

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The MN Alliance With Youth will have 100 AmeriCorps members provide educational case management and support in academic, attendance, serving learning and mentoring to 3,000 students in 6th -10th grade who are risk of dropping out of high school in central and southern MN communities including Minneapolis, St. Paul, Bloomington, Northfield, Mankato and Rochester. At the end of the first program year, AmeriCorps members will be responsible for helping 1,350 youth get back on track to graduate from high school on time. In addition, AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 1,500 volunteers to provide informal mentoring, academic support, attendance coaching, and support for service learning. The program will focus on the CNCS Education focus area. The CNCS investment of \$1,230,250 will be matched with \$1,230,250 of which \$50,000 is public funding and \$1,180,250 is private funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

Across MN, nearly 1 in every 4 students (23%) do not graduate from high school on time. Some 12,000 youth drop out of school each year -- most of them low-income youth of color. The MN Dept. of Education (MDE) reports (2012) that 84% of White students graduate from high school, a rate 9% higher than the national average of 77%. But students of color graduate at rates up to 40% lower than the national average. In MN, only 74% Asians, 53% Hispanic, 51% African American/Black, 46% American Indians, and 60% of low-income students graduated from high school. Last year, Minneapolis Public Schools had an overall graduation rate of 50% while its neighboring district, St. Paul, had a graduation rate of 66%. For districts in Southern MN, while rates appear to be above the state average (83% for Mankato and 81% for Rochester), this isn't the reality for students of color: Black students graduate on time at a rate of only 48% in Rochester and 51% in Mankato. These alarming numbers demonstrate why MN has one of the nation's largest disparities in graduation rates. The economic impact of dropping out can be devastating for communities. For one class of dropouts alone, the lost lifetime earnings to MN's economy can total more than \$3.6 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). The same report stated that if the dropout rate was cut in half for Minneapolis/St. Paul/Bloomington, the benefits for just one class would be an additional \$112 million in economic growth for the region, \$10 million more in tax revenue per year, and \$250 million more in home sales.

Dropping out of school is a process, not a one-day event, with multiple preventable causes. Educators often lack the time and resources to monitor data that might raise flags as early as middle school,

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when research finds the earliest indicators appearing. In 2009, MDE's Dropout Prevention Initiative reported that more support is needed for students in this grade range and research shows the impact of early interventions on developmental transitions for middle and early high school aged youth (Balfanz 2007). By middle school, we can forecast who has a 75% chance of dropping out of school based on Early Warning Indicators of Attendance, Behavior, and Core Academics (Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Neild, Balfanz & Herzog, 2007; Allensworth & Easton 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2010).

Historically, interventions have not been available to students until their trajectory of failure is almost impossible to reverse. AmeriCorps members provide the people power to assist schools and communities to intervene early and often, supporting youth before they are in crisis.

The communities we propose to serve are located throughout Central MN (Twin Cities Metro) and Southern MN (Rochester, Northfield, Mankato). These geographic areas represent some of MN's poorest and most diverse communities and are home to the low-income youth of color who are most at-risk of dropping out. Since 2000, MN's population of color has grown by 55%, and southern MN's residents of color have doubled between 2000 and 2010 (MN Compass, 2012).

Minnesota continues to have significant racial and ethnic disparities between those who live in poverty and those who do not. Statewide, 19% of youth live in poverty (Wilder Research, 2011). Broken down by race, the rates of poverty for MN's young people reflect our achievement gap: 8% White youth live in poverty compared to 46% African American/Black youth, 38% American Indian youth and 30% Hispanic youth. In Minneapolis, 23% of families live in poverty with higher rates for families of color: 65% American Indian, 49% Black, 39% Asian and 34% Hispanic (Minneapolis Foundation Report, 2012). In St. Paul, 1 in 4 people live in poverty with a higher proportion of youth living in poverty than other Twin Cities communities (MN Compass, 2012). In Mankato, 1 in 3 youth receive free and reduced lunch at school -- an 80% increase in the last 10 years with over 12% of families living in poverty -- a rate 34% higher than the state average (Mankato United Way Report, 2012).

b. AmeriCorps Members as Highly Effective Means to Solve Community Problems: The Alliance theory of change provides targeted interventions at a critical point along the educational pathway in order to increase school engagement and high school graduation rates among low-income students and students of color. As a result, member efforts will contribute to closing the disparities in high school graduation rates between at-risk students and their more advantaged peers.

We request 100 members to serve 3,000 youth in grades 6-10 who attend high schools with high drop-out rates and the middle schools that feed into them. At least 30% of our members will serve Focus and Priority schools, as designated by MDE. Members serve in a full-time capacity because of

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the time-intensive nature of the service activities required to support a caseload of 30 students each. CNCS should invest in this project because of the direct connection between helping 3,000 youth graduate from high school and the economic and social benefits to individuals and communities when the high school graduation rate is increased, even just by 5%.

The Alliance model of drop-out prevention positions members as case managers who help individual students to address behaviors that put them at high risk of dropping out and engages them in developing a plan of service to put them back on track to graduation. Working as case managers, members guide students through a process of assessment and evidence-based interventions.

Interventions are selected from a "menu" as appropriate for the individual student and may include: direct support (e.g., mentoring, attendance coaching), the provision of educational services (e.g., tutoring, out-of-school time enrichment), and engagement opportunities (e.g., service learning, leadership training). These interventions were identified by Johns Hopkins University, the National Dropout Prevention Center, and MDE's Dropout Prevention Initiative as the most effective for engaging youth in school and learning.

At program start, members work as part of a site-based team of educators, school social workers and community partners (known as a Youth Success Team) to screen youth and identify those who are at risk of dropping out based on three early-warning indicators: Attendance, Behavior and Core Academics, or ABCs (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2010; Allensworth & Easton 2007; Balfanz, Herzog & MacIver, 2007). The team uses school records to assess attendance data, number of behavior referrals (e.g., office visits, detention, suspension), and academic scores in English and Math. Having even one indicator makes it harder for youth to graduate on time, but the presence of two or more indicators put students at significant risk of dropping out. The Youth Success Teams analyze student data, select students to be placed on member caseloads and make recommendations as to which interventions the member should use. The member then reviews those recommendations with each student to create a service plan to guide their activities during the program period. Youth Success Teams meet monthly to monitor student progress against those plans and recommend adjustments in the interventions as needed.

Members offer case management and advisement relative to individual student's progress against their service plan. Members address attendance issues by monitoring student attendance, calling each tardy student, and discussing attendance issues with students and families. Members develop service-learning projects to improve attendance and student engagement. To impact behavior issues, members connect youth with mentors, help build conflict resolution skills, and engage youth in

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leadership opportunities. To improve academic performance, members meet with students one-to-one to review grades and develop study plans that may include tutoring or assignment make-up. They implement afterschool enrichment programs with youth on their caseload. For schools with student populations in the thousands, these interventions would be impossible without the support of members. Additionally, members build school and community capacity by recruiting, training and supervising volunteers to support and sustain the program.

Members track youth activities and outcomes against their service plans to determine whether interventions are keeping students on-track toward graduation or whether adjustments are needed. Measures for "on-track toward graduation" include the number of youth who participate for at least 12 weeks who improve one of the following: school-day attendance; decrease behavior referrals including office visits, detention or suspension; complete more homework assignments; improve their academic performance in English and/or Math and/or reading over the course of the AmeriCorps program's involvement. The member also tracks the number and type of interventions provided and the dosage or amount of time spent on each intervention. The member tracks the number of hours volunteers serve youth and the number of hours that youth volunteer for community service.

Members and sites collect and review youth progress data monthly. Using an online system to track students, members and sites report on individual student quantitative progress, and provide a narrative that gives context to variables. Alliance staff review progress reports and conduct site visits to assess how well a site is implementing the model. This allows the Alliance to regularly report to stakeholders about program progress and ensure the model is being implemented with fidelity. The Alliance submits a final year-end report to its Board, ServeMinnesota, and key community stakeholders.

As a result of members' service, 3,000 youth will be identified as needing supports based on the Early Warning Indicators. Of those, 1,800 students (60%) will complete at least 12 weeks of the program, and 1,350 youth (45%) will increase their academic engagement, as defined by gains in one of the following (with the others not showing signs of worsening): daily attendance or fewer tardies (being late to school); a decrease in behavior referrals (e.g. office visits, detentions, suspensions); and/or improved academic performance in English and /or Math or reading. Each student will volunteer at least 20 hours to promote their engagement in school and learning.

Evidence Base: Research from Johns Hopkins University demonstrates that Early Warning Indicators of youth disengagement from school and community include school absences, behavior problems, and academic failure in core subjects such as English and Math. According to Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver

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(2007), 6th graders with chronic absenteeism (missing more than 20% of school) were 68% less like to graduate from high school than their peers who attended school regularly. They also found that the majority of students who show signs of being off track in middle school do so in 6th grade. Neild & Balfanz (2006) found that 8th graders who missed 5 weeks of school and had a failing grade in English or Math had a 75% chance of dropping out of high school. Heppen & Therriault (2008) also note that creating a system in which student attendance and course performance data is reviewed regularly should be designed within the local context. Early warning systems can be developed at the school, district, and state level with the goal that students are identified early when interventions are most effective at shifting their trajectory (Balfanz 2009).

In addition to providing direct interventions such as attendance monitoring and academic support, members employ the following strategies, identified by MDE as being particularly effective with middle/early high school students (2009) to reinforce student engagement and ultimately high school completion:

**CARING ADULTS:** Members increase the number of caring adult relationships experienced by every youth in the cohort by strengthening informal mentoring and tutoring programs. The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance at the US Department of Education (DOE) recommends connecting students who are at risk of dropping out with adult advocates. The National High School Center concurs, reporting proven dropout prevention programs feature adults working with small groups of students.

**HIGH-QUALITY IN-SCHOOL AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME ACTIVITIES:** Each member implements high-quality academic enrichment and skill-building activities before, during and/or afterschool and in the summer. Research indicates that participation in quality, academically-focused afterschool programs helps to address achievement gaps in English or Math scores between Black vs. White, Hispanic vs. White, and students eligible for free/reduced lunch vs. ineligible (Hill et. al., 2008).

As a result, disengaged youth will spend more hours in high-quality activities and fewer hours in unsupervised or inactive time (a key indicator of disengagement) (Henry, 2006; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010). Members work to ensure youth spend at least 10 hours/week in high-quality activities to improve academic skills as a way to increase engagement.

**SERVICE-LEARNING AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:** Service-learning is a proven student engagement strategy (Search Institute 2005). Members engage youth in meaningful service-learning or civic engagement activities for a minimum of 20 hours/youth. According to the National Dropout

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Prevention Center, "Middle-school students, in particular, benefit from service-learning activities. As research indicates, service learning is a strategy to deliver a variety of interventions because it increases student engagement and provides hands-on learning opportunities." Members strengthen service-learning programs and provide opportunities for youth leadership.

c. Member Training: Members receive training on a wide variety of topics and skill areas relevant to their service throughout the year. Using best practices in working with adult learners, the Alliance uses a variety of methods to support member professional development. Starting within their first two weeks of service, members attend an initial Corps Meeting and are given a Pre-Orientation assignment designed to support the member's introduction to their site, position, students and community. It includes information on prohibited activities and the responsibilities of being an AmeriCorps member. Members also attend a two-day training institute within a month of starting service to build their understanding of the Alliance, its mission, AmeriCorps and national service, and to acquire model-specific skills in dropout prevention. The training curriculum is based on the key interventions members implement that reflect research and best practices in the field of dropout prevention. Members gain skills in facilitating afterschool activities, tutoring/study skills tips, mentoring, volunteer management, behavior management, youth development, evaluation, and leadership.

Ongoing professional development is provided to members through monthly corps meetings. The corps meetings are small groups of members based on geography which meet for a 1/2 day from October through June with Alliance staff. Facilitated by Alliance Directors of Education & Training the meetings are based on a set curriculum utilizing local or state experts and include opportunities for program updates. Topics include: using data to drive impact; service-learning and youth engagement; leadership and conflict resolution; program sustainability; and communicating impact. Finally, members work together to plan national service days. Between meetings, communication with members occurs through email, blogs, webinars, phone calls, and visits. Alliance staff use monthly meetings to train members on their responsibility to ensure the volunteers they recruit are aware of and adhere to AmeriCorps regulations regarding prohibited activities. Site visits, monthly progress reports, and mid-year and year-end performance evaluations are used to review the role of volunteers and ensure that volunteers are not engaged in prohibited activities.

The Alliance gathers the entire corps of members and supervisors in March to reflect on the year and plan for the last third of the year. In July, Life After AmeriCorps training takes place in the Twin Cities Metro and Southern MN to support member and site transition. Evaluations are completed by

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members on the effectiveness of each monthly meeting and statewide gathering, plus a mid-year and year-end training survey assesses the overall effectiveness of training on member preparation and implementation of the model. Survey results inform continuous improvement plans for member and site training.

d. Member Supervision: Each host site identifies a Site Supervisor and Data Coach to work with the member at the sponsoring organization. Site Supervisors provide day-to-day support, help problem-solve and meet at least weekly with their member(s). The Data Coach provides evaluation support, interprets student data and suggests modifications of interventions and community supports. Typically there is a ratio of one supervisor for every two members. Members often are placed in pairs or small teams at a particular site. Before members begin their service, Site Supervisors and Data Coaches are trained in the model, data reporting, and program expectations, including prohibited activities and best practices in supervision. The Site Supervisor leads each member's initial orientation at the host site and in the community. Site Supervisors also attend one day of the initial member orientation and the mid-year retreat to ensure they receive ongoing training and support in supervision.

Alliance staff complete site visits twice each year to facilitate conversations between the member and Site Supervisor about the service experience and site implementation plans. Used as a monitoring and planning tool, site visits assist members and sites in developing future activities. Throughout the year, members and host sites prepare monthly progress reports, noting any issues that should be addressed with support from Alliance staff. In addition, members and Site Supervisors complete a mid-year and year-end performance evaluation. The evaluation form is provided at the start of the year and is used as a tool to guide member development.

e. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: The Alliance is proud to partner with CNCS and our state commission, ServeMinnesota. All communication to host sites, applicants, and members reflects the language of national service. The AmeriCorps name and logo is used appropriately on websites, service gear, recruitment materials (including postcards and online position postings), and program documents (ex. online resource manual). All member position descriptions are required to use the AmeriCorps logo (whether a paper version or online posting). The Alliance ensures that its press releases about the program include CNCS branding and logo. Host sites and members receive training along with materials on how to use branding and talk about national service, CNCS, and AmeriCorps during their respective orientations and during a mid-year retreat. The impact of national service is shared via news articles, web postings, on Facebook, and Twitter. Members are given posters, pins, and other signage to prominently display that their host site supports a national service member. In

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addition, members are provided gear with the AmeriCorps logo to wear each day at their service site. Members are asked to wear gear on special national service days and at events throughout the year.

### Organizational Capability

a. Organizational Background and Staffing: Founded in 1997, the MN Alliance With Youth works to ignite the spark in all young people to become actively engaged, develop strong voices and acquire skills needed for success in school, work and life. Since 1998, the Alliance has utilized AmeriCorps members on the front line to deliver needed services to youth. At Alliance-sponsored regional youth summits in the late 1990s, community and school leaders frequently cited lack of human resources to create a brighter future for youth. We responded by establishing a corps of 10 AmeriCorps members in partnership with America's Promise Alliance that grew to 60 statewide members in 2004 and expanded to 190 members in 2013. The MN Alliance With Youth is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Through fiscal responsibility and an aggressive fund development strategy, the Alliance has a modest fund balance to cover short-term cash flow that mirrors standard government accounting practices. Since its inception, 4 Lt. Governors have co-chaired the Alliance alongside youth co-chairs. The Board provides fiscal oversight for the organization, including the AmeriCorps program. The Board is recruited for their expertise in positive youth development, graduation success, civic engagement, school-community partnerships, and connections to valuable resources. Board committees include Finance, Development, Board Governance and Executive.

Staff are located in two regional offices (Duluth and Twin Cities). Key staff include: Sarah Dixon, President and CEO, who provides overall leadership and strategic plan development, leads resource development, supervises the staff team, develops partnerships, coordinates board relationships, and oversees public relations. During Ms. Dixon's 12-year tenure, the program grew from 10 to 190 members. She brings 28 years of experience in adolescent health including intervention, treatment, counseling, education, and community-wide youth development.

Melissa Burwell, Director of Strategic Initiatives, oversees site development, compliance, grant writing, and supports the Directors of Education and Training. Ms. Burwell joined the Alliance in 2004 and has a master's degree in Counseling and Higher Education.

Each Director of Education and Training supports a caseload of members and sites and facilitates training. Director Renee Anderson joined the Alliance in 2010 and has a master's degree in Social Work and Public Policy. Sarah Ullmer joined the Alliance in 2011, has a degree in Environmental Education and is a certified life coach. Nicholas Beecher and Meghan Aanenson joined the Alliance in 2013. Mr. Beecher has a Master's Degree in Education and has been a classroom teacher. Ms.

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Aanenson has a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Management and experience in administering a VISTA program. We anticipate hiring an additional Director of Education and Training. This person's qualifications will combine education and work experience, with preference for experience with national service.

Julie Muklebust, Business Manager, coordinates fiscal responsibilities for the program. She joined the Alliance in 2008 and has a background in accounting and management.

Hannah Zelmer, AmeriCorps Compliance Assistant, oversees member files, compliance, and enrollment. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. Hannah Nemetz, Program Associate, provides logistical and office support for trainings and events. She is working towards a Bachelor's Degree in Youth Development. Both joined the Alliance in 2013.

Mark Gruen, Evaluation Specialist, has a master's degree in Nonprofit Management with an emphasis in Evaluation and Policy. He joined the Alliance in 2013 and has experience in research and program evaluation, and will support data coaching and member fidelity checks with progress reporting.

The Alliance contracts with Cammy Lehr, Ph.D., Project Coordinator for Implementation and Effective Educational Practices and the Dropout Prevention Initiative at MDE. She provides access to cutting edge research, best practices, and staff development to ensure that staff and sites are replicating the model with fidelity.

Finally, the Alliance contracts with an external evaluator, Lange Research and Evaluation (LRE), to provide oversight, ensure compliance with all reporting requirements, and contribute to the continuous improvement process. Working with staff, LRE develops and executes the evaluation plan.

b. Compliance and Accountability: The Alliance has consistently received high marks from our state commission regarding financial and programmatic compliance and often is highlighted as a program best practice. We unflinchingly ensure sites and members adhere to CNCS guidelines and regulations. We have unqualified audits both for financial and programmatic sides of the program. We are responsive to state commission and CNCS requests for information. To ensure accountability, members and supervisors jointly complete monthly progress reports on activities and sustainability. The Directors of Training and Education conduct regular compliance visits and monitor member monthly progress reports to prevent and detect compliance issues, including issues related to prohibited or allowable activities.

