Narratives

Executive Summary

Thirty-one AmeriCorps members (22.12 MSYs) will leverage 500 volunteers to provide increased economic and educational opportunities to two under-served populations -- low literate economically disadvantaged adults residing in sixteen communities in the greater Chicago area and teens incarcerated in five Illinois Youth Centers located in Chicago, Harrisburg, Kewanee, St. Charles and Warrenville. The program will commence in September 2014 and conclude the following August. During that time it is anticipated that 1400 low literate economically disadvantaged adults will receive one-to-one, small group or classroom instruction in basic literacy skills, ESL, or GED preparation, with 840 increasing by at least one level their literacy abilities; another 250 will receive job search assistance, 125 of whom will secure employment. Among the incarcerated youth, 300 will receive individualized tutorial instruction with 180 of them increasing their reading and math abilities by at least one grade. The project, known as VOCAL - Volunteer Outreach for Community Action in Literacy - focuses on two CNCS focus areas - Economic Development and Education. The CNCS investment of $261,825 will be matched with $383,940.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

A. Need

Education drives the economy, begins a report by the National Commission on Adult Literacy (NCAL) entitled Reach Higher, AMERICA (2008). It goes on to state that "Almost a decade into the 21st Century America faces a choice: We can invest in the basic education and skills in our workforce and remain competitive in today's global economy, or we can continue to overlook glaring evidence of a national crisis and move further down a path to decline." The NCAL report followed a 2007 report issued by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) The Perfect Storm, which outlined three converging forces threatening our nation - A divergent skills distribution which shows a wide disparity in literacy and numeracy skills among our school age and adult population, a profound restructuring of the U.S. workplace being driven by technical innovation and globalization, and demographic changes in which our population will become older and more diverse, with immigration having a significant impact on the composition of the workforce and the general population.

The impetus for both reports came from the findings of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), which using the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 definition of literacy as - "an individual's ability to read, write, and speak English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society"- found that

half of our adult population failed to meet the standard, with 32% having what would be considered "basic" skills and 20% having "below basic" skills.

While few adults in either category would be considered "illiterate" only a small percentage were judged to have the skills needed to fully participate in an increasingly complex society. For instance, those with "Below Basic" skills, the study found, could usually complete such tasks as totaling a few entries on a deposit slip and identifying a piece of specific information in a brief news article, but could not compare the ticket prices for two events or use a television guide to find out what programs are on at a specific time. Individuals with "Basic" skills, while being able to complete those tasks were not able to compare viewpoints in two editorials, interpret a table about blood pressure, age, and physical activity, or perform quantitative tasks that required two or more sequential operations.

Low literacy is a costly proposition that not only threatens the future viability of our workforce, but contributes to a host of problems plaguing our communities including: Poverty - 43% of people with the lowest literacy skills live in poverty (NAAL 2003); Joblessness - 70% of people with the lowest literacy skills have either no or a part time job (NAAL 2003); Inequities in family income especially among low income single family households - 44% of all births to women under age 30 in 2003-2004 were out of wedlock, among black women in this age group the proportion reached 77%, with the vast majority of the women lacking a high school diploma (ETS 2007); Crime - 70% of prisoners fall into the lowest two levels of reading proficiency (National Institute for Literacy 1999), and low Civic and Community Participation - Only 55% of adults with low literacy levels voted in the past five years, compared to 89% of the most literate (NAAL 2003).

The economic consequences include - $60 billion lost in productivity each year by American businesses (National Institute for Literacy); $73 billion placed each year on the national health care system (American Medical Assn); $5 billion a year in taxes to support public assistance recipients who are unemployable due to their low literacy (ProLiteracy 2003); and, an average $22,500 a year to house each prison inmate, 68% of whom do not have a HS diploma or GED (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2007).

The causes of low literacy vary, but include poor education systems; diagnosed and undiagnosed learning disabilities; high mobility; immigration; and a lack of parental involvement in, and often an inability to contribute to, the academic growth and development of their children.

Solutions to the problem of adult literacy are complex and the public dollars devoted to it are minimal. It is estimated that nationally there are 88 million adults in need, yet fewer than 3 million are served by adult basic education programs each year, at an average cost of $645 per student

(NCAL 2008). This compares to an average $10,591 per enrollee in the K-12 system and $13,297 in higher education (National Center for Education Statistics 2011).

In Illinois, there are 1.4 million adults who have less than 12 years of formal education; 531,000 have less than a 9th grade education. There are another 2.59 million adults who speak a language other than English as the primary language in their home. In Fiscal Year 2012, through state and federal funding, 101,480 individuals were served (FY 12 Illinois Community College Board Report).

Despite this lack of public support, strategies undertaken at the community level have proven to be effective in helping to address the problem. Since the late 1980's one strategy has been the use of volunteers to serve as tutors. While volunteer tutors can not take the place of trained educators, they can fill in the gap and their ability to provide individual attention helps many learners succeed where classroom instruction has failed.

In FY '13 there were 7,795 volunteers who were involved with 85 programs that received $3.89 million in funding from the Illinois State Library Literacy Office. These are the only Illinois funds devoted to adult volunteer literacy. Through them, 19,392 adult literacy students were served (2013 Guide to the Illinois State Literacy Office). While these figures are substantial, Literacy Office staff estimate that there are at least 10,000 adults on program waiting lists.

While many low literate adults have learning disabilities, which cut across social, economic and geographic lines, there are areas in Illinois, especially Chicago, where there are high concentrations of low literate adults who generally are high school drop-outs, immigrants and/or refugees. There is also a high incidence of low literacy among incarcerated teens in the Illinois Youth Centers (IYC), with School District 428 of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice reporting that over half of their juveniles test at or below a 6th grade level and that 60% are classified as "special education" students in their home school. Studies show that youth who are labeled "special ed" or "learning disabled" are likely to drop out of school, as in their eyes it may be better to be a "delinquent" than a "class dummy".

Though volunteer literacy programs throughout the state have made strides in serving those in need, still they lack the financial and human resources to recruit, train and support additional tutors to more fully satisfy the need. This is where the VOCAL - Volunteer Outreach for Community Action in Literacy - AmeriCorps program has been most valuable.

First developed in 2003, the goal of the VOCAL program is to assist community and faith-based agencies in providing increased services to low literate adults in their communities and juveniles residing in the IYCs through a three-pronged approach that consists of: 1.) One-to-one and small group tutoring of low literate adults by AmeriCorps members; 2.) Recruitment of volunteers to serve

as one-to-one and small group tutors; and, 3.) A member training and development program that instills in participants a lifelong ethic of service and provides them with the training and experience they would need should they pursue positions in the public sector, specifically in adult education.

In its ten years, 39 different agencies hosted 321 members, who were a mix of full, part and minimum-time members. The members along with the 4,729 tutors they recruited served 16,375 low literate adults and incarcerated youth. Sixteen sites hired members who were part of the program.

LVI seeks to continue providing this valuable resource and is requesting 22 MSYs on behalf of 13 agencies to serve at 19 service sites. The breakdown is - 16 full-time, 10 half-time and 5 minimum-time. The sites and number of members requested are - Albany Park Community Center (2 FT), Anixter Center (1 FT), Centro Romero (2 FT & 1 HT), Chicago Citywide Literacy Coalition (1 FT), Howard Area Community Center (2 FT), Indo-American Center (1 HT), Instituto del Progreso Latino (2 FT), Midwest Asian American Center (1 HT) Pui Tak Center (2 HT and 2 MT), School District 214 Community Programs (1 FT), World Relief (2 FT), LVI (1 FT) & LVI-Jump Start in the Illinois Youth Centers (2 FT, 5 HT and 3 MT).

Of the agencies requesting members, 9 are community-based, 2 are faith-based, and 2 are in school districts - LVI's Jump Start program, in School District 428 of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Read to Learn program, in the Community Programs Division of north suburban School District 214. Fourteen of the service sites are in Chicago, three are in suburban areas, one is in central Illinois, and one is in far southern Illinois. Six agencies serve a mix of adult literacy and ESL learners; three provide only basic literacy services, and four serve only ESL learners, who are primarily recent Hispanic or Asian immigrants or refugees.

The communities to be served include - Albany Park, Edgewater, Rogers Park, and Uptown on the north side of Chicago; Brighton Park, Little Village, McKinley Park, New City, Pilsen and South Lawndale on the south side and the Near West and Near South communities. Of the 495,605 individuals residing in these communities, 375,525 (76%) are minority and 109,303 (25%) are below poverty level. There are 114,308 (26%) who are over age 25 and lack a high school diploma, and, 20,593 who are age 16+ and are out-of-school and unemployed. (cityofchicago.org)

Of the sites in the suburban area and central and southern Illinois, four are Illinois Youth Centers, where the majority of the youth are socially and economically disadvantaged with most coming from low income, single family households in the "inner city" areas of Chicago, Peoria, and Rockford.

While Arlington Heights and the surrounding three communities served by SD 214, are not predominantly economically disadvantaged, there are pockets of low-income areas that are home to

low-income immigrants and migrant workers.

b.) AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve the Community Problems Evidence Base and Measurable Community Impact

To date, AmeriCorps members have been highly effective in tutoring low income, economically-disadvantaged immigrants and basic literacy learners who, although their first language is English, failed to acquire the necessary literacy skills to be effective members of their community, family, and/or the workforce. For many of us learning to read was "as easy as the ABC's". But the a, b, c 's are not easy for many, because for some the "b" looks like a "d", while for others who come here from another country there may not be an "a" or a "c" in the language they know. For these individuals the process of acquiring literacy skills as an adult is a slow one, and, more often than not, requires one-to-one attention, which few educational programs - even in elementary and high schools - have the resources or time to do. This is where AmeriCorps members have been especially effective.

Beyond tutoring, AmeriCorps members have also been effective tutor recruiters and have provided invaluable assistance in tutor retention activities, initial and in-service tutor training, organizing tutor and student recognition events, securing in-kind donations from area businesses, and developing newsletters and public information materials. Members have also assisted with curriculum development, computer and other classroom instruction, facilitated conversation clubs, and assisted with student intake and assessment and tutor and student matching. This current year they are also serving as coaches and para-professional job counselors for economically-disadvantaged individuals seeking job search services. Finally, members also serve as tutors for incarcerated and other at-risk youth.

As a coordinating organization for volunteer literacy programs one of the greatest resources that we've provided to community and faith-based organizations is the opportunity to tap into federal resources, such as AmeriCorps, that are otherwise beyond their reach. Our ability to tap in to this resource has strengthened the adult literacy network in Illinois which in turn is strengthening our communities. While the programs that are part of the VOCAL program would be able to provide services without AmeriCorps members, they would not be able to provide the same level or depth of service as they have with members, or broaden their service to include employment training and assistance as they have recently begun to do through AmeriCorps members.

LVI is requesting 22 MSYs, which is our current member complement, to provide Economic Opportunity and Education services. Our input, process, product, strategies, and outcomes follow.

Theory of Change and Logic Model

Narratives

In Economic Opportunity, 14 members (11.95 MSYs) will provide one-to-one, small group and classroom instruction to 1,400 adults in need of basic literacy services in reading, math and conversational English. The one-to-one and small group sessions will be conducted once a week for one to one-and-a-half hours, over a one year period. The instruction will be learner-centered and while it will be open entry/open exit, participants will be asked to commit to attending the sessions for a period of at least 6 months. Standardized pre-tests in reading and math will be administered at the time of enrollment with a post-test occurring after 30 hours of instruction. Classroom instruction will also be offered at some of sites for Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language learners; those sessions will be 3 hours in duration and will be offered over a 12-week period. Standardized pre-tests will be administered at the start of each cycle; a post-test will be administered at the end. Attendance logs will be kept for all three of the interventions; one-to-one and small group tutors will also file reports after each session on materials used and progress made. It is expected that 60% of those served (840) will increase their literacy levels in reading, math or both, by at least one grade level. In addition to this short-term outcome, we expect medium and long-term outcomes that will have a positive impact on both the learners and our communities that include - higher rates of citizenship among ESL learners, increased participation by all learners in community and civic activities, such as voting and volunteering - many of whom will volunteer with the program that provided them with service, and greater involvement among parents with their children's education from assisting them with their homework to serving in PTAs. We also expect that many served will continue their education beyond the basic skills training and transition into adult secondary or post-secondary education, which will lead to greater employment opportunities and economic advancements.

Within Economic Opportunity, the VOCAL program will also place six members (4.5 MSYs) at 7 host sites to assist in providing job search and placement services to 250 economically disadvantaged adults. Activities that will be conducted in this performance measure will consist of structured job seeking training and peer-assisted job clubs that will be offered weekly, on a year-round basis. The length and duration of the training will vary by site and the length and duration of job club participation will vary by individual, but each participant can be expected to receive at least 24 hours of formal training, and 12 hours of individual job search and placement counseling. Major topics that will be presented in the training will consist of resume development, job application procedures, preparing for the interview, interview skill development, growth occupations and types of jobs within them and within their immediate communities, and salary and pay negotiation. Following the formal

training, participants will be offered individualized job seeking services, as needed, on a one-to-one basis. From the training and counseling, it is expected that participants will learn how to accurately complete job applications, will know what jobs need a resume and will have developed one, and will have learned how to conduct a job search on their own. Beyond the short-term knowledge, it is expected that at least 125 of them will find jobs, which will, for the long term, provide them and their families with increased income and a higher standard of living.

Within Education, the VOCAL program will place 11 members (5.67 MSYs) to serve as tutors to incarcerated and at-risk youth. We expect to annually provide tutoring services in reading and math to 300 IYC youth and another 50 at-risk youth. The tutoring to the youth will be one-to-one for the incarcerated youth and will be offered twice a week for one to one-and-a half hours. The duration will likely be three-months, as that is the average stay of an incarcerated juvenile. Based on standardized testing we expect that 180 of the youth will increase their academic performance in literacy or math by at least one grade. Beyond grade level increases, we expect to see the youth participating more in their academic classes, less "tickets" being written for negative or aggressive behavior, fewer youth making return "visits" to the Youth Centers and seeing them develop a greater sense of personal responsibility, which will be measured through specialized surveys. For the at-risk youth, tutoring will be two hours a day, four days a week that will follow a regular school year. We expect to see increased academic performance among these youth, greater participation in their regular classes, positive attitudes towards furthering their education and no involvement with negative community influences. (Note: The at-risk youth are not part of the performance measure, but will be reported on as a program activity.)

Evidence Base

A serious short-coming in the adult literacy field is that there is little scientific research to support that one design or intervention over another will lead to a more desirable outcome. In fact, in a paper commissioned by the National Institute for Literacy, Adult Literacy Research: Opportunities and Challenges, the author John Comings, cited the work of Beder (1999) who reviewed 115 studies of proposed outcomes and impact in the field of adult literacy and found that only 23 met minimum standards for analysis. Once his review was complete, he concluded that even those 23 studies had serious flaws that significantly compromised the validity and usefulness of the findings. Later reviews of existing literature, Comings found, supported the same conclusion. Comings and other of his colleagues attribute this lack of research to the low funding levels for adult literacy which fail to provide program providers with the necessary resources to participate in rigorous research.

Narratives

Failing a wide body of scientifically-based research, all publicly-funded programs participate in data-collection and analysis, from which conclusions can be drawn and outcomes evaluated. The strategies, interventions and outcomes identified herewith are based on that as well as our previous ten years of successfully delivering services through AmeriCorps members in the VOCAL program, and our thirty years of experience in adult literacy programming. As is delineated in the evaluation summary included in this proposal, the VOCAL program has always met and generally exceeded what it set out to do in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes as verified through post-tests and surveys, and in doing so has had a positive effect on the clients who were served and the members who served. The letters of support offered by the host sites, which are also included with this proposal speak to these positive outcomes and the impact the program has had on their agency and communities.

c.) Member Training

Training for members begins with two orientations: a full-day orientation at LVI that covers volunteerism and the history of national service, adult education and adult literacy networks, program goals, acceptable and non-acceptable activities and other program regulations, and an additional one at the host site which introduces them to their duties and the community, programs, and personnel there. A Handbook containing the information presented at the orientation is provided and the information is also posted on the Members' Only section of our web site.

LVI also holds quarterly member meetings in December, March, and June that all members are required to attend. In addition to receiving reports from members and providing updates for them, the meetings are a venue for reinforcing the principles of civic participation and the meaning of service, which is facilitated by the Center for Civic Participation of Valparaiso University.

As an organization that focuses on the acquisition of literacy skills, LVI has long held that there is no simple way of teaching adults to read. However, LVI and host sites have found that there are combinations of strategies that can be used with low reading level adults, which when used in one-to-one and small group settings by trained volunteers, can lead to one grade level gain for every 30 hours of instruction. The curriculum, originally developed by the Literacy Volunteers of America and utilized by literacy programs nationwide, is used. Major topics include: Definition and Scope of Illiteracy; Language Experience Approach; Sight Words and Context Clues; Phonemic Awareness; Assessment and Goal Setting; and, Lesson Planning. All VOCAL members attend 12 hours of tutor training held in the first month of service at LVI and as needed downstate.

In addition to the initial tutor training and quarterly meetings, LVI presents monthly training on the first Friday of the intervening months. This year's topics include - Learned Helplessness in Adult

Education, Basic Adult-Centered Instructional Design, Cultural Literacy, Classroom Management, Adult Literacy Research and Studies, Creative Writing, and, an on-going 6-part Language and Leadership series.

Members are also encouraged to attend the annual LVI On the Road to Literacy Conference, a tutor and student conference held each spring, and the fall New Readers for New Life Conference, which features workshops conducted by new readers themselves. LVI also encourages sites to provide training for their members and recommends that they budget at least $200 for registration fees.

In addition to skills training, LVI offers members development opportunities for their own personal and/or career growth. These include internships and shadowing in agencies other than the one where the member is serving, leadership development through team leader service, and career preparation and counseling. We also offer members the opportunity to learn more about themselves and others through Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and "COLORS" assessments and training.

d.) Member Supervision

A designated staff member at each host site provides daily supervision of members. The supervisors are provided with a Site Supervisor Manual that includes information on the Corporation, Illinois Commission, Program Goals and Regulations as well as resource materials and program reporting forms. An orientation is held at the start of each year by LVI, and site supervisors are also encouraged to attend the Member Orientation and the Quarterly Member Meetings. When there are changes to staff during the program year, LVI conducts a one-on-one orientation for them. On an on-going basis LVI provides support to site supervisors through site visits conducted by LVI's Executive Director and VOCAL program coordinator.

e.) Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification

As a result of LVI's executive director having served on the Serve Illinois Commission and America Service Commission's Board of Directors, LVI has a strong association with AmeriCorps and an organizational commitment towards the AmeriCorps brand. Our downtown Chicago office boasts AmeriCorps banners and signs, and AmeriCorps signs are posted at all host sites. We provide gear to all members that includes a t-shirt, sweatshirt and a canvas bag with the AmeriCorps and our program logo. We print the AmeriCorps logo on our recruitment flyers, monthly newsletters, web site and Facebook page. Members wear their t-shirts and sweatshirts to all Service Day activities and to all training sessions and other events sponsored by LVI. They also regularly wear their t-shirts and sweatshirts to their service sites and on a daily basis carry their canvas bag. We also provide pens with the program and AmeriCorps logos for use at host sites, and other AmeriCorps items that are made

available to us from the Serve Illinois Commission. We also encourage members to join AmeriCorps Alums to stay connected with each other as well as to preserve their experience and maintain the same sense of affiliation after service as they have during.

Organizational Capability

The Literacy Volunteers of Illinois (LVI) was incorporated in 1979 as an independent, self-supporting tax-exempt corporation. LVI was founded by the national Literacy Volunteers of America to serve as a mid-level support system for LVA-affiliated programs. Over the years, we evolved into a resource and training center for all literacy programs as our mission statement reflects - "Literacy Volunteers of Illinois is a statewide organization committed to developing and supporting volunteer literacy programs that help families, adults and out-of-school teens increase their literacy skills".

To carry out that mission, LVI provides a range of services to staff, tutors, and learners in five areas - Resource and Referral, Correctional Education, Public Information and Advocacy, New Reader Leadership, and National Service.

The Resource and Referral Center conducts recruitment on behalf of, and provides referral to, local literacy programs. An up-to-date Volunteer Directory of literacy programs and their needs & services is maintained on the LVI web site, along with a map showing their location. LVI also conducts through the Center, two annual conferences for tutors, students and staff, a spring Conference and Awards Presentation with the UIC Center for Literacy and a fall student-led conference hosted by a community college.

LVI began its work in correctional education by helping to develop peer inmate tutoring programs in adult correctional centers. From this sprung the Jump Start program, an intergenerational tutor/mentor effort that recruits and trains individuals, primarily retirees, to work with youth residing in the Illinois Youth Centers. The program was founded by LVI in 1995 with a 3-year grant from the Retirement Research Foundation. Current support comes from School District #428 of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, the Illinois State Literacy Office and contributions from individuals and businesses in the area of the Centers. The program has hosted VISTA & AmeriCorps members at the IYCs in Chicago, Harrisburg, Kewanee, St. Charles and Warrenville; three were hired by LVI to serve as staff at the IYC at which they served.

To raise public awareness about adult literacy and generate resources, LVI participates in numerous coalitions, commissions, and advisory councils at the local, state, and national level. LVI also sponsors events throughout the year, and each fall conducts a SCRABBLE for Literacy Challenge with the North American SCRABBLE Players Association that features a ranked-tournament.

Narratives

As a learner-centered organization, LVI encourages students to be active in all phases of the learning process. To bring this about LVI provides training and administrative support to the statewide organization, New Readers for New Life, a network of past and current students and coordinates on their behalf an annual fall conference.

LVI has been involved with National Service programs both VISTA and AmeriCorps for the past twenty years and, in fact, became a self-sustaining organization through the efforts of a VISTA volunteer who in 1983 "worked herself out of a job". Over the years, LVI has been the sponsor of three VISTA and two AmeriCorps programs - the VISTA Literacy Corps, which contributed greatly to the development of the adult literacy network in Illinois; Project HEART, a 1999 Summer Associates program that was a joint effort of the CNCS and the US Departments of Veteran Affairs and Education, which LVI managed at the request of the Illinois CNCS office; and, Project I-CARE, a joint program with the UIC Center for Literacy, which recruited Head Start parents to be VISTA volunteers in programs in their communities.

In AmeriCorps programming LVI is a past sponsor of Project UPLIFT (Urging Partnership in Literacy Initiatives for Families and Teens), which was funded first as a state formula program, and in its second cycle, received competitive funds, that had teams of 4-5 members serving at family literacy sites in southern, central and northern Illinois, and our current program - VOCAL - which focuses on one or two member placements in community and faith-based adult literacy programs. With our help and collaboration, three of the service sites in these two programs became AmeriCorps programs - a past formula-funded program at the University of Chicago, and the currently funded UIC Project MORE and the Schuler Scholar program.

A seven-member Board of Directors representing the public and private sector governs LVI. Day-to-day activities are overseen by an executive director who is assisted by four program coordinators, an administrative services intern, and a full-time AmeriCorps member who assists with member communication and provides support to the Jump Start program, including tutoring.

The VOCAL program is fully integrated in LVI and supported by all staff and board members. The program is managed by LVI's executive director, who has a Masters in the Management of Public Services. She has been with LVI for 22 years, during which time she has provided leadership and support to over 800 VISTA and AmeriCorps members and is the founder of the Jump Start program.

Day-to-day activities of VOCAL are handled by a program coordinator, who has a background in social services and served two years as an AmeriCorps member, the second with the VOCAL program. She has a Bachelor's in Administration, and has been with LVI for eight years.

Narratives

VOCAL is further supported in our downtown office by an administrative services intern who assists with organizing special events, and member recognition and service activities. LVI's Jump Start coordinators, who are based at the IYC's in northern, central and southern Illinois, provide support to host sites, as needed, and serve as member supervisors at their Centers. They average 40% of their time working on the VOCAL program.

The administrative activities of LVI are handled by the executive director, the administrative intern, and a contracted bookkeeper who maintains the agency's accounts payable and receivable journals, performs the monthly bank reconciliations, issues checks to vendors and bi-weekly checks to employees and AmeriCorps members, handles the payment of state and federal taxes and other employee withholdings, and files our quarterly IRS 941's and annual W-2's. The accounting firm of Lance Wise Ltd handles LVI's annual audit and federal and state 990s. Insurance, liability and workers' compensation, is handled by Laurus Strategies.

LVI's Board of Directors is fully supportive of the VOCAL program, with the board president attending orientation each year to welcome members. Board members also conduct member training sessions, participate in Days of Service and attend member recognition events.

b.) Compliance and Accountability

A priority of VOCAL is ensuring that members and host sites are well informed about and committed to complying with rules on prohibited service activities as promulgated by the CNCS, which includes complementing and not duplicating staff efforts. Members are introduced to the rules at their initial orientation; prohibited activities are also included in the LVI Member Manual and Member Contract, for their continued reference.

Supervisors are informed of prohibited activities at our Host Site orientation and in the contract that is signed at the beginning of the service year. Prohibited activities and non-duplication of staff positions are also reiterated at site visits and periodic conference calls.

Monitoring compliance is accomplished in two ways: through written and verbal member reports, which we've found to be effective means of identifying potential violations; and, through regular visits to sites which includes observations of members' activities. Throughout our history of managing VISTA and AmeriCorps programs, we have had a good record of complying with all state and national standards, and, at no time have we had an instance of a member engaging in prohibited activity.

c.) Past Performance for Current Grantee

Describe performance against performance measure during last three years of program operations. How successful in solving identified problem ?

Narratives

The VOCAL program had one performance measure in the 2010-2013 program cycle which was to provide one-to-one, small group and classroom instruction annually to 1,500 economically disadvantaged adults and incarcerated teens (4,500/3yrs). The target output was exceeded with host sites reporting that 6,693 individuals were served. The intermediate target was that 900 (2,700/3 yrs) of the individuals served would raise their literacy level by at least one grade; post-testing revealed that in the three years of the program, 3,491 raised their literacy level by at least one grade as measured by the Slosson Oral Reading Test or Test of Adult Basic Education for basic literacy students, or the Best Literacy Test for English as a Second Language Learners. Sites also reported that 221 of their learners earned a GED. A fuller discussion of program accomplishments is included in the evaluation section.

Enrollment - Per E-Grant reports, our average enrollment rate for our most recently completed year, PY 13, is 102.8%.

Retention - Our average retention rate for PY '13, per E-Grants was 97.3%. The lack of our achieving 100% was due to losing one part-time member early on who was replaced, which accounts for our over-enrollment.

d,) Continuous Improvement

LVI works with a diverse group of agencies and members, which necessitates having on-going communication and feedback mechanisms. As outlined earlier, LVI conducts quarterly member meetings, which serve as a venue for reports and feedback. LVI also has periodic teleconferences with site supervisors, and conducts at least two site visits a year to review activity and gain a better perspective on site and member needs and accomplishments. Sites also submit quarterly reports that detail the work of their members, along with "great stories". The information is reviewed bi-monthly by the LVI Board, who provide input on program adjustments. Semi-annually, reports are submitted to the Serve Illinois Commission, which provides additional feedback for our program to consider. The Board also participates in our annual and 3-year program evaluation, typically chairing the committee and conducting some of the interviews.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

a.) Cost per MSY

LVI's Per Member Cost for the 2014/2015 program year is $11,869 which is a decrease of $8 over our 2013/2014 per member cost of $11,877. Our match is 59%, which is greater than our PY 13 match of 57%, and 9% more than the 50% requirement

b.) Budget Adequacy

Our operating budget for Fiscal Year 2014 is $727,060 in income and $724,186 in expenses.

Narratives

Thirty-six percent (36%) of our budget is from CNCS-formula funding from the Service Illinois Commission for the VOCAL program; 21% is state revenue from the Illinois State Library and School District 428 of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice; 23% is conference and training fees and contracts; 16% is placement fees; and, 4% is individual and corporate donations.

LVI is providing a 59% match in funding ($383,940) for PY 15, which will come from the host sites by way of a member placement fee - $7800 for full-time members & $3900 for part-time members ($117,000) - and in-kind matches ($138,600). All placement fees will be dedicated to the VOCAL program. LVI will provide a cash match for the members in the IYCs of $30,000, an in-kind match of $45,000 for Jump Start staff, and an in-kind match of $53,340 for LVI supervision and administrative costs not covered through CNCS funding or the placement fees.

The fees paid by host sites come from a variety of local sources and grants they receive from the Illinois State Library. Since none of our sites receive federal funding for literacy activities, the only federal funds the sites and LVI realize are those that come from CNCS. Since we are primarily an intermediary organization for the placement of AmeriCorps members there are two areas to look at for a decreased reliance on federal support - LVI and the host sites. While it might not be politically correct to write that LVI would not be able to sustain the VOCAL program without federal support that is in fact the reality, since the very basis of the program is providing AmeriCorps support to community and faith-based programs that would otherwise be unable to access the resources on their own. Important to note is that our sites have changed over the years, as the needs within our communities and agencies have changed.

LVI is seeking $261,825 in AmeriCorps funding for continuation of the VOCAL program, which seeks to assist 13 community, school and faith-based agencies by placing 31 full, part, and minimum time members to provide economic opportunity and educational services annually to at least 2,000 individuals. Of the CNCS funds, 84% will go to member services - living allowance and fringes; 14% will be used to partially fund staff and LVI operating costs (rent, utilities, phone, auditing and accounting); the remaining 2% will be set aside for travel to CNCS or Commission-required activities ($2,000) and Serve Illinois administrative and training costs ($5,234).

In addition to CNCS funds, $147,000 in cash will be committed. Of that, $93,420 will go towards member costs - living allowances, fringes, training and travel. The remaining cash will be spent on program costs that include member gear, trainers, staff travel & training, program materials, background checks for members & site supervisors, partial support of salary & fringes for the program coordinator and other associated administrative costs.

Narratives

Evaluation Summary or Plan

The program committee of the LVI Board of Directors concluded an internal evaluation of the 2010-2013 VOCAL program that was process and outcome oriented. It consisted of a review of the end-of-the year member surveys; a questionnaire distributed to PY '13 site supervisors; interviews with three site directors and three AmeriCorps members; interviews with LVI staff; and, a review of data and "Great Stories" submitted by members and sites with their bi-annual progress reports.

In summary, the process evaluation found that: a.) all of the activities outlined in the grant proposal were carried out as planned; b.) the members received sufficient training to be successful in their assignments; c.) the desired number of students were enrolled and tutors recruited; d.) 100% of the member slots were filled; e.) retention standards were met; f.) the infrastructures of the host sites supported the services of the members; and, g.) the infrastructure and staffing of LVI sufficiently supported the needs of the members and host sites.

In outcomes, the committee found that the VOCAL program exceeded its target output of serving 1,500 adults and out-of-school teens each year (4,500 for the 3-years) through AmeriCorps members and the tutors they recruited, with host sites reporting that 6,693 individuals were served.

The program's intermediate target was that 900 (2,700/3 yrs) of the individuals served would raise their literacy level by at least one grade; post-testing revealed that in the three years of the program, 3,491 raised their literacy level by at least one grade as measured by the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT) or Test of Basic Education (TABE) for basic literacy students, or the BEST Literacy Test for English as a Second Language Learners. Additionally, sites reported that 221 of those served earned a GED.

Since the learners were served by AmeriCorps members as well as community tutors, the evaluators questioned whether there were outcome differences. While the data submitted by host sites did not separate which learners were served by community tutors and which were served by members, in interviews with site directors they observed that because members were better trained and more available on a regular basis to tutor their learners than the one to two hours a week that community volunteers do, there was greater learner persistence among those served by AmeriCorps members, which in turn contributed to their learners making greater gains in shorter periods of time. Because learning gains in adult literacy programs are closely tied to learner persistence, the sustained tutoring provided by AmeriCorps members has proven itself to be an invaluable resource to the host sites.

Narratives

Evaluation Plan

For the 2014/2017 program cycle, the Program Committee of the LVI Board of Directors will conduct an internal evaluation of the VOCAL program similar to the two it previously conducted that will be goals, process, and impact-oriented.

The goals-based evaluation will focus on the program itself and will consider the following questions -- How were the program's goals established? Was the process effective? Were the plan's activities as described carried out at the host sites? Were the desired number of AmeriCorps members recruited? Was the make-up of the corps diverse and reflective of the population served? Were member retention standards met? Did the program achieve its corps-wide goals ? Was there adequate staff and funding for LVI to support the program's activities? How should goals for LVI and host sites be established in the future?

The process-based evaluation will focus on the activities carried out at the host sites and will consider the following questions -- Were the activities as described in the program plan carried out at the host sites ? Did program delivery differ from one site to another? Were additional services and/or activities added? Was program performance at some host sites significantly better or poorer than at other? Were members at host sites following the LVI-provided position description or were other sets by the host site? Did all members operate under a position description? Were all members properly trained to carry-out their assignments? Does the infrastructure of the host sites support the services of the members? Of the clients? Were the desired number of students enrolled and tutors recruited at each site? Were the desired number of clients served in the job seeking training program? How many got jobs ? Are there modifications that need to be made at the host site level ?

The impact evaluation will focus on the effect that the VOCAL program and host sites had on program participants - members and learners - and will consider the following questions -- Did the training offered the members provide them with the knowledge they needed to carry-out their duties at their site? Did it enhance service delivery at the host site? Did the training provided through the Center for Civic Participation produce the intended effect? How many members engaged in community service activities beyond their AmeriCorps assignment? Did the adult learners improve in their reading ability as anticipated? How much change occurred ? Did those participating in the job search activities retain the jobs they found? Did the tutors recruited have a positive tutoring experience? How many tutors continued their work beyond their initial commitment of one year?

The methodology that will be used for the evaluation will consist of: 1.) an annual written questionnaire that all host site supervisors and AmeriCorps members will be asked to complete, 2.)

end-of-the-cycle interviews with 3-5 of the agency directors and/or site supervisors; 3.) a mid-cycle focus group made up of 3-5 host site supervisors and 2-3 clients from their sites; 4.) in-depth interview with 3-5 AmeriCorps members, 5.) interviews with LVI staff assigned to the VOCAL program; 6.) a review of the training evaluations completed by AmeriCorps members; and, 7.) a review of the data submitted by host sites for the mid and end-of-the year progress reports. Data that host sites submit consists of: number of students enrolled, number of students receiving 30 hours of tutorial instruction, student progress as measured by one or more standardized tests, number of individuals enrolled in job search training programs, number of individuals showing increased knowledge of the job search process as measured through a questionnaire, number of individuals getting jobs, number of tutors and other volunteers recruited and number of hours of service provided, and, summaries of tutor needs, tutor interest and tutor satisfaction surveys conducted by them or their AmeriCorps members.

The executive director of LVI will serve as the lead staff person to the program committee and will compile and submit the committee's findings to the full board of directors for their review. A summary will be developed and disseminated to site supervisors and others who participated in the evaluative process. The full report and/or summary will be submitted to the Serve Illinois Commission at the time as designated by them.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

Your application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of $261,825, 22.06 Member Service Years (MSYs), 31 slots, and $11,869 Cost per MSY.

a. Please respond to the following items in the clarification summary field of the narrative and/or in the budget narrative as is appropriate:

1. Administrative/Indirect Costs: Please confirm your intent to claim less Administrative/Indirect Costs as Grantee Share than what you are allowed. If you need additional guidance, please consult page 27 of the State and National Competitive New and Continuation application instructions.

Change made to claim 10% of Sections 1 and 2, which increases our match.

Narratives

2. Your funding history indicates that you were required to submit an evaluation report. Please provide a copy of your evaluation report via email. If you did not conduct an evaluation, please provide an explanation in the clarification summary field in eGrants.

Three-year Evaluation Report 2010-2013 was submitted to the Serve Illinois Commission and will be forwarded to the CNCS.

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

1. Please explain why ED5 was not paired with the proposed ED1 performance measure. Please revise the Education (ED1) performance measure to comply with the selection rule for education on page 4 of the PM instructions or remove it.

The change was made. The outcome language was similar but we incorrectly identified it by number. Our Outcome is ED1 and our Outcome is ED5. Thank you for allowing us to correct it.

2. Please summarize how beneficiaries for O2/O10 Outcome6107 are determined to be economically disadvantaged individuals per the CNCS Performance Measure standards.

The CNCS Performance Measures Instruction Manual identifies Economically Disadvantaged individuals as those who are receiving or meet the income eligibility requirements to receive: TANF, Food Stamps (SNAP), Medicaid, SCHIP, Section 8 housing assistance OR have a poor credit score OR are at least 60 days behind on one or more personal/family accounts. These guidelines are similar and/or the same as those required by other government funding bodies that provide support to the agencies hosting VOCAL members. Accordingly, all of their intake records request this information at time of enrollment into their programs. Host sites are advised that only those clients who meet these guidelines may be served by AmeriCorps members and reported under this performance measure.

c. Strategic Engagement slots Clarification:

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?

Narratives

Typically 15% to 20% of our members have one or more observed disabilities as defined and/or covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act. We have not targeted recruitment towards this population in the past however since several of our host sites serve the disability community we have received referrals from them, many of whom became members of the VOCAL AmeriCorps program. Going forward we will actively encourage host sites serving the disability community to recruit from their ranks for member placements within their agency, as well as for placement through us at other host sites. As part of our intake and interviewing process we will also include a self-identification component to better understand the referrals we receive and the make-up of our corps. Our goal for the coming year is 20%.

3. 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 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 appreciate the offer but will not pursue it at this time.

d. MSY with no program funds attached clarification:

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 narrative field:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The organization's capability and capacity to successfully implement, manage, and monitor the additional members.

We appreciate the offer but will not pursue it at this time.

e. Healthcare Clarification Items for all applicants with full-time members (excluding EAP and Professional Corps) :

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

LVI is currently providing health insurance to its members through BCS, a division of ASRM, LLC. Our original intent was to remain with the firm however we are now being advised that the coverage they offer is not compliant with the Affordable Care Act, so we are re-visiting that.

2. How did you select the provider? (for example, direct marketing ,through the Health Insurance

Marketplace or other means)

The health care provider was originally made known to us by the Serve Illinois Commission. Following the introduction to AmeriCorps programs by the Commission BCS provided us with information on plans they were offering. We found the plans to be comparable with other providers that were made known to us by the Commission and/or who we received direct marketing materials from and began offering our members insurance through them in the 09/10 program year.

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 is based on current premiums. Our understanding is that the current health care policy we are offering our members may not provide for Minimum Essential Coverage (MEC) as defined by the Affordable Care Act.

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

We are not certain at this time what adjustment, if any, may need to be made. We understand that our current coverage is compliant with AmeriCorps rules, so we can continue to offer it but in doing so will need to advise members that they may have to pay a penalty as a result of the coverage not being in compliance with the ACA. In the past, a number of our members have had the opportunity to receive MEC compliant insurance through a spouse or parent and they accepted that and waived our coverage. We anticipate that to continue. Depending also on who our future members are some may already be receiving or may qualify for Medicaid, in which case the supplemental benefits offered through Medicaid would make them ACA-compliant. Finally, we are investigating the cost of individual insurance policies with our insurance agent. Depending upon the age of the members, the cost for individual policies may be in line with what is already budgeted.

4. 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.

Narratives

We cannot further investigate what we've outlined above until we know who our members are.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics