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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program will have 63 half-time Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program members. Members each provide 10-12 Arkansas Delta Region Elementary School students at increased risk for academic failure with 1-2 hours of one-on-one tutoring in math and literacy weekly. At the end of the first program year, No less than 630 students will receive program services. As a result of this tutoring no less than 70% (441) of targeted students will score at basic or higher achievement levels on post program implementation academic assessments. In addition, the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 176 volunteers who will be engaged in school based hunger relief efforts.

This project focuses on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$409,733.00 will be matched with no less than \$248,189.00 in public funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

A. PROGRAM DESIGN

1. Problem/Need: The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress data reports (2013), in Arkansas 68 percent of all fourth graders and 78 percent of lower income fourth graders were reading below proficient levels. The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK ESC) serves schools in eight counties in the Arkansas Delta Region. In November 2014, each of the 22 elementary schools, located in these eight counties, served by the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program ranked at a Needs Improvement, Needs Improvement Focus, or Needs Improvement Priority status in the Arkansas Department of Education's (ADE) school accountability system. These rankings indicate the percentage of students performing at proficient and advanced levels does not meet the annual measurable academic achievement goals set by ADE for each individual school. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) school accountability system measures student performance on state assessments looking at the data in three different ways; student achievement, student growth and graduation rate at high schools. The system maintains a focus on helping students achieve proficiency in both literacy and math, but also gives credit for improving performance along the way. Each school and school district is assigned Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs). Those AMOs were set from the 2012 assessment results as required by the U.S. Department of Education. The school's AMOs or targets are individualized. Each school has a target for performance and a

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target for growth. School classifications include Exemplary, Achieving, Needs Improvement, Needs Improvement Focus, or Needs Improvement Priority.

An example from one of the 22 schools served: A school's annual measurable objective in 3rd grade literacy was that 82.9% of tested students would perform at the proficient or advanced levels. Only 73.21% of students performed at the proficient or advanced levels. They did not meet this and other objectives. They were identified as a needs improvement school because they had failed to meet objectives. The Smart Start AmeriCorps program serves students scoring below proficient level. High poverty rates, reduced community and economic resources, and a shortage of qualified and highly qualified educators are all factors contributing to poor academic performance in participating schools. Not only does living in poverty affect the academic performance of those students in that situation, but also poverty has a negative effect on the academic performance of students not living in poverty (Maine Education Policy Research Institute, USM, 2014).

The poverty level in a school is the best predictor of student academic performance. The relationship between family socioeconomic characteristics and student achievement has been the subject of many in depth studies since the early 1960s. These studies reveal a strong correlation between low socioeconomic status and poor academic performance. More recent studies reveal the academic achievement gap between students living in poverty and students living above the median income level has actually grown over the past thirty years (Sean Reardon, Stanford University 2011).

The US poverty rate for children under 18 was 19.9% according to the US Census Bureau. In the eight counties served by the cooperative an average 36.3% of all children under the age of 18 live in poverty. Greater than 50% of children under the age of 18 are living in poverty in Chicot County, one of the eight counties served by this program (Arkansas Child Poverty Update). In 2008-2012 the average median household income of the counties served was \$32,615.00, less than 63% of the national median income (US Census Bureau). The average percentage of students receiving free or reduced meals for the 2014-15 school year in the 22 elementary schools served is 90% (ADE).

Decreased resources, population decline, and decreased revenue have all had an impact on the ability of SEARK Schools to address the educational needs of area students. These Delta counties are all rural, sparsely populated, and lack the resources to support healthy community growth. Southeast Arkansas families were once supported by thriving family farms, locally owned timber businesses, and the retail businesses that supported both. As the farming and timber industries shifted from being family owned and operated to corporate owned, the economy of the Southeast Arkansas Delta suffered greatly. Textiles manufacturing companies relocated to Central and South America. Local

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businesses gradually closed and many families were forced to leave the Delta to seek employment opportunities to support their families. Downtown areas are in disrepair with many vacant and boarded up buildings. From the years 2000-2012, the Delta Region of Arkansas lost 7% of its population and 10.9% of its jobs (RPA). Public school enrollment as a result decreased by 5% in the region served. Because of the distance between school districts and sparseness of population these schools are often overlooked for funding and research projects due to the additional cost and effort required for providing and monitoring services.

Directly related to the issues of poverty and education success and information that helps to continue to paint a picture of the Arkansas Delta region, are data and details related to food and hunger. Vast food deserts exist in the region. According to the 2013 University of Arkansas's Division of Agriculture's Rural Profile of Arkansas (RPA) in the eight counties served by this AmeriCorps Program between 24.3 and 43.1% of the population reside greater than 1 mile from the nearest store. Between 4.6 and 27.2% of this population reside greater than 10 miles from the nearest store. Stores in many of the communities lack competition and drive prices up on essential items, thus increasing the stress of poverty for community members. The percentage of the Delta Region population receiving food stamps is 29%. We highlight these statistics because in the last several years, our AmeriCorps members have identified hunger as one of the priority community needs in Southeast Arkansas and the students they serve. When children come to school hungry, they are less able to focus and learn; the research is clear. The National Education Association states that, "missing meals and experiencing hunger impair children's development and achievement". Studies published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Pediatrics, and the Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry document the negative effects of hunger on children's academic performance and behavior in school. Hungry children have lower math scores. They are also more likely to repeat a grade, come to school late, or miss it entirely (National Education Association). If a child is hungry they cannot learn to the best of their ability. The two meals Southeast Arkansas students receive at school are the only meals some children receive.

Poverty is not the only factor contributing to academic failure in SEARK. A shortage of qualified and highly qualified teachers exists within this region. The Arkansas Department of Education has identified four of the eight counties served by this program to be 2013-2014 Geographic Shortage Area Teachers. All eight counties have a shortage of highly qualified teachers. Teachers with four characteristics, or dimensions, of teacher quality consistently generate higher student achievement: content knowledge, experience, teacher training and certification, and general cognitive skills (Center

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for Public Education, Updated on Aug 27, 2014). Through this program members gain skills, experience to build these dimensions, and funding to pursue a college education as they assist targeted students in improving their academic performance. Many former members are now qualified educators within the region's schools, with over 60 former members are now operating as certified teachers within the SEARK ESC area.

The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK ESC) established the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program in 2006 to provide area students at increased risk for academic failure with in-school tutoring services to help improve their academic performance. Through the Arkansas AmeriCorps Smart Start program 63 half-time AmeriCorps members provide 630 at risk for academic failure with additional weekly 1-2 hour math and literacy tutoring session to enhance student academic growth throughout the school year. Additionally, they will integrate ways to address the hunger issue by recruiting volunteers to focus on this effort and integrate food-focused activities on national days of service and as special program-wide projects. As a result over 70% of targeted students will be performing at basic or higher levels of academic achievement as evidenced by beginning of year, mid-year, and end of year academic assessments. Members will also gain experience in the education field and earn education awards for completed terms of service. Through this program the region is able to nurture and mentor quality educators to serve in SEARK.

2. Theory of Change and Logic Model: The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps theory of change assumes that by providing students at increased risk for academic failure with one-on-one high quality in-school tutoring services students' academic performance will improve.

To promote academic growth in 630 at-risk for academic failure k-5th grade students, 63 Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps half-time program members each provide 10-12 students tutoring support services that enhance those currently provided by area schools. Members apply the knowledge and tutoring skills they learn through program training to teach the five basic reading skills and common core grade appropriate math concepts. Members work with school district math and literacy coaches and classroom teachers to create tutoring plans for individual targeted students. Targeted students receive 1-2 hours of one-on-one literacy and math tutoring each week for seven months. Positive reinforcement is a stimulus provided by tutors which follows and is contingent upon a behavior such as, correctly spelling a new word or using a new word in the correct context. Many psychological and educational studies support the use of positive reinforcement programs to support positive behaviors and academic achievement.

Logic model: If 63 half-time Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps members provide at least 630 targeted

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students with additional one-on-one tutoring services and use positive reinforcement strategies to encourage positive behavior/learning, no less than 70% (441) of targeted students will demonstrate academic growth and score at basic or higher achievement levels on post program implementation academic assessments. As a result of improved academic knowledge and skills targeted student will successfully complete elementary school without being retained at a grade level and become high school graduates.

Program performance measures are; ED2- No less than 630 students will complete participation in the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps tutoring services and ED5-No less than 441(70%) of the 630 targeted students completing participation in the Arkansas Smart Start Program will demonstrate improved academic knowledge and skills on post program common core assessments.

This program will not only have an impact on students served, but also have an impact on the schools served, and the members who serve. First our schools will continue to recognize the benefit of one-on-one tutoring services have for risk students and expand/modify current in-school tutoring programs. As a result of members' service in the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program members will receive education awards and become college graduates, become gainfully employed, and continue to provide community service and teach within the region.

Additionally members will collaborate with school personnel and community members to conduct no less than two community service projects each program year. Members work with schools to identify a community need and develop a service project to help address the identified need, with many focusing on hunger or other poverty related issues. Through these efforts members gain an understanding of community needs and their ability to make a positive impact to help address that need. Many members report they were unaware of children in their communities going hungry, being without utilities, and not having proper clothing for cold weather prior to serving within area schools. Finally, this program support college-aged member growth in community service, and provides valuable training and experience in the education field. The recruitment of quality educators is difficult in impoverished rural areas. Through this program a cadre of exceptional teachers has been recruited to serve Southeast Arkansas Schools. Many of these college students would not have had the resources to complete college without the education award they earned through community service. Only 13% of rural Arkansans have a college degree. Many Arkansas Universities now offer additional scholarships designated for AmeriCorps members completing their terms of community service, providing member further support in attaining academic goals.

Evidence Base: The desired outcome of this program is that no less than 70% of targeted at risk for

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academic failure students will demonstrate improved academic performance on post intervention academic assessments. To help accomplish this, 63 half-time members will provide 630-756 students scoring below basic on academic assessments with 1-2 hours of one-on-one tutoring in math and literacy weekly. State academic assessments and program pre and post intervention assessments are conducted to help guide the tutoring process. These formal and informal assessments track the progress of students in order to adjust their content and strategies to improve tutoring sessions.

Moderate Evidence: The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program is presenting two studies to that validate the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring programs delivered by community volunteers. The first study is a quantitative study conducted by this program, the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program over the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 AmeriCorps program years. The second study is a 3 year experimental study of the Reading Partners program. Program similarities are: Targeted Population- both programs serve low-income students who are not meeting grade appropriate reading levels. Tutoring services are provided by AmeriCorps members (volunteers). The dose and duration of tutoring services is the same. Pre and post program implementation assessments as well as mid-year assessments are conducted to assess student progress and guide tutoring services. While this program serves a much larger population over a broad area and does not provide math tutoring it shares many similarities with the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps Program.

1st Study: To determine the effectiveness of one-on-one tutoring sessions provided by AmeriCorps members to students identified by schools through standardized testing as scoring at less than proficient in literacy and/or math a quantitative study was created. The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative elementary math and literacy specialists, testing coordinator, and information technology staff created an assessment tool and plan to assess student grade appropriate math and literacy knowledge and skills based on the Arkansas Department of Education's common core standards. Targeted students are assessed before tutoring services begin, at the end of the first semester, and at the end of the school year. Pre and post intervention assessments measure change in student academic performance. The mid-year assessment allows school math and literacy specialist and members to assess the effectiveness of current strategies used and modify tutoring and reinforcement strategies if necessary to better serve individual students.

During the 2012-2013 program year pre-program, midterm and post-program assessment indicated 721 out of 792 (91%) students' academic performance improved from the pre assessment to post assessment. Kindergarten students showed the most gain with an average of 33% on pre-program assessment to an average of 78% on the post program assessment.

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During the 2013-2014 program year assessments indicated 601 out of 704 (85%) students' academic performance improved from the pre-program assessment to post program assessment. Students in kindergarten through fifth grades averaged an increase of 21% from the pre-test to post-test scores. This study provides preliminary evidence that weekly 1-2 hour one-on-one tutoring sessions provided by Smart Start AmeriCorps members are effective in improving the academic performance of students at increased risk for academic failure.

2nd Study: MDRC, a nonprofit, nonpartisan education and social policy research organization conducted a program evaluation for Reading Partners, a successful one-on-one volunteer tutoring program that serves struggling readers in low-income elementary schools. This program is very large, serving over 7,000 students in seven states and Washington DC. An experimental study was conducted with a randomly selected number of students receiving services and a control group; the final sample of 1,166 out of the 1,265 students randomly selected completed the study. Through this study MDRC found a positive and statistically significant impact on all three measures of student reading proficiency, with effect-size impact of 0.10 on reading comprehension scores, 0.09 on reading fluency, and 0.11 on sight-word reading.

4. Notice Priority: The Arkansas Smart Start program focuses on the CNCS Funding Priority-Education-improving academic performance. Program members provide services and resources that contribute to improved academic scores of economically disadvantaged youth identified at increased risk for academic failure. The 63 half-time members serve K-5th grade students in schools within the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative area of service which includes eight counties in the Arkansas Delta Region. Members target 10-12 students with 1-2 hours of tutoring in math and or literacy each week. Greater than 80% of member time served is dedicated to tutoring.

5. Member Training: Each Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps member must attend no less than 42 hours of annual training. Training is specific to the cognitive development and skills required to provide quality tutoring services to at risk students, member professional growth, and identifying and addressing community needs. Additionally members attend school district orientation and training conducted by the schools they will serve prior to program initiation. This orientation covers the specific school district policies and procedures as well as orientation to the schools math and literacy programs.

Upon Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program initiation, members complete a three-day orientation which covers diverse topics that support their understanding of the AmeriCorps program, the Smart Start program and equips them with the beginning tools to start their service in their

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schools. First, members are trained on the Corporation for National and Community Service and Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps programs, policies, procedures, and prohibited activities. Our purpose is to help members understand the larger programs of which they are a part, the larger work of SEARK, and to understand the policies and rules that guide their service and the program. With regards to prohibited and unallowable activities, members are walked through what they cannot do during their term of service and while accruing hours and are then broken up into teams, given various scenarios, and asked to demonstrate how they would respond in these situations. Returning members help presenters to guide teams through this process and provide additional insight based on their previous year experience. Second, members are trained in Community Service 101: Ways to Get Involved in Your Community. This covers identifying community needs, available resources, community partners, and volunteer recruitment. Third, The SEARK ESC Math and Literacy Specialist provide members with training on the five basic reading skills, common core grade appropriate math concepts, and tutoring strategies for one-on-one instruction applicable to math and literacy. This training is structured around the principals of learning and follows a sequentially arranged, systemic approach. Finally, members receive training on motivational strategies to use in tutoring and learn how to organize their tutoring schedule and sessions.

Once initial training is received, members work closely with classroom teachers and school reading and math specialists to develop and implement a tutoring plan to meet each targeted student's needs. School math and literacy coaches who are certified teachers who specialize in either math or literacy, advise and mentor members and provide hands on training to support member growth throughout the program year.

During the second semester of each school year, members receive additional training on math tutoring strategies conducted by the SEARK ESC Math Specialist. This includes strategies to facilitate growth in math knowledge and skills and is provided to benefit targeted students and build members' confidence and cognitive skills related to math/problem solving.

Additionally, members are provided ongoing training throughout the year to support their personal and professional development needs that not only support the service they do in school, but also to help them with future professional goals. Members have two additional training opportunities provided through the program annually. Topics covered in the past include American Heart Association Heart Saver First Aid, CPR, and AED; Dressing for Success; Resume; Writing; Recognizing Diversity; Citizenship; Communication; and Internet Safety.

6. Member Supervision: The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program uses a centralized

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management structure to handle all administrative functions and collaborates with individual schools (service sites) to select and assign members. This program utilizes a three prong supervision strategy to ensure high quality and consistent services are provided by members.

Our first supervision strategy is through the Smart Start AmeriCorps program director. Our Program Director supports and oversees members through monthly site visits and, as needed, holds meeting to provide ongoing member monitoring and support. She ensures that members are both committed and having a successful program year. On site visits, the program director meets with site supervisors and members to ensure program and service site expectations are being met, to discuss member performance strengths and weaknesses, and ensures school and member compliance with CNCS rules and regulations.

Our second supervision strategy involves monitoring through the monthly reporting that each member is required to do and for which the Program Director monitors and provides feedback. Members submit monthly time sheets electronically and mail documentation of services provided to the program coordinator. Documentation is to be received by SEARK ESC no later than the 5th of each month. Documentation includes the member's: personal daily activity journal, signed documentation of tutoring services provided, a success story related to a particular program experience gained that month, reports of community service projects, parent involvement activities, volunteer recruitment, and sign in sheets. This allows the program director to monitor member progress in fulfilling program requirements in addition to monthly site visits.

Our third supervision strategy happens on a site level and includes two layers. First a school administrator housed within each school/service site is responsible for supervising the members that provide service within their school. This person is directly responsible for ensuring members are on site and providing services as scheduled. Site supervisors meet with the program director to complete a mid-year member evaluation. Together, the site supervisor and the program director, work with the members to develop a plan to promote continued professional growth/improvement. Members and supervisors also complete a mid-year and end of year program evaluation to identify program strengths and weaknesses that aid in improving the program and member experience for current and future program years.

These supervisors receive annual orientation to CNCS, Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program, requirements and due dates, program outcomes and data collection strategies, and policies and procedures as well as prohibited activities. They each complete a memorandum of understanding (MOU) confirming that they are aware of program requirements and prohibited activities and will

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abide by this MOU. The program director provides this annual program orientation and follows up with a post program year assessment at the end of each year. Site supervisors attend an end of year program evaluation session at the SEARK ESC to help identify program strengths, weakness, and develop strategies to continue to support strengths and improve program weakness.

Second, Classroom teachers are responsible for direct supervision of the tutoring services members provide in the classroom and providing student discipline if necessary. Classroom teachers advise members the implementation of tutoring strategies provided and provide encouragement. Together, the site supervisor, classroom teacher, and the AmeriCorps member schedule the members' classroom service time.

Members and supervisors complete mid-year and end of year member program evaluation sessions annually to identify program strengths and weaknesses that aid in improving the program and member experience for future program years.

7. A secondary goal of The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative is to grow quality educators through the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program that will teach within SEARK schools when they become licensed educators. Through this program members gain skills, experience in education, and funding to pursue a college education as they assist targeted students in improving their academic performance. Additionally, members learn important skills and values related to responsibility, fulfilling commitments, meeting deadlines, and the importance of community service. At least 60 former members are now qualified educators within the SEARK schools.

Through their year of service, our members become acutely aware of how great the impact of poverty is on the students they serve and their families. Through this awareness and training we provide, our members learn and gain experience in planning and implementing services that support those needs. They have taken children complaining of stomachaches to the nurse's office to discover the child hadn't eaten anything but a bag of chips since lunch the previous day. They have seen starving students steal food from other students' lunch trays. Because they saw consistent community needs around hunger, they decided to implement additional projects that focused on food including canned food drives within area schools to ensure students and families had access to food and filling back packs with nonperishable food items for students. Arkansas has experienced two very cold winters recently. Many families did not have winter clothing, coats, socks, hats, and gloves for children. Members conducted coat drives and got community partners to either clean used coats or pay for the cleaners to clean donated coats. These are only a few examples of members identifying community needs and taking action to help meet community needs.

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Members keep journals of experiences they have through AmeriCorps service. These journals are submitted to the program director. They are encouraged to submit pictures of community service activities and provide monthly success stories highlighting an accomplishment they made that month that made a big impression on them.

Starting in the spring of 2015, members will have access to a new SEARK AmeriCorps Google networking site. They will receive training on how to access and use this tool to share ideas and solutions with fellow members. This should prove to be a very effective means of networking and sharing.

It is of utmost importance that members live within the communities they serve so they are more invested in the people and schools with whom they interact. As such the service sites/elementary schools select members for service from the community the school serves. Members are invested in the community live in. This allows members to form long lasting relationships within the school they are serving and relationships within the community they reside in through community service. These relationships increase the probability that the member will continue to be actively involved in community service after they complete their terms of service.

8. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: It is of utmost importance that program members are identifiable and easily distinguished from school district staff and employees. This necessity is conveyed to members and site supervisors alike. Members are required to wear Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program gear and identification badges when providing service. Host sites display the AmeriCorps logo/Service Site Identification at the highly visible main entrance to each elementary school served.

This aids in reminding staff and visitors that members are not school district employees and cannot perform CNCS prohibited activities. During school district orientation employees are reminded that members are volunteers, cannot be left alone with students, cannot displace school personnel in any manner, or cannot do activities that are outside of their approved and assigned position descriptions.

Program member orientation includes what it means to be an AmeriCorps Member selected to provide community service that will benefit their community and allow them (the members) to grow and become active community members. Emphasis is placed on the need for members to stand out and be identifiable as Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps Members, separate from school district employees, parent volunteers, and other AmeriCorps Program members. Members are required to wear Arkansas

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Smart Start AmeriCorps Program gear and identification tags when providing service. Host sites display the AmeriCorps logo/Service Site Identification at the highly visible entrance to each elementary school served.

Organizational Capability

B. Organizational Capability

1. Organizational Background and Staffing: It is the mission of the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK ESC) to assist member schools in more effective and more equitable use of their shared resources and to provide shared services for the better education of their children and youth. The SEARK ESC was developed by the Arkansas Department of Education in 1981 to meet the needs of rural school districts in Southeast Arkansas. The education service cooperative provides staff development, consultation services, special programs, and houses specialists in specific fields of educational services to aid area school districts in improving the academic performance of students in Southeast Arkansas. The current number of employees is in excess of 150.

The SEARK ESC provides shared services to 14 member school districts. Of those 14 districts 13 currently support the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program. Each school district and the SEARK ESC provide \$238,234.00 annually to support this program.

The SEARK ESC has an exemplary reputation for receiving funding and managing state, federal and privately funded programs. The SEARK ESC has been selected to house and manage statewide programs such as; the Arkansas Medicaid in the Schools program and the Arkansas Future Teacher Initiative (both Arkansas Department of Human Service programs) as well as other statewide programs based on this reputation. The SEARK ESC's current annual budget is approximately \$14,451,335.99. Of that amount \$325,000.00 is the state government awarded base funding each of the Arkansas Education Service Cooperatives receive to maintain administrative and administrative support positions, the remaining \$14,126,336.00 is awarded from both federal and state government sources as well as national, state, and local public and private foundation grants. The percentage of CNSC funding the SEARK ESC receives is approximately 7% of the SEARK ESC annual budget. The SEARK ESC has been awarded three AmeriCorps grants, the Future Teacher AmeriCorps grant is a National Awarded Competitive grant of \$12,000.00 (additional funding in the amount of \$280,000.00 is awarded from by the Arkansas Department of Human Services; Arkansas Better Chance program), the Coordinated School Health AmeriCorps grant is a State Commission Formula

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grant of \$106,265.00 (participating school districts and the UAMS Arkansas Health Education Centers provide > \$52,000.00 annually), and the Smart Start AmeriCorps grant is a National Awarded Competitive grant in the amount of \$458,680.00 with > \$238,234.00 provided by participating schools. Another CNCS funded program within the SEARK ESC is the Foster Grandparent Program grant of \$427,828.00.

The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps Program Director is Jenny Satterlee. Ms. Satterlee is serving in her ninth successful year as the program director. Ms. Satterlee oversees all aspects of the Arkansas Smart Start program. She is directly involved in member recruitment and retention. She plans and facilitates all program training to meet current member needs. She is responsible for ensuring community partners are satisfied with member performance and community service projects. She has been an Arkansas Licensed Teacher for over 19 years. She has vast experience working with special needs children.

The Arkansas Smart Start Program Office Manager is Jeri Craven. She is responsible for managing program finances and submitting required reports. She aids the director in coordinating member, enrollment, training, and record maintenance. Ms. Craven has successfully served in this position for over nine years.

The SEARK ESC has six finance and accounting personnel overseen by Ms. Sandra Savage who has a BA in Finance and over 26 years of experience in accounting. The SEARK ESC undergoes an Arkansas State Legislative Audit every two years. The Arkansas Division of Community Service and Nonprofit Support conducts annual audits of the cooperative's three AmeriCorps programs. The results of these audits have revealed only minor infractions that were easily corrected.

The SEARK ESC is governed by its 14 member school districts. Each of the 14 superintendents is a SEARK ESC Board Member. A board member is elected annually to serve as board president. The current board president is, Max Dyson, from the Hamburg School District. The board employs a director, Karen Eoff, to oversee programs, employees, and services housed within the SEARK ESC. Ms. Eoff has 31 years of educational experience, which includes six years as the cooperative's director and 17 years of administrative experience as the assistant director and Teacher Center Coordinator of the SEARK ESC.

Policies and Procedures are in place to govern both the board and cooperative personnel. Board members meet monthly to address cooperative business. Each program or department within the ESC has a program coordinator or director. The SEARK ESC coordinates all activities and provides appropriate financial accounting services through its director and board members.

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Each member school district completes an annual evaluation of all SEARK ESC programs operating within their schools. This helps the SEARK ESC to identify program strengths, weaknesses, and develop strategies with program coordinators/directors to strengthen their programs.

Program staff and the SEARK ESC Director invite representatives from each school district served to attend an end of school year meeting to discuss how the program is operating within their schools. Program advisors, evaluators, and randomly selected members attend this meeting as well. The results of all program assessments and evaluations are shared. Strengths and weaknesses are identified. Participants identify strategies to support program strengths and improve program weaknesses.

2. Compliance and Accountability: The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative monitors the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program personnel and program processes. The SEARK ESC holds quarterly program director/coordinator meetings to review issues relevant to all cooperative programs. The SEARK ESC finance and accounting department oversees all expenditures ensuring programs are complying with state and federal guidelines. The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps Program applies all CNCS Program requirements and updates to the program as they are advised by the Arkansas Division of Community Service and Nonprofit Support and CNCS to ensure compliance with federal and state program requirements. The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program's office manager conducts a review of all members' files at the beginning and end of the service year to ensure compliance with CNCS requirements.

The Arkansas Division of Community Service and Nonprofit Support provides Arkansas AmeriCorps Program directors with; New program orientation, program support services available by phone, email and in person, and program updates and training each program quarter at statewide directors meetings. The program receives annual site visits from the Arkansas Service Commission to ensure program compliance. Outcomes of these visits have been positive. Quarterly reports to the NCSC 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 Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program underwent a federal program audit in 2013 for which the finding details are provided in the next section.

To ensure service sites are compliant with federal and state program requirements each host site supervisor's annual program orientation includes the following topics: Allowable and prohibited prohibited activities within the program, finances and host site contributions, prohibited activities within the program, finances and host site contributions, member training, technical assistance, and program/site monitoring for compliance. The program director conducts monthly site visits to

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monitor both member and site compliance with CNCS rules and regulations. Site supervisors and members are to make the program director aware of any issues of noncompliance immediately. The program director makes a site visit to meet with members and site supervisor upon notification of potential noncompliance to ensure members and sites are in compliance with program rules and regulations. Corrective actions are taken and documentation of issues and corrective action are maintained in program files.

3. Past Performance for Current Grantees: Members demonstrate to residents of Southeast Arkansas, and the state, a proven workable program model to provide, students with the skills to perform at no less than basic on academic assessments, to increase access to higher education for residents, and to promote entrance of college students into the teaching profession. Each program year the targeted number of students (730 members) has been met. Over the past two years greater than 70% of targeted students have demonstrated grade level academic growth using the SEARK Common Core Basic Skills Assessment Tool. The program is currently in its third year of using this assessment tool. Schools report that the program not only aids in improving student academic achievement, it also helps them to identify quality future teachers. Each school district is committed to providing long-term support to the program through cash and in-kind commitments.

Member enrollment rates have been 100% for the past six years. By targeting half-time members with an interest in pursuing a college degree in education the program has been able to recruit both service sites and members with ease. The member retention rate was at 84% for the 2012 program year. This increased to 85.1% in the 2013 program year. Moving out of SEARK to find gainful employment and having to get a full time job are the two most cited reasons members provide for leaving the program without completing their term of service. However our program goal is to have no less than a 90% member retention rate. To do this we are looking specifically at our interview and selection process as an area of growth. The program staff has developed a four page interview process for use in member selection to help improve member retention. Some member school districts are requiring potential members to provide an essay regarding why they want to serve as an AmeriCorps member to help with member selection. Another strategy to ensure member commitment to the completion of service is that members will attend program orientation prior to program initiation. This helps members to determine if they are a good match for the program and able to fulfill program requirements.

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During the 2013 CNCS Federal Audit it was discovered that NSOPWs had not been conducted on the program's two staff members. The program had followed Arkansas Department of Education's requirements and conducted the Arkansas Child Maltreatment Investigations on staff members, but not the NSOPW. Program policy has been modified to include NSOPWs on all staff upon employment and when renewing teaching license. In addition the CNCS awarded the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program an Alternate Search Procedure for use with program staff and site supervisors who are licensed educators through the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). The ADE requires all educators to undergo federal and state background checks and the Arkansas Child Maltreatment Registry Check upon license renewal every five years. A second issue identified through this audit was how the cost for program office space and conference room rental was determined. Office space and conference room rent is based on the appraisal of the SEARK ESC facility and the square footage each program rents. Programs are now invoiced for office space rental. There were no other issues of noncompliance.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

C. Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

1. Cost Effectiveness: The program requests \$409,733 to support the project. Our school districts provide an in-kind match of not less than \$238,189 from school districts. These matching funds come from the school districts' Arkansas NSLA funding. This funding is named after the National Student Lunch Act because the funding each district gets is determined by the number of students who receive free and reduced meals. It is part of the state funding package for schools that target low-income students with help to overcome barriers and succeed in school. The requested budget is sufficient to cover staffing, facility, travel, training, member, and program support costs. Program outcomes and services rendered within SEARK communities greatly outweigh the cost of the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program. School districts are willing to contribute matching funds to support this program because through this program they gain quality educators and targeted students demonstrate academic growth. SEARK ESC's share of member cost per MSY increases by 2% annually. The SEARK ESC's member cost increased from 36% for the 2014 program year to 38% for the 2015 program year. The program is not requesting more CNCS funding per MSY.

2. Budget Adequacy: All Non-CNCS funds (\$175,872.00) are contributed by SEARK ESC member school districts participating in the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program. In-kind services, facilities, and equipment in the amount of no less than \$72,317.00 are provided by the SEARK ESC

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and participating schools. In-kind services includes; member training, use of training facilities and equipment, and site supervision.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

D. Evaluation Plan

Introduction: This evaluation plan describes an experimental evaluation plan for the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program, an AmeriCorps State and National (ACSN) program. Through this evaluation, the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program will learn more about the impact it is making on student academic performance.

Program Background and Problem Definition: The Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK ESC) serves schools in eight counties in the Arkansas Delta Region. According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress data reports (2013), in Arkansas 68 percent of all fourth graders and 78 percent of lower income fourth graders were reading below proficient levels.

The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program was created by the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative (SEARK ESC) in 2006 to provide additional resources to help elementary schools to improve the academic performance of students at risk for academic failure. Decreased resources, population decline, and decreased revenue have all had an impact on the ability of SEARK Schools to address the educational needs of area students. Area schools lack the resources to provide in school one-on-one tutoring services.

To promote academic growth in 630 at-risk for academic failure k-5th grade students, 63 Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps half-time program members each provide 10-12 students tutoring support services that enhance those currently provided by area schools. Members apply the knowledge and tutoring skills they learn through program training to teach the five basic reading skills and common core grade appropriate math concepts. Members work with school district math and literacy coaches and classroom teachers to create tutoring plans for individual targeted students. Targeted students receive 1-2 hours of one-on-one literacy and math tutoring each week for seven months.

Program Theory, Logic Model and Outcomes: The Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program assumes that by providing students at increased risk for academic failure with one-on-one high quality in-school tutoring services students' academic performance will improve. Through this program 63 half-time members provide no less than 630 students at risk for academic failure with 1-2 hours of one-on-one in-school literacy and/or math tutoring services weekly for a seven month period

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in 22 participating Arkansas Delta elementary schools. Research shows that one-on-one tutoring can have a significant positive effect on the academic performance of students at increased risk for academic failure.

If 63 half-time Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps members provide at least 630 targeted students with high quality one-on-one tutoring services and use positive reinforcement strategies to encourage positive behavior/learning, no less than 70% (441) of targeted students will demonstrate academic growth and score at basic or higher achievement levels on post program implementation academic assessments.

Research Questions to be Addressed in Program Evaluation:

1. Do one-on-one tutoring services provided through the program have an effect on student academic performance in literacy and math? Is this a positive effect and how significant is the effect?
2. How does academic growth of students receiving one-on-one tutoring services compare to students at increased risk for academic failure students not receiving one-on-one in-school tutoring?
3. How effective is the Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps program design and management?

Evaluation: Program Evaluation will be conducted by Dr. Richard Clubb, Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Professor of Psychology specializing in experimental methods at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. This study will be conducted annually over a three year period. At the beginning of each school year no less than 1,360 k-5th grade students identified as being at increased risk for academic failure will be randomly selected for participation this program evaluation in the 22 elementary schools served. Selected students will be randomized by grade level to ensure equal numbers of upper and lower elementary students participate in the evaluation. A lottery-like process will be used to identify 680 of these students who will be targeted to receive 1-2 hours of weekly one-on-one math and literacy tutoring services throughout the school year (7 months). The remaining 680 students will be assigned to an *as-is* control condition. Each participating classroom will contain students at risk for academic failure who receive program services and students at risk for academic failure not receiving program tutoring services. Students from the program and the control group are not systemically different at the start of this study; therefore, any differences between the two groups at the end of the study can be attributed to the program being evaluated.

It is predicted that if 630 students who are identified as being at risk for academic failure receive 1-2 hours of weekly math and literacy one-on-one tutoring sessions over a seven month period these students will achieve academic growth.

Following randomized student assignments the study team will conduct pre-program implementation

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assessments of student grade appropriate math and literacy knowledge and skills. These same assessments will be conducted toward the end of the 1st semester of school and again toward the end of the 2nd semester. The grade appropriate assessment tools used by this program were developed by the SEARK ESC math and literacy specialists and correlate with the Arkansas Department of Education common core academic frameworks. These instruments provide a quantitative assessment of student math and literacy skills.

AmeriCorps program staff, school administrators (site supervisors), classroom teachers, and AmeriCorps members will each complete mid and end of year program qualitative and quantitative evaluations to measure program fidelity;

Quantitative assessment is conducted through interviews with program staff, schools staff, and Arkansas Smart Start AmeriCorps members; study team observation of tutoring sessions; administrative data regarding the actual dose and duration of tutoring services received; and teacher surveys.

Qualitative assessment questions relate to the quality of program orientation and training, support provided by program staff, member commitment and the quality of tutoring services rendered.

Reporting Results and Budget Factors: This program evaluation will be conducted annually for three years. State and local stakeholders will meet annually to review evaluation results, identify program strengths and weaknesses and make necessary program modifications to ensure future program success. Annual reports will be provided to CNCS. Upon completion of the three year study a full evaluation report will be submitted to CNCS. All program evaluation costs will be absorbed by the Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative.

Amendment Justification

n/a

Clarification Summary

1. SEARK proposes to utilize tutoring as part of the intervention strategy. Please provide the definition of "one-to-one tutoring", including clarification of how this is implemented in the program model versus small group tutoring. Please describe how members will be supervised by individuals with expertise in tutoring, consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 2522.940. Clarify that the program meets the requirements of a tutoring program which requires specialized member qualification and training as identified in 45 CFR 2522.910-940.

Qualified members will provide one-on-one tutoring to targeted at-risk students in grades

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kindergarten through fifth grade. Members with high school diplomas or GED equivalence are selected to participate in the AmeriCorps Programs. Members are required to attend 3-4 days of trainings provided by Program Directors, Site Supervisors, and SEARK Education Service Cooperative's Math and Literacy Specialists. These specialists hold Masters Degrees in the areas of math and literacy and provide intense, extensive on-going training in the areas of math and literacy to all teachers and administrators in the Cooperative Schools. They also provide members with the same tutoring techniques and skilled services for each grade level of students struggling in math and literacy. Members provide tutoring services to identified students in their mentoring teacher's classrooms and are supervised at all times.

2. Please identify selection characteristics of students identified as "at increased risk for academic failure".

Students are identified as at risk for academic failure by standardized test scores of basic or below basic in reading and/ or math. Students with a higher risk of being retained are chosen for tutoring services.

3. It is expected that AmeriCorps programs achieve a 100% member retention rate. The applicant did not maintain a 100% retention rate in the most recent year of program operations and did not fully describe its corrective action plan for achieving a 100% retention rate. Please provide detailed information about the program's corrective action plan for improving the member retention rate. Retention is continuously addressed by encouraging host sites to select quality members that will meet the needs of the program. The program has submitted a retention plan to the Arkansas Service Commission for the upcoming program year.

* Communication- Be more direct on expectations prior to orientation. Potential applicants will make appointments with program staff prior to interview process to discuss program requirements, expectations and schedules.

* Applicants that can provide a minimum of 20 hours per week will be chosen. If applicants cannot provide the hours required first semester of the program, they will be required to serve a minimum of 25 hours per week second semester. College schedules must be arranged to accommodate AmeriCorps schedules.

* Team leaders chosen at each site to oversee and help with supervision of members. Monthly reports from leaders will be requested. Team leaders must report any issues or concerns that have been

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brought to their attention.

* Monitoring of member's hours on a daily basis. Emails, texts and phone calls will be made to members regarding the lack of hours in My Service Log. They will be required to log hours on a daily/weekly basis.

* Letters will be mailed monthly based on the total number of the member's hours.

* Expectations will be reviewed at EACH quarterly training and documented.

* Members will be placed on a "probation period" if they have two consecutive months of low hours. They will provide program with a corrective action plan on how they will increase their hours and a time period they predict to resume a normal balance. Members on probation will be monitored closely by staff through email, texts and phone calls.

* More site visits will be conducted at the sites that have consistent issues with a member/s.

* Unannounced site visits at each site will be conducted.

The program also provides incentives to promote retention including selecting an outstanding member of the quarter. Members selected as outstanding member will be recognized in the quarterly newsletter. Also, the University of Arkansas at Monticello provides five AmeriCorps Scholarships each year for members who complete at least one term of service and maintain the required GPA. If chosen as a recipient of the UAM/AmeriCorps Scholarship, members will receive an additional \$1,000.00 per semester for up to eight semesters.

Performance Measure Clarifications were made in the Performance Measures screens in egrants.

Continuation Changes

n/a

Grant Characteristics