Alliance staff make at least two in-person monitoring visits per year that are focused on the site's compliance to the model, program development, supervision, timesheets/hours requirements,

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evaluation, member experience, and planning. Alliance staff observes the member and site in action to ensure that sites are in compliance with all AmeriCorps regulations and rules. Alliance staff complete a written report outlining areas of strengths and areas needing improvement for the members, Site Supervisors, and Data Coaches. Sites are given a deadline to make adjustments and must comply or face the possibility of the member being removed from the site.

d. Past Performance for Current Grantees: We have just started the third year of a revised program model. In each year of our grant, our goal was for 80 members to serve 2,400 youth with intensive, individualized interventions with at least 1,680 youth completing at least 12 weeks of support and 100% of them showing signs of improvement in one of the Early Warning Indicators of Attendance or Behavior. Students were to be engaged in service learning and supported by volunteers. In PY11-12, 80 members served 1,705 youth, of whom 1,452 completed at least 12 weeks of support while in PY12-13, 3,896 youth were served of whom 1,831 completed at least 12 weeks of support.

In 2011-12, of the 1,452 students who received individualized interventions during the school year, 334 youth had data that was comparable over the course of the year. Of those, 49% improved in either attendance or behavior as a result of the members' support. In 2012-13, the program made great strides in tracking and monitoring of student data. Of the 1,831 youth who received interventions during the school year, 1,665 (90%) completed the program. For those youth who completed the program and had complete Attendance and Behavior data to compare, 77% had fewer office visits, 86% decreased suspensions, and 85% improved their rate of suspensions. In addition, 33% increased daily attendance and 33% reduced their tardiness.

**CORRECTIVE ACTION:** The Alliance has made positive inroads in tracking, aggregating, and analyzing student data through the second year of the program even while just falling short of meeting our targets. The youth we serve are some of the hardest to reach and any improvement is significant. Of those students who had complete data in PY12-13, a large percentage showed significant gains on the ABCs as a result of members' efforts.

To ensure the Alliance has sufficient and accurate data to demonstrate the impact of youth participants, additional staff and technological structures are being put in place. As a result of challenges with member reporting, the hiring of staff and improved technology has allowed the Alliance to improve procedures in the second year resulting in improved numbers for comparison moving forward. We continue to assess and re-evaluate our training and data collection tools to ensure we have accurate, timely, and usable data to demonstrate the impact members are having on the students they serve. This year, redeveloped tools and supports allowed for us to have more

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accurate data to report and more numbers to compare than in the first year of the program. We know the additional enhancements made to the OnCorps system (our online database) in the final quarter will allow us to correctly and accurately collect and analyze data throughout the course of the year as intended.

**ENROLLMENT AND RETENTION:** In the last full year of the program the Alliance had 100% enrollment and a 94% retention rate for the Central and Southern Corps. 20% of members returned for a second year of service. We are confident that we have the systems and staff in place to support a 25% increase in members and maintain our 100% enrollment. Our host site partners overwhelmingly request more MSYs than we are able to award -- last year we had a 46% increase in requests over the prior year. Their commitment and our continual refinement of recruitment and supervision systems are well positioned to support this expansion. We work to ensure members receive the most accurate information in advance of their national service experience. We support host sites in being compliant and able to fulfill the model with fidelity which contributes to member retention. We know the members who end their service early do so for financial reasons. In this economic climate, serving in a full-time capacity can burden families. The Alliance provides resources, coaching and makes accommodations regarding hours when needed to support members who struggle to maintain hours because they work an additional job and can't complete their term of service.

d. Continuous Improvement: Alliance staff use a variety of methods to develop a continuous improvement plan and solicit ongoing feedback from internal and external stakeholders. Staff utilize feedback to adjust systems and assess what additional training and support is needed. If targets are not met, staff, host sites, and members receive additional training. The Alliance also uses feedback from the state commission to ensure we meet compliance requirements. In addition, our external evaluator provides insight on implementation of the model and makes recommendations for areas of improvement.

Staff work with sites during visits to identify areas of growth and develop an action plan to help sites achieve targets. Members and sites are surveyed about key aspects of the program, from recruitment to training to evaluation, throughout the year. In addition, a small council of members and supervisors serve as a sounding board to assist Alliance staff in strategic planning and evaluation of the program and its implementation process.

To assess how the program is implementing the model across sites, Alliance staff use 7 indicators in the first quarter to identify which sites and members need early intervention. Sites complete an improvement plan to document how they will ensure they are meeting requirements and may be

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given a mentor who is an experienced supervisor to support their efforts. Sites that require additional assistance receive extra monitoring visits by staff to ensure they remain in compliance. In order to host members in the future, the community partner must work with Alliance staff to refine their continuous improvement plan with clear benchmarks and demonstrate commitment to implementing the Alliance model. The plan is reviewed with members, Site Supervisors, and Alliance staff throughout the year with ongoing support and feedback provided for implementation plans.

### **Budget/Cost Effectiveness**

a. Cost-Effectiveness: In comparison to other models of dropout prevention, the Alliance program is cost-effective. The total cost per MSY is \$24,605 with CNCS contributing \$12,302.50/MSY. Research conducted by USDOE's School Dropout Demonstration Assistance Program (SDDAP) in the late 1990s found that effective programs cost as much as \$28,000 per student to operate. Our model is focused on primary prevention and selected interventions, which means the cost per student is much lower than the cost of more specialized interventions. Given the high cost to society that dropouts have, our model is extremely cost effective and will save the US economy, schools and communities in the long run.

Because of the leveraging power of AmeriCorps and a funding model that combines federal, state and private resources, there is a remarkable return on investment for each funding partner. The federal share of launching a student on a trajectory of success is as little as \$410 per year. The human capital of AmeriCorps members and the individualized support they provide for students is a significant benefit to schools and community-based organizations, freeing up resources to be directly applied to individual students.

b. Budget Adequacy: The total budget for this AmeriCorps program is \$2,460,500. The CNCS contribution is \$1,230,250 or \$12,302.50 per 100 MSYs, which is under the \$13,000 per MSY limit for a Fixed Amount Grant. Based on years of experience, the Alliance knows what a high quality program costs per member. Our request for federal support is less than the CNCS limit for the federal share because of our large host site cash match and our ability to raise private funds from foundations and individuals. The Alliance match of \$1,230,250 (which is 50% of the total program budget) is raised through a local host site cash match (\$680,000 or \$6,800/member), state appropriation (\$50,000 or \$500/member) and locally raised foundation, corporate funds and in-kind (\$500,250). In addition, the Alliance balances revenue to expenses and maintains a modest fund balance in order to ensure the budget is met.

In 2013, the Alliance raised over \$1,310,250 from host sites. Sites willingly allocate this expense

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because of the value of the AmeriCorps members and the powerful leverage of the program.

Significant in-kind commitments are secured from organizations such as AmeriCoach, Duluth Public Schools, and MDE. Total in-kind contributions are valued at \$716,500.

Select sources of funding to support host site cash match and programming include: \$35,000 from Delta Dental of MN, \$40,000 from Bigelow Foundation, \$50,000 from America's Promise, \$50,000 from AT&T Foundation, \$65,000 from St. Paul Foundation, \$75,000 from State Farm, \$210,000 from Otto Bremer Foundation, and \$461,600 from Youthprise Foundation.

In addition, the Alliance developed a line item in the budget to cover the cost of Criminal History Check and FBI checks as required by AmeriCorps regulations. We continue to raise significant cash match from host sites and partners, and our Development Committee is committed to raising private funds at greater levels than in the past. The committee recently completed a Fund Development Strategic Plan which includes an aggressive strategy for prospect research and encouraging additional giving from the Board.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

1. Description of Theory of Change: A substantial body of research has found that the specific educational indicators of attendance, behavior referrals, and core academic performance of 6th to 10th graders provide powerful insight into which students are most likely to eventually drop out of school. Our program's Theory of Change is that targeted, individualized interventions (including mentoring, high quality in/out-of-school activities, academic supports, and service learning) case managed by a caring adult can shift an at-risk students' trajectory and help them to graduate on time. Informed by research, our members work with school personnel to use attendance, behavior, and academic indicators to identify a core group of about 30 youth in grades 6 through 10 on which to focus their efforts (a.k.a. a caseload). Members develop positive, caring adult relationships with these youth, and provide them with targeted interventions before, during and/or afterschool, and in the summer.

In order to monitor progress and ensure that the right students receive the right interventions at the right time, members track student data on attendance, behavior, and academic indicators throughout the program year. As students progress over time, members adjust strategies and dosages. As a result of this intensive individualized support, youth will demonstrate an increased engagement in school and learning as shown by an increase in attendance, decrease in behavior referrals, and increase in core academic skills.

2. Program Evaluation Design: The overarching question for the summative evaluation addresses the

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extent that AmeriCorps members implemented interventions identified by Johns Hopkins University, the National Dropout Prevention Center and MDE's Dropout Prevention Initiative to re-engage youth in school and learning (including mentoring, high quality in/out-of-school activities, academic supports, and service-learning). The Alliance Logic Model, use of qualitative and quantitative methods of gathering data (narrative progress reports plus weekly tracking documents), and site visits contribute to creating both a process and outcome evaluation for the program. The Alliance uses an online system, OnCorps, that is password-protected, to track individual student data. The system allows sites and members to review student progress and made adjustments. The Alliance aggregates and analyzes the data across the program to demonstrate the impact of the program.

The following questions guide the summative evaluation, focusing on desired outputs and direct, intermediate, and long-term outcomes:

A: To what extent have desired outputs been achieved? Outputs are the result of the implementation procedures described above. In addressing this question, summative project data will be collected (primarily using OnCorps) to identify program outputs identified above by the Alliance, including:

- \* Numbers of Members
- \* Numbers of students served
- \* Evidence-based interventions used
- \* Numbers of caring adults and their time spent with students
- \* In-school and out-of-school activities together with hours per week of student participation
- \* Service learning projects and participation hours per youth

B: To what extent have desired outcomes been achieved? Outcomes result in systems change and can be described in terms of direct outcomes, which result from outputs, intermediate outcomes that are the result of direct outcomes, and a long-term outcome that typically takes three years or longer to demonstrate.

\* Direct outcome: Student engagement will increase. The measure for this direct outcome is continued student participation in the Alliance program, with a target of 60% of students will complete 3 months of participation (data collected by Members and reported in OnCorps).

\* Intermediate outcomes: Youth will show improvement in the following:

1) There will be improved student attendance. The target for this intermediate outcome is 45% of students will demonstrate improved attendance;

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2) There will be decreased student discipline actions. The target for this intermediate outcome is that 45% of students will demonstrate zero or reduced numbers of disciplinary actions;

\*Long-term outcome. By the end of the grant cycle, over 4,050 youth will get back on track to graduate from high school on time.

3. Data Collection Procedures: Members and host sites work together to identify youth for caseloads using the early warning indicators. Baseline information about each youth is collected weekly (demographics and ABC data), and tracked in the Alliance's online password-protected data tracking system, OnCorps. Interventions, dosage, volunteer involvement and weekly/monthly reports on student attendance and behavior is entered into the system by the member. Baseline data are then used to compute attendance rates and disciplinary referral rates. Monthly, members and their Youth Success Team review progress both on ABCs and on dosage of interventions in order to make adjustments. Alliance staff review data monthly including narrative reports that members and sites submit as well. Each quarter, Alliance staff and the Alliance's external evaluator, Lange Research and Evaluation, Inc. (LRE), work together to evaluate organizational progress towards desired outputs and direct, intermediate, and long-term outcomes on a quarterly and annual basis.

In order to track progress of individual students, members are trained in using OnCorps. To ensure information is kept confidential, Alliance staff allocate additional time and energy to train new members in student data privacy policies during Member Orientation. Once a caseload is created and members are trained in the conceptual and technical aspects of evaluation, members create a profile for each youth on their caseload in OnCorps. Members are trained by the Alliance staff to track several types of data in OnCorps. Members collect demographic and educational data on their caseload to record who they serve and establish a baseline with which they can later evaluate student progress. Demographic data include: name; birthdate; grade; program start date; and the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System number. Baseline data is taken from the preceding time period and include: academic score and score type; absences, tardies, and the total number of instructional days or periods to which the absences and tardies correspond; office visits, detentions, and days suspended out-of-school, and the total number of instructional days or periods to which the office visits, detentions, and days suspended out-of-school correspond. Baseline data are then used to compute attendance rates and disciplinary referral rates.

In addition to baseline data, members input ongoing educational data into OnCorps to monitor student progress. Each week, members input attendance, behavior, and core academic indicator data,

## Narratives

as well as the types of interventions provided, their duration, and who provided the interventions. In the second or third month of the program year (October/November) Alliance staff begin to analyze the data that members have input into OnCorps. Staff identify any early issues in the evaluation system and provide additional follow up to any members and/or host sites to ensure that a plan to access data is in place and any data access issues are addressed appropriately.

Also in October, members submit their first monthly reflection in OnCorps and are trained how to generate reports in OnCorps and use the data to inform their support of their caseload. Monthly reflection questions generally include two components: reflection on the meaning of report data of their caseload youth and a description of a success with a youth. Members use the reports generated by OnCorps to compare baseline data to ongoing attendance, behavior, and core academic indicator data and assess progress.

4. Evaluation Results: The Alliance uses several methods to share the results and impact of both the formative and summative program evaluation with key stakeholders. Alliance staff generate an aggregated quarterly report for the state commission and Board of Directors. This information is also shared with members and host sites along with highlights of promising practices and great stories. In addition, this information is shared to a wider group of stakeholders through e-newsletters and social media. The progress report data is also used in determining future host sites along with developing program-wide continuous improvement plans for all systems from recruitment and retention to training to financial management.

### Amendment Justification

NA

### Clarification Summary

CLARIFICATION 2014 - April 8, 2014

1) Budget clarification items:

a) The CCR registration is scheduled to expire on 02/03/2015. Please remember the registration must be current and active to receive an award from CNCS.

The Minnesota Alliance With Youth updates their registration through [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov) on a yearly basis.

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2) Programmatic clarification items: Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled "Clarification Summary" as appropriate. Please provide a header to this narrative that indicates CLARIFICATION 2014 with the date of your response.

a) Please explain what training is provided before members start service and how this training prepares them to deliver the multiple interventions.

Site supervisors & site coordinators participate in a regional four hour pre-service training in May (prior to the start of the year) which covers the following topics: Member activities & implementing interventions with high quality at your site; Evaluation, data access, & reporting requirements; Developing a Youth Success Team; Recruitment & Supervision, including AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities; Planning member training & orientation; Communicating the impact of your member on students & the community. Supervisors & coordinators are invited to participate in ongoing training via webinar on AmeriCorps & the Alliance 101, Evaluation, and Supervision during May, June & July -- all prior to the start of the program year.

As a result of this pre-service site supervisor training, members receive individualized training from their host sites immediately upon beginning their year of service. Training includes reviewing curriculum and resources particular to the site to support interventions delivered by the member. For example, one of our sites provides training in Study Island, an online academic skills program that members can use with students. At another site, members receive training in PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports) used both in-school & out of school programming. Minneapolis Public Schools provides their members with researched-based attendance intervention training as part of the Check and Connect model, which aligns with the Promise Fellow model.

All Members participate in a First Small Corps meeting during their first two weeks of service focused on serving as an AmeriCorps member, prohibited activities, background on the Alliance, and an overview of the Promise Fellow model and multiple interventions they will provide at their site as part of our model.

Following the First Small Corps meetings, all Members participate in a three day Promise Fellow Institute in mid-September. The curriculum of the initial three day Institute is designed using best practices in adult education drawing upon experience, resource sharing, reflection, and experiential

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activities to build member skills. Members have varied levels of experience in the interventions of the Alliance model. Workshops complement and build member skills and knowledge in providing interventions. If a member comes with a high level of expertise in tutoring but less experience in service-learning, members are encouraged to attend a series of service-learning trainings to gain a deeper understanding of the intervention. While all members receive a baseline training in each intervention, additional workshops provide more intensive instruction throughout their service. Subsequent monthly meetings build the knowledge and understanding of the members in delivering interventions. Specific training at the institute includes the following pertaining to the multiple interventions that Promise Fellows deliver to their students; Working with Survival Based Youth, Basic Youth Development, Attendance Based Interventions, Behavior Intervention Training, Tutoring Strategies, High Quality Out of School Time Strategies, Key Elements of Effective Service-Learning Practices, and High Quality Mentoring. These workshops are facilitated by experts in the field who are provided with a thorough understanding of the Promise Fellow role and model to help best meet the training needs of the Promise Fellows in their first month of service.

Host Site Supervisors also attend one day of the Promise Fellow Institute to support the Promise Fellows in understanding their role in supporting students and implementing specific interventions. In addition, the three day Institute builds on the initial First Small Corps meetings, which members participate in within two weeks of the start of service. The three day Institute occurs two weeks later. This timing allows the member to get acquainted with their host community and site during the intervening days. Members are better able to put their training into perspective after learning about their community and school prior to intensive intervention training.

b) In the Clarification narrative field, please enter a statement confirming the desired grant award start and member enrollment period start.

The 2014 - 2015 grant award start and member enrollment period start is September 1, 2014 and end date is August 31, 2015.

3) Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants:

a) Performance Measure ED2 has mentoring as an intervention. Mentoring interventions may only be selected for ED3A and ED4A. De-select mentoring as an intervention in the ED2 performance

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measure. You may create a new mentoring PM using ED3A/ED4A if you choose.

Mentoring as an intervention was de-selected in the PM Section. We chose not create a new mentoring PM.

b) Please define what you will consider a "substantial improvement" per the Performance Measures Instructions.

Substantial improvement refers to both the individual and the aggregate improvement (in any of the elements: attendance, completion of assignments & discipline referrals) of students in the program. This signifies 1350 or 75% of the students who complete the program increase their academic engagement. Any increase in attendance, assignment completion or decrease in discipline referrals is significant because of the high needs of the students served. Changes were also made in the PM Section.

4) Strategic Engagement Slots Clarification:

a) 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?

The Alliance values recruiting a diverse pool of applicants and hiring members with a variety of backgrounds. We will use similar recruitment strategies that we use for communities of color, emphasizing relationship building, posting in specific & accessible venues such as Access Press & University Disability Services offices, and tapping into alumni with disabilities to identify potential members. We will target 5% of our positions for members with disabilities.

b) Increase number of additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities:

The MN Alliance With Youth will not be requesting any additional MSYs for individuals with disabilities for this grant.

5) MSY With No Program Funds Attached Clarification (No Cost MSYs):

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The MN Alliance With Youth will not be requesting No-Cost MSY positions for this grant.

6) Healthcare Clarification Items: Health care clarification items are to be addressed by programs with full-time members (excluding EAP and Professional Corps):

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

The Corps Network/Summit America

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

Our program switched from SRC-Aetna to The Corps Network when SRC determined that they would no longer be able to provide coverage to AmeriCorps programs. The Corps Network assured us that they were working closely with CNCS and HHS to have the plan either be exempt from MEC or try to provide coverage that meets the MEC requirement.

c) 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?

No, the Alliance is still trying to receive bids from providers who will offer a Minimum Essential Coverage plan to members knowing they are not employees. Until the Alliance can find a provider to cover our members we have no idea what the financial impact will be to the budget.

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

At this point we cannot determine what the full financial impact will be. If we were to find a provider that will provide MEC than we could be looking a monthly premiums to rise up to 300%

e) If you do not have enough information to answer question (d), please explain why not and/or what

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prevented you from being able to obtain the necessary information.

It is very hard to find a provider that will provide coverage that meets the Affordable Care Act because the AmeriCorps members are not considered employees. The providers we have reached out to do not understand AmeriCorps and therefore are unwilling to provide coverage.

### **Continuation Changes**

NA

### **Grant Characteristics**