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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK Coop) will have 30 half-time AmeriCorps members who will participate in the Future Teacher Initiative (FTI) AmeriCorps Program to address identified community needs in education in the following Arkansas counties: Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Clark, Cleveland, Chicot, Drew, and Faulkner. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for no less than 27,000 service and training hours dedicated to tutoring at-risk preschool students to ensure targeted students are socially, emotionally and academically prepared for the kindergarten learning environment and academic requirements. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 300 volunteers that will be engaged in and assisting with service projects in the schools and communities.

The program will focus on the CNCS focus area of education. The CNCS investment of \$12,000 will be matched with \$285,000 in public funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM/NEED - The AmeriCorps Future Teacher Initiative (FTI) AmeriCorps program specifically targets pre-schools in communities of Arkansas with the highest rates of poverty and the lowest amount of family and community resources. Preference is given to schools listed as ABC Schools and/or districts that are categorized as having academic/financial distress. The program host sites are selected according to desire to enter this program and the degree of community need. The AmeriCorps FTI is a two-fold program that targets schools that are located in areas of Arkansas that have few resources due to poor economic conditions. Within the state of Arkansas, many children grow up in severely distressed communities and are at higher risk of school failure, unemployment, and persistent poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau reported the 2011 average median income in Arkansas to be \$38,785.00. This falls below the national average median income of \$50,502.00 (U.S. Census 2011 data). In Arkansas, 27% of children six and under live in poverty. According to Lynn Huntley, President of the Southern Education Foundation, "There is a way to help the state's huge numbers of low income students' escape from poverty, dependence, and manipulation. There is an educational strategy that expert research shows will have positive impact and outcome." The strategy starts in high quality pre-kindergarten programs. The FTI members serve at-risk preschool students in disadvantaged communities in counties across the state of Arkansas and these sites are known as ABC Schools. Districts that have 75% of students scoring below proficient in Literacy and Math on the State

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Benchmark exams and those children in schools that have been designated a school improvement status are qualifying factors in becoming an ABC School. According to the Delta Regional Authority, 40 of Arkansas' 75 counties are listed as distressed counties. These areas are very rural containing abandoned buildings and little access to more than one gas station or grocery store. Of these 40 counties, the FTI program currently serves the following counties: Ashley (30.6%, children living in poverty), Bradley (36.1%), Calhoun (22.4%), Clark (30.3%), Cleveland (24.6%), Chicot (48.2%), Drew (31.2%), and Faulkner (17.7%). The poverty rates by counties served indicate that many are below the state average of 27.8 percent of children, ages 0-17, who are living in poverty (2011 Bureau of the Census). Many of these families cannot afford quality childcare or cultural and education experiences necessary for language development and stimulation. The unemployment rates for the targeted counties are: Ashley (12.5), Bradley (10.1), Calhoun (9.0), Clark (9.3), Cleveland (7.0), Chicot (10.4), Drew (9.6), and Faulkner (6.6). All of the counties targeted except Faulkner and Cleveland are below the state average of 7.5 %. These AmeriCorps members will serve these children in helping make sure they are socially, emotionally, and academically prepared to enter the kindergarten learning environment.

The districts, in addition to the distressed counties listed above will also serve as priority communities where members will serve. The districts served must be in academic and/or financial distressed areas. The severely disadvantaged communities such as those in the Arkansas Delta Region and other areas of the state that offer ABC Schools have priority for selection as host sites. While recent legislation has placed emphasis on creating high quality preschool programs, many severely disadvantaged counties continue to be unable to provide the majority of disadvantaged students' access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

AMERICORPS MEMBERS AS HIGHLY EFFECTIVE MEANS TO SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS - FTI's primary focus is to ensure a brighter future for Arkansas' youth by providing one-on-one and small group tutoring for at-risk pre-school children in disadvantaged communities in counties in Arkansas. To do this, we request 30 half-time members that will serve an average of 20-25 hours a week and support a minimum of 10 students each. Our goal is to have these students at the appropriate stage to start kindergarten, working to close the achievement gap between children of poverty and higher income families. Not only do the students benefit from the members service but the schools do as well. By recruiting dedicated members in these schools, the teachers have tutors on hand that would otherwise not be available. Funding for tutors and after-school programs is declining

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related to state and federal budget cuts. For example, Arkansas Better Chance faced funding cuts of 2.6% in 2010. FTI members will fill the gap with tutoring that otherwise, the schools would just have to do without. The average tutor cost districts \$30,000 with salaries and benefits. Districts are facing cuts in education due to sequestration and other federal cuts. These tutors work with children one-on-one and in small groups of two or three students. The children need this intervention to grow into responsible, educated citizens. Tutoring will provide these students living in poverty with necessary skills to be successful as they enter kindergarten. Tutoring in one-on-one and small group settings focus on: Expressiveness and Language Comprehension, Approach to Learning/Cognition, Phonological Awareness Print Knowledge, Social and Emotional Skills, Mathematics, and Physical Development. These are the six indicators of kindergarten readiness. Tutoring will be based on student specific needs to help each student successfully complete the Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist (KRIC) prior to entry into Kindergarten. The KRIC indicators were developed by the School Readiness Committee, Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Childcare and Early Childhood Education, Arkansas Head Start, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families and many Arkansas Early Childhood Providers. At-risk for academic failure students are identified by the host site. FTI members are assigned ten at-risk preschool students to tutor weekly in the small group setting and three students for direct one-on-one tutoring. These three students may be included in the ten students that the member is tutoring. In total, the 30 FTI half-time members will provide tutoring to 300 at-risk preschool students and one-on-one tutoring to 90 at-risk preschool students. FTI members will provide a minimum of two hours one-on-one tutoring each week to no less than three at-risk students. FTI members conduct a pre-, mid-, and post- Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist assessment on each of the ten targeted students. With direction from the host site lead teacher, tutoring plans are implemented based on students' needs. Tutoring plans are modified to strengthen student weaknesses and continue to support student strengths. The 2010-2011 school year average results indicate that 82% of students tutored by FTI members showed growth in three of the five areas of the Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist.

EVIDENCE-BASED/EVIDENCE-INFORMED AND MEASUREABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT ¿ The FTI program's focus area is education. In the article written by W. Steven Barnett, National Institute for Early Education Research, he states, ¿Multiple meta-analysis conducted over the past 25 years have found quality preschool education to produce an average immediate effect of about half (0.50) a standard deviation on cognitive development. This is the equivalent of 7 or 8 points on an IQ test or a move from the 30th percentile to the 50th percentile for achievement test scores. To put these gains

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in perspective, it's important to realize that these gains, a half standard deviation is enough to reduce by half the school readiness gap between children in poverty and the national average. In this meta-analysis of the effects of early education interventions on cognitive and social development, a total of 123 comparative studies of early childhood interventions were analyzed. The meta-analytic database included both quasi-experimental and randomized studies. Specific aspects that positively correlated with gains included teacher-directed instruction and small group instruction such as the tutoring done by the FTI tutors.

Key findings from research documented in *Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise* by Lynn A. Karoly, M. Rebecca Kilburn, and Jill S. Cannon are: Early childhood interventions programs have been shown to yield benefits in academic achievement, behavior, educational progression and attainment, delinquency and crime, and labor market success, among other domains. Interventions with better-trained caregivers and smaller child-to-staff ratios appear to offer more favorable results. Well-designed Early childhood interventions have been found to generate a return to society ranging from \$1.80 to \$17.07 for each dollar spent on the program.

This AmeriCorps program will provide quality interventions by assisting academic or distressed schools in helping targeted at-risk students achieve success in kindergarten. In the 2012-2013 program year, 92% of the children served showed growth in at least three of the five areas of the Kindergarten Readiness Indicator Checklist. This improvement had increased from 82% for the 2013 program year. This improvement is in direct correlation with the FTI members' tutoring interventions. This improvement is also a result of increased monitoring of members service in the classroom as well as weekly meetings between the host site supervisors and members to focus on member activities to reinforce the lesson plans. At the end of this three-year cycle, the schools participating in the FTI program will show that at least 70% of all students preparing for kindergarten will reflect growth in literacy and math. Students served in the FTI program will show they are performing at grade level academically and socially. The interventions are designed to address the problems outlined in this proposal. (See Logic Model diagram.)

In addition, FTI members will gain a unique perspective and experience as it directly relates to the field of education and is addressing the challenge of the teacher shortage in the state of Arkansas. Since the FTI program conception in 2007, at least 23 AmeriCorps alumni have reported to have begun their career in teaching in the state of Arkansas. At the end of each program year, tutored students enrolled in the FTI program will exhibit increased percentages in academic performance and

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kindergarten readiness. These at-risk students will receive tutoring necessary to build skills and knowledge to continue performing at proficient levels. Simultaneously, FTI members will gain experience in the field of education. The following Performance Measures will be incorporated in the tracking of students' growth: Measure ED21: No less than 210 of the 300 students enrolled will complete the tutoring program. Measure ED24: No less than 210 of the 300 students enrolled in the tutoring program will show growth in literacy skills in terms of school readiness by the end of the program year. Each FTI member will use the KRIC assessment as a tool for measuring and recording student growth. A pre-, mid-, and post- assessment will be required on each student. ED25: No less than 210 of the 300 students enrolled in the tutoring program will show growth in math skills in terms of school readiness by the end of the program year.

Although the FTI program's main focus is tutoring in preschool classrooms to ensure kindergarten readiness, members also strive to promote and increase parental involvement. The FTI program director holds an advisory council meeting to share the evaluation results on an annual basis. This advisory council consists of: FTI program staff, two host site supervisors, one stakeholder, 2 members at large, and 1 parent. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and addressed at this time. One weakness noted is that members serving in rural Arkansas can feel isolated and alone.

Another integral part of the FTI program is to promote and recruit community and parent volunteers.

Measurable community impact is noted through the work of the many hours provided by the volunteers. Volunteers are recruited to be engaged in the lives of the children and families in the communities through service projects and to offer additional tutoring when needed. To support this goal, each of the 30 AmeriCorps members will recruit at least five volunteers to assist with each service project. Each AmeriCorps member coordinates two to five projects per service year. Volunteers are recruited by the members once they hand out flyers in the schools and in the community and aid in ways parallel to each project. Some project examples include collecting goods for food drives or book drives, community cleanups, or serving at community festivals and parent-teacher conferences. During the 2011-12 AmeriCorps year, 596 volunteers were recruited and served over 2000 hours of service in the communities as a result of FTI recruitment. Once each project is completed, the AmeriCorps member reports back to the host site supervisor and AmeriCorps director. Although, each project must be pre-approved, each member is still required to supply a detailed description of the project as well as a sign-in sheet of the volunteers and those in attendance. Members also provide additional documentation such as photos and even surveys completed by those involved in the project. These surveys give feedback on how the community and/or school site is affected by the project. The

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surveys also score the project on areas such as efficiency and effectiveness. Volunteer generation has proven to build the support system around the AmeriCorps program and community that the program serves. It is the FTI program's goal to continue growth in the number of volunteers recruited each service year.

The SEARK Coop director collects data annually from program staff, participants and parents to determine the quality of services rendered. Feedback from FTI members and participants are analyzed following their service year. These data are used in program improvement and reporting.

MEMBER TRAINING - AmeriCorps members are required to attend a minimum of 48 hours of training. Prior to providing community service in the preschool setting, members must receive orientation to the Corporation of National Community Service and AmeriCorps program. The FTI program director is responsible for member orientation. This eight hour orientation includes covering the goals of the FTI member, program requirements and all prohibited activities. The FTI program director issues each FTI member a Member Guide. This member guide provides the member with a hard copy of member benefits, overview of the program, appropriate/required duties for the member, prohibited activities, inappropriate duties, consequences, list of grant requirements, list of monthly required documents; i.e. hour logs, monthly success story, daily activity report, quarterly required documents; i.e. pre, mid and post KRIC Assessments, list of yearly required documents; i.e. signature service project and recruitment of volunteers. During this time, members are given roles and asked to act out different scenarios related to prohibited activities. This helps members to understand and better and accurately serve during their AmeriCorps term. Copies of the member's contract and policy and procedure agreement are also included for the member to have as a reference guide. The policy and procedure agreement includes information concerning the following: Information Release Consent, SEARK AmeriCorps Drug-Free Policy, Confidentiality Agreement, Attendance Policy, Dress Code Policy, Adhering to School/Site Policy, Procedure for Living Allowance Stipend, Grievance Policy, Loan Forbearance Information, Volunteer Accident Policy and Coverage, Withholding Income Tax Notice, Social Media Policy and a Waiver of Responsibility. The FTI member guide also details how the member is to submit documentation accurately. Direct tutoring skills needed to tutor at-risk students in the early childhood learning environment are also included in the orientation training. This four hour portion of the training is provided by an ABC site director that is also a certified pre-school employee. This trainer teaches members how to tutor the students using assigned math and literacy manipulative that is in line with the sites mandatory curriculum. Following the member

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orientation, the FTI members are provided training skills by their certified teachers at their host site though in-service training during their service year. Training and orientation to their assigned site must be provided by the host preschool prior to beginning their term of service as well as renewed instruction throughout the year. Host site supervisors and members will meet weekly to discuss member activities to reinforce the lesson plan. This ensures cohesiveness between classroom instruction and tutoring. Host sites will provide members with orientation to the preschool facility, programs, and policies prior to initiation of service to students. There will be other training opportunities throughout the school year through the Arkansas AmeriCorps Program, Arkansas Service Commission (ASC) and the education service cooperatives throughout the state. Entry Level Training (ELT), which is a one to two day long training provided by the Arkansas Service Commission that includes AmeriCorps 101, Education Award training, and Life after AmeriCorps. ELT is offered in all four quadrants of the state to ensure all members have an opportunity to participate and occurs within the first three months of the program start date. The ASC offers the Opening Ceremony which occurs in the first semester of service as well. This gives members an opportunity to be sworn in to the AmeriCorps program by reciting the AmeriCorps pledge. Members also receive specific training on disaster relief, a mandatory training offered by the Arkansas Service Commission. Members serving their second through fourth year AmeriCorps term are required to attend Advanced Level Training. ALT is also provided in all four quadrants of Arkansas. This eight hour training is offered closer to the service year-end and focuses on topics such as professionalism and using your Education Award wisely. Lastly, members are required to complete an Exit Interview at the end of their service term. This is a short one hour individual interview where the member will reflect on their year of service and be exited from the program.

MEMBER SUPERVISION - FTI members are supervised by the program director as well as the host site supervisor and classroom teachers. This two-tiered supervision is necessary to ensure each member follows tutoring curriculum and program guidelines. The member is supervised by the program director. The director provides the information and resources needed for the member to see and be a part of the big picture of AmeriCorps. The program performs a State and Federal Background Check on each member as well as a National Sex Offender Public Registry (NSOPR). At the program level, the member is also trained in AmeriCorps guidelines and prohibited activities. The program director tracks the service and progress of each member through at least two on-site visits annually, weekly conference calls, email and My Service Log. During the annual site visits, the director observes the member tutoring and documents any changes that need to be addressed with the member or site

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supervisor. The director also meets one-on-one with the site supervisor to discuss member performance, attendance, and compatibility with the school twice per year. Conference calls are done often when visits are not necessary. In some cases, members just need questions answered or clarifications regarding their service. Weekly emails and monthly newsletters are sent out to each member to remind members of prohibited activities and upcoming service projects and opportunities. Each FTI member is directly supervised by a host site supervisor and classroom teachers. Classroom teachers are present to supervise classroom activities and tutoring conducted by members. Classroom teachers also provide members with guidance and encouragement through weekly meetings to discuss plans of tutoring for the week. This ensures that members are following the curriculum already set within the site. The site supervisor also conducts mid-term and end-term member assessments to support members and host sites. FTI program director hosts a Supervisor's Training Meeting in early spring prior to the program start date for host site supervisors and classroom teachers. This training informs the site supervisor of their duties and responsibilities as acting supervisor. Each FTI site supervisor receives a Program Handbook which outlines all the program requirements and details the role and mission of the FTI member. The Program Handbook not only includes the same information as the Member Guide but contains the following: laminated signs to post at the entrance of their site displaying the message "This Site Proudly Hosts AmeriCorps Members!", Program Start and End Dates, copy of a Memorandum of Understanding between FTI Program and host site detailing school responsibility, copy of a Memorandum of Understanding between FTI Program and Site Supervisor, Instructions for verifying FTI members' monthly, quarterly and yearly reports, evaluation forms that must be completed Mid-Year and End-of-the Year on each FTI member, grievance report forms, and disciplinary action forms. The FTI program director provides indirect supervision and serves as a resource for both host site supervisors and FTI AmeriCorps members.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION - Big emphasis is placed on what it means to be a member and great pride is instilled in our members as they become a part of AmeriCorps. FTI members are issued member gear and name badges to distinguish them from school employees and other AmeriCorps program members. FTI members are required to wear either their name badge and /or member gear during service hours. FTI members will be required to submit a 250 minimum word essay to reflect upon their year of service. Each FTI member will submit a monthly success story that highlights a positive impact that has been realized due to their intervention. The FTI program is firmly committed to promoting the importance of national service. By wearing their member gear, FTI members are able to distinguish themselves from other organizations, while simultaneously

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identifying themselves and connecting with other AmeriCorps programs. The FTI program director provides each host site with a laminated sign stating that "This Site Proudly Hosts AmeriCorps Members!" This ensures that all parents and staff are aware of the sites participation in the AmeriCorps program.

Organizational Capability

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITY

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING - The SEARK Coop was established in 1981 as one of two education cooperatives established in Arkansas as a result of the passage of ACT 360 by the Arkansas General Assembly, originating from work done in 1979-80 by Dr. Don Roberts, Dr. Jerry Perrin and Dr. Noble Gividen. Dr. Noble Gividen was an important leader in this movement as he moved to Arkansas from New York and brought the "education coop concept" with him. What is this concept? It is the belief that an education cooperative could assist member school districts and communities with the development of more effective and equitable use of their shared resources and to provide shared services supporting the knowledge and skills necessary to impact effective citizenship and economic productivity through student achievement. In short, the SEARK Coop provides high quality services which individual school districts are unable to provide on their own. Examples of such services are support programs that include professional staff and curriculum development, testing and assessment, early childhood/special education, printing/teacher center services, media, technology, health education, and early high school college education. The FTI AmeriCorps is currently housed at the SEARK Coop. The FTI program fits perfectly with the SEARK Coop's mission to strengthen our communities by means of improving the education of our children The SEARK Coop currently serves 15 public school districts in nine surrounding counties. The SEARK Coop is governed by 14 of the 15 member school districts. Each of the 14 superintendents is a SEARK Coop Board Member. One of the 14 board members is elected annually to serve as board president. The board hires a director to oversee program, employees, and services housed at the SEARK Coop. The SEARK Coop has a personnel committee made up of certified and non-certified employees who make recommendations to the director to present to the board. Policies and procedures are in place to govern both the board and cooperative personnel. The current annual budget is approximately \$11,000,000.00. The number of employees is in excess of 150 with an additional 133 AmeriCorps members (40 FTI members, 20 Coordinated School Health members and 73 Smart Start members). As noted, the SEARK Coop is home to additional service programs: Foster Grandparent Program, Smart Start, Coordinated School Health and Hippy. Funding sources include both federal and state government sources as well as

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national, state, and local public and private grants. The primary and secondary contacts for this grant application are: Karen Eoff, SEARK Coop Director, has 30 years of educational experience, which includes 17 years of administrative experience. Ms. Eoff has been the SEARK Coop director for 4 years. Ms. Eoff holds several certifications including a Master Degree in School District Administration. The FTI Program will be Co-Directed by Candace Howard and Kim Pesaresi. Candace Howard has 9 years of experience at the SEARK Coop. Mrs. Howard holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration. Mrs. Howard was Assistant Coordinator for the FTI program for one year and program director for 4 years. Co-Director, Kim Pesaresi, has 6 years of experience at the SEARK Coop all of which has been served in the AmeriCorps Program. Mrs. Pesaresi holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology. Her roles have consisted of Administrative Assistant, Program Director and Assistant Coordinator. As program co-directors both Mrs. Howard and Mrs. Pesaresi will be entrusted with and share the following responsibilities: preparing quarterly progress reports, monthly financial reports, monitor and validate all member service hours and required documents, attend program director meetings, plan and implement orientation training, maintain constant communication with site supervisors and members via, telephone, email and conduct scheduled and unscheduled site visits to ensure program compliance. The FTI directors will also aid in the recruitment of FTI members. They are also responsible for maintaining member files, ensuring all required documents are current, collecting of member data, quarterly newsletters, member recognition, monitors members service hours to ensure members are completing their service hours in a timely manner and monthly news bulletins. The FTI directors attend program director's meetings hosted by the Arkansas Service Commission. The topics have included Developing and Managing Budgets, Workplace Ethics, Grant Provisions, Member Recruitment, and Utilizing a web-based reporting site to name a few. The FTI program directors also utilize nationalserviceresources.org as a great reference tool to address new policies and procedures regarding Corporation for National and Community Service. Since the FTI AmeriCorps program is housed at the SEARK Coop, certified employees in Math and Literacy are available and provide in-kind service with regards to training the FTI members the skills needed to tutor at-risk students. The SEARK Coop has five finance and accounting personnel overseen by Mrs. Sandra Savage who holds a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration and has over 20 years of experience in accounting. The SEARK Coop staff, area school administrators and staff and the communities of the projected sites are all familiar with and have experience with the FTI program while supporting its efforts. The FTI program directors will provide host site supervisor's training which includes the following topics: member training, technical

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assistance, and program/site monitoring compliance, program finances and host site contributions. The SEARK Coop provides a strong resource base that includes on-site training and technical assistance in all areas related to this proposal: early childhood education, parent involvement, technology and health. The SEARK Coop's certified specialists are available to provide math, literacy and technology training to FTI members. The FTI program receives annual site visits from the Arkansas Service Commission to safeguard program compliance. Outcomes of these visits have been positive in all aspects. Quarterly reports to the CNCS and state commission have been submitted on time and performance measures have been met. Responses to requests from federal and state commission have been submitted in a timely manner. The SEARK Coop has administered and operated successfully numerous federally issued grant programs such as the FTI AmeriCorps Program, Foster Grandparent, HIPPIY Program, Smart Start AmeriCorps Program and a state formula funded program entitled Coordinated School Health. The SEARK Coop board members meet on a monthly basis to address cooperative business. Each program and/or department housed at the SEARK Coop has a program coordinator/director. Each coordinator/director is responsible for supervising his/her staff. The SEARK Coop coordinates all activities and provides appropriate financial accounting services through its director and board members. The FTI AmeriCorps program is perfectly integrated into the mission of the SEARK Coop of providing services to improve the academic achievement of students. The SEARK Coop provides staff development, consultation services, and specialized programs and houses specialists in specific fields of educational services to aid schools in cultivating the highest academic performance of their students. (See Organizational Chart for the SEARK Coop)

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY - The FTI AmeriCorps program utilizes many strategies to ensure compliance and overall accountability to Corporation rules and regulations. In order to monitor the program and service sites for compliance, the FTI program director will conduct orientation training for both the FTI members and the site supervisors to make sure that all parties involved know of the rules, policies and regulations of the FTI program. FTI AmeriCorps members and supervisors are issued Program Handbooks that document CNCS rules and regulations, prohibited activities and program requirements and will serve as a reference tool. Each host site and site supervisor are required to sign a Memorandum of Understanding that details all program requirements and lists prohibited activities. The FTI director will monitor host sites via constant communication with site supervisors and members in a variety of means: scheduled and unscheduled site visits, conference calls, email, newsletters, and the AmeriCorps Facebook page to safeguard

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program compliance. Any performance and/or disciplinary issues are addressed immediately by the program director. The FTI director will also prepare quarterly progress reports and monthly financial reports. The FTI director will also monitor and validate all member service hours and required documents. The Arkansas Department of Human Services, Division of Community Service and Nonprofit Support (DCSNS) provide quarterly trainings for FTI program staff. These trainings are based on CNCS's policies, procedures, rules and regulations and any updates. Examples of topics include but are not limited to: conducting criminal history checks, creating progress reports, non-duplication and non-displacement of paid employees. In addition to quarterly face-to-face meetings, monthly conference calls are held which include the Arkansas Service Commission staff and staff from all the AmeriCorps programs across the state of Arkansas. The Arkansas Service Commission conducts annual site visits to the SEARK Cooperative to audit FTI member files, portfolios and financial reports. The State Portfolio Evaluation is only conducted on a three year cycle. This audit ensures that each program remains in compliance with CNCS guidelines. In addition, the SEARK Coop is audited by state auditors on an annual basis. Results of these audits have proven that the SEARK Coop exemplifies its ability to maintain and manage numerous programs without blemish.

PAST PERFORMANCE FOR CURRENT GRANTEES, DEMONSTRATED COMPLIANCE - The following weaknesses were noted in the audit. Some members are challenged to reach the AmeriCorps 900 hour requirement and their college hours at the same time; Program director cannot visit all sites due to financial constraints; and lack of clarity around member roles among site staff that perceive members as threatening their own positions. These challenges will be addressed in the following manner: more emphasis during the interview about the challenge of earning enough volunteer hours and going to college full time, time management training to overcome tension between earning enough hours and attending college full time; program director will make at least two site visits per host site annually, the role of AmeriCorps will be more widely advertised throughout a site to overcome site staff and member tension due to ambiguity of AmeriCorps member roles.

The following Performance Measures have been successfully accomplished and will continue to be incorporated in the tracking of students' growth: Measure ED21: No less than 210 of the 300 students enrolled will complete the tutoring program. Measure ED24: No less than 210 of the 300 students enrolled in the tutoring program will show growth in literacy skills in terms of school readiness by the end of the program year. Each FTI member will use the KRIC assessment as a tool for measuring and recording student growth. A pre-, mid-, and post- assessment will be required on each student. ED25:

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No less than 210 of the 300 students enrolled in the tutoring program will show growth in math skills in terms of school readiness by the end of the program year.

ENROLLMENT-RETENTION- The FTI AmeriCorps program has operated for the last six years thanks to the funding provided by Arkansas Better Chance (ABC). Eighty-four of the 85 member slots were filled for the 2010-2011 program year. FTI member retention rate for those who successfully completed the program was 82%. It is a struggle sometimes with member retention due largely to the poor economic conditions in Arkansas. Families must move in their quest for employment and therefore FTI members will relocate with them. However, the FTI program staff does not feel that is the only reason. Most FTI members are serving in rural Arkansas and often times may feel isolated. It became the FTI program director's goal to shore up efforts that will enable each FTI member to feel the cohesiveness with other AmeriCorps members and service not only on a local but also on a state and national level. The FTI director recognizes 5 Outstanding FTI AmeriCorps Members on a quarterly basis. Recognition and honor of selected Outstanding FTI AmeriCorps Members are acknowledged in quarterly newsletters. In the 2011-2012 school year, 85 half-time member slots were awarded and 84 half-time member slots were filled. Ninety percent of FTI members completed the program with an Education Award. The FTI program director will seek for more opportunities that allow the FTI members to meet other AmeriCorps members to share their experiences and best practices with one another. It will always be the goal of the FTI director and staff to strive for 100% member retention. Targeted children, who are assigned to a FTI member for tutoring, have continuously shown academic improvement. This improvement has been documented and evidenced by the KRIC Assessments for the last six years and performance measures that have been met in a timely manner. For the 2012-13 program year, Arkansas Better Chance had to reduce the amount of their funding, thereby decreasing the number of slots to 40. The short notification of the reduction of funds did not allow for the program staff to acquire additional funding. Host sites have continued to praise the FTI program and attribute some of the success of the students as a reflection of the service that members have provided. All member positions were filled for the 2012-13 program year. As of January 1, 2013, member retention remains at 98%.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT - The FTI program conducts two internal evaluations annually during the program year. As part of the policy of the SEARK Coop, evaluations are mailed out to each participating site evaluating the services being received. The program director utilizes the results in order to make necessary adjustments to the betterment of the program. Evaluations are also administered at the supervisor's training meeting. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and issues

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addressed. The FTI program also participated and supported an external evaluation conducted in 2012 by Business Nonprofit Connections. This external evaluation was performed as part of the Arkansas Service Commission AmeriCorps State Portfolio Evaluation.

At the end of each program year, academic data from tutored students enrolled in the FTI program will exhibit evidence as percentages in academic performance and kindergarten readiness increases. Performance Measures will be incorporated in the tracking of students' growth.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

BUDGET ADEQUACY

COST EFFECTIVENESS - The SEARK Coop is requesting \$12,000 annually to support the FTI program. This funding will cover member training, office supplies, cost of criminal history checks and FBI checks, staff travel, member gear and training as well as other program operating costs. This amount is based on 30 half-time members multiplied by \$800 per member for service to disadvantaged children ($30 * \$800.00 = \$24,000$). NON-Federal Support: The program will serve 30 half-time members. ABC Preschool Program funding provides living allowance, training, member travel, salary and benefits for staff, and other program operating costs such as telephone service, office space, accounting services and printing. ABC Preschool Program Funding totals \$285,000. Total MSY requested is 15. The cost per MSY is \$800. The total operational budget for the FTI program is \$297,000. The FTI program operated and received funds for the past six years as an Education Award Only Competitive grant. The SEARK Coop supports the FTI program through additional in-kind contributions.

BUDGET ADEQUACY The FTI Program serves disadvantaged communities statewide. Children enrolled in preschool programs are considered to be increased risk of not being prepared for kindergarten due to poverty, absence of parent(s), developmental disabilities, and other environmental issues within the home and community. The FTI program specifically targets preschool programs in communities of Arkansas with the highest rates of poverty and the lowest amount of family and community resources. The children in targeted preschool programs are severely disadvantaged. The FTI program has the commitment of local and statewide support to make an impact in education in the state of Arkansas. Current Grantees Only: The FTI program continues to receive funding from Arkansas Better Chance to help support the program. The current budget is adequate to meet program requirements. The budget clearly allows for member support. This support allows for member living allowance, training, cost of criminal history checks and FBI checks and program operating costs. The FTI program has successfully met its goals annually.

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Evaluation Summary or Plan

EVALUATION PLAN OR SUMMARY

In addition to the external evaluation as part of the Arkansas Service Commission , the SEARK Coop policy requires program evaluations that are distributed to each participating site to determine the quality of services received. The SEARK Coop director meets with the FTI director to discuss the results of this evaluation. The AmeriCorps Future Teacher Initiative Program has been and continues to prove its effectiveness in using service as a solution to addressing CNCS's strategic plan with regards to education. Although the FTI program's main focus is tutoring in preschool classrooms to ensure kindergarten readiness, members also strive to promote and increase parental involvement. The FTI program director holds an advisory council meeting to share the evaluation results on an annual basis. This advisory council consists of: FTI program staff, two host site supervisors, one stakeholder, 2 members at large, and 1 parent. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and addressed at this time. One weakness noted is that members serving in rural Arkansas can feel isolated and alone. The program director will seek more opportunities across the state and encourage members to connect and meet with other AmeriCorps members to lessen the sense of isolation. The FTI director uses all information from the evaluation to make necessary adjustments in order to better operate the program effectively.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

4-7-14 Clarifications

1. Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK): Arkansas AmeriCorps Future Teacher Initiative (14ES155893)

This application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of \$12,000.00; 15.00 Member Service Years (MSYs); 30 slots; and \$800.00 Cost per MSY.

Unless otherwise specified, please provide the following information in the eGrants narrative field labeled ¿Clarification Summary.¿ Please create a heading within the clarification section with the date of your response.

A. Programmatic Clarification

1. Grant Start Date and Member Enrollment Period: While CNCS will prioritize early submitted start

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dates in award processing, the earliest possible start date we can consider is 06/01/2014. It is not permitted for an applicant to re-submit with an earlier start date than previously submitted. Please review the requested grant award start date and member enrollment period start date in the Applicant Info section of your application. Please make any corrections necessary. In the Clarification Summary field, please enter a statement confirming the desired grant award start and member enrollment period start.

The desired start date is 09/01/2014 and end date is 08/31/2015.

2. Please clarify how much time members will spend per week and in direct service with students versus in training and what percentage of time they will spend in training, overall.

Members will average 20-25 hours per week versus one hour in training. Overall AmeriCorps member will spend 5% in training and 95% in service.

3. Given that members will also be students at the time of service, please discuss whether their AmeriCorps service hours will count towards their academic program requirement, if they have such. Members are not allowed to use AmeriCorps service hours toward their academic program requirements.

4. What is the dosage and duration of intervention that will be provided to each student by the member?

Each student will receive on average 10-15 hours in small group tutoring and four hours of one-on-one tutoring every two weeks.

5. Please discuss how, in their roles, members do not duplicate, displace, or supplant staff.

Members are not counted in the student-teacher ratio. Members serve as tutors in pre-k classrooms and are not involved in teacher-led activities; members will not displace any paid staff or employee duties.

B. Performance Measure Clarification

Please provide the following information directly in the performance measure clarification section of the application. If necessary, add additional narrative to the Clarification Summary field.

1. Please clarify what will constitute "completion of the program" in order for a beneficiary to be captured in ED21 measure.

The number of children who were tutored and assessed throughout the service year using the pre-, mid- and post- KRIC assessment will constitute "completion of the program".

2. Please discuss how the program will ensure and track that the children who are tracked in your performance measures are enrolled in early childhood education programs with a majority of

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economically disadvantaged children and/or majority of children with special or exceptional needs, as is outlined in the performance measure guidance.

Arkansas Better Chance is an income based program therefore; all students tutored in the FTI program are proven to be economically disadvantaged.

3. Although not required, you are encouraged to also track ED20 measure, as comparing ED21 and ED20 data is a good performance management tool.

We have added ED20 to better track performance. ED20: Number of children who start in the CNCS-supported early childhood education program.

4. Please clarify what you mean by "moderate growth" in literacy or math that is being tracked in ED24 and ED25.

Seventy percent of participating students will show a growth of 70% or greater in math in the post-assessment. Seventy percent of participating students will show a growth of 70% or greater in literacy in the post- assessment.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification

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

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

N/A

E. No-Cost MSY Clarification

MSY with no program funds attached: 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,

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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 the program would like to request No-Cost MSYs, please edit the budget as appropriate (for example, line items for member gear or criminal history checks may need to be revised). Please ensure performance measure targets and MSY allocations align with these additional MSYs. Lastly, please include a response to each item below in the Clarification Summary 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.

N/A

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics