes evaluation will examine the effectiveness of PT's summer program at improving reading achievement compared to a control group without summer programming. Students' reading data will be collected in the spring and fall of 2016 and 2017, just before and after the summer program. Reading performance data will be collected on students using the Passport Reading Journeys Benchmark Assessment, the instrument used by Dallas ISD elementary schools. Data will be collected on all PT participants and a randomized sample of low-income students (grades 1-5) with similar demographics from three local elementary schools who have not participated in summer learning programs, based on parent surveys. Data will be analyzed through the use of SPSS statistical software. The final evaluation report will be available November 2017. The results of the evaluation will be analyzed by PT staff and board members and will allow us to make informed decisions toward improving the summer reading program. The outcome evaluation findings will provide us with information on causality. We plan to report our findings with Dallas Afterschool and other local stakeholders.

BUDGET

The total evaluation budget for 2014-15 is \$1,750 for consultant fees.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

a. Programmatic Clarification:

1) Project Transformation will recruit and hire teams of AmeriCorps members that allow us to provide a high-quality program to our students, ensuring a minimum 8:1 student to member ratio. This consists of 8 full-time members, 7 half-time members, 111 quarter-time members, and 7 minimum

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time members. Each of the 7 afterschool program site locations will have 1 full-time, 1 half-time, 2 quarter-time, and 1 minimum-time member. One additional full-time member will serve in a special role as a reading curriculum coordinator, moving from site to site to provide specialized reading curriculum for struggling students. The full-time and half-time members will also serve in the summer program, which is held at 10 site locations. Ninety-seven additional quarter-time members will join the 15 members carrying over from the afterschool program to form the 10 summer teams. A few quarter-time members will serve in specialized roles, including 3 members serving as site coordinators, 9 serving as elementary reading coordinators, 2 serving as additional reading curriculum coordinators, and 8 serving as LITE program coordinators. The remaining 75 quarter-time members will serve as elementary or middle-school youth program team members. Each site will have between 8 and 16 members, depending on whether or not the site houses a high school LITE program, facility space limitations, and if the site houses only elementary, middle-school youth or both. As in the afterschool program, each summer team is composed of a slot configuration that maximizes the number of students served while maintaining an 8:1 minimum student to member ratio to provide the highest quality program.

b. Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification:

1) Project Transformation anticipates that at least 15 percent of the awarded slots will be members with disabilities. In surveys over the past two years, between 12.5 and 50 percent of active members consider themselves to be a person with a disability. Our recruitment and outreach efforts will continue to focus on building a diverse corps that includes people of all abilities and backgrounds. During recruiting visits to college and universities, we plan to reach out to the various offices of disability accommodation, many of which have specific job boards. We will also reach out to other related organizations such as AHEAD (Association on Higher Education and Disability) and Delta Alpha Pi International Honor Society for students with disabilities, which there are 78 chapters nationwide. Our recruitment materials and brochures will also have inclusive language to help target members of the disability community.

2) At this time, we are not requesting any additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities.

c. MSY With No Program Funds Attached Clarification:

1) At this time, we are not requesting any No-Cost MSYs.

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d. Healthcare Clarification:

- 1) Project Transformation plans to insure full-time AmeriCorps members through the health plan sponsored through the Corps Network Plan.
- 2) We selected this provider through researching insurance plans that are tailored to meet the needs of AmeriCorps programs.
- 3) The proposed budget for member healthcare does not provide for Minimum Essential Coverage, as defined by the Affordable Care Act for full-time members.
- 4) The health care cost per member was set at \$150 per month, and this will need to be adjusted to \$220 per month in order to provide Minimum Essential Coverage. This new cost per member is based on consultation with a representative of the Corps Network Plan.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics