

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The United Way of Central West Virginia (UWCWV) proposes to have 70 AmeriCorps members who will provide an integrated response to the needs of vulnerable and at-risk individuals and families by providing academic support; training in financial literacy and jobs skills; facilitating access to healthy foods and nutrition; and supporting veterans and military families throughout the State of West Virginia. At the end of the first program year, AmeriCorps members will be responsible for: (1) 200 K-12 students improving academic performance in literacy; (2) 200 K-12 students improving academic engagement (attitudes and behaviors); (3) 2,000 economically disadvantaged individuals improving their soft job skills and 640 improve their financial knowledge; (4) 4,800 individuals increasing food security for themselves and their children; (5) 600 military veterans and/or individuals living in transition improving their job skills; and (6) 600 military veterans increasing their knowledge and use of available veteran services. In addition, AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 1,750 volunteers each year, who will be engaged in community activities to help economically disadvantaged individuals. This program will operate as a Multi-Focus Intermediary in the CNCS focus areas of Education, Economic Opportunities, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. The CNCS annual investment of \$903,068 will be matched with \$976,267, all of which will come from in-kind and private funds, with a cost per MSY of \$12,901.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

For the past 20 years, LifeBridge AmeriCorps has successfully created positive change for thousands of vulnerable and economically disadvantaged individuals across the State of West Virginia. The mission of LifeBridge AmeriCorps is to utilize a diverse group of National Service members to build and strengthen WV communities by addressing the most critical needs of citizens through service and volunteering. As a Multi-Focus Program Intermediary, LifeBridge fulfills its mission by addressing four CNCS areas: improving educational outcomes, expanding economic opportunities, improving access to healthy futures, and impacting the quality of life of veterans and improving military family strength. Through the service of 70 members and 1,750 leveraged volunteers, LifeBridge AmeriCorps will provide immediate and long-term benefits by expanding individual opportunity, building family stability, and creating more sustainable communities in a state plagued with socioeconomic problems. LifeBridge AmeriCorps will target vulnerable and at-risk individuals, children, and families in WV. LifeBridge adopts The Common Rule (45CFR 46, Subpart A) definition which identifies vulnerable individuals as children; persons who have physical or mental disabilities; those who are economically

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disadvantaged; and those who are educationally disadvantaged. This target population was selected for a number of reasons. First, this population is comprised of individuals who are in most need of critical community supports. West Virginia, the only state entirely within the Appalachian region, is a rural state with extreme poverty. According to the U.S. Census, in 2013, 15.8% of the U.S. population had income below the poverty level. However, in WV, the overall poverty rate was 18.5% and the extreme poverty rate was 8.4%. More than 49% of WV's 55 counties are categorized as distressed or at-risk by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Focusing on this poverty stricken population helps ensure services are provided to those with the most need and that federal funds have the greatest impact. Second, LifeBridge AmeriCorps has a very successful track record of providing services and creating positive change for disadvantaged populations for 20 years. The program has developed efficiencies, partnerships, collaborations, and systems that uphold high quality services to at-risk individuals and families.

LifeBridge has developed a coordinated network of comprehensive child and adult education services and supports, financial and job skills training services, and an effective human service referral system that is adapted to meet the unique needs of communities across WV. LifeBridge AmeriCorps provides overall direction to the program; assists in the identification of community needs; recruits and trains members; recruits sites for members to serve; trains supervisors to manage members; evaluates the program; and helps disadvantaged AmeriCorps members engage in educational pursuits or job opportunities after their service is complete. Community sites also identify specific needs in the community; recruit and train members; supervise the day-to-day activities of the members; and develop specialties and trusting relationships to address the unique attributes of economically disadvantaged individuals in their community. AmeriCorps members provide a range of different activities, depending on the priority area they are addressing. By serving as the umbrella organizer of the LifeBridge AmeriCorps program and performing all required administrative, training, and financial activities required by CNCS, LifeBridge AmeriCorps effectively and efficiently meets community needs through National Service participants' especially in communities without the capacity to develop AmeriCorps programs on their own.

### **Education Need**

The high rates of poverty in WV are a result of low educational attainment levels and low levels of literacy. According to "Diplomas Count 2013," WV's high school graduation rate in 2010 was only 74.7%. WV significantly lags behind other states in the percent of adults 25 and older with a bachelor's degree; only 17.9% in WV compared to 28.5% nationally. "The State of Literacy in America"

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reported that 20% of WV adults function at a Level 1 literacy level. This translates into over 250,000 adults who have difficulty performing tasks such as locating and applying for a job or preparing a household budget.

According to the American Psychological Association report, "Effects of Poverty, Hunger, and Homelessness on Children and Youth," poverty has a particularly negative effect on the academic outcomes of children, especially during early childhood. Chronic stress associated with living in poverty has been shown to adversely affect children's concentration and memory which may impact their ability to learn. The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 2008, the dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about four and one-half times greater than the rate of children from higher-income families (8.7% vs. 2%). Further, under-resourced schools in poorer communities struggle to meet the learning needs of their students. Inadequate education contributes to the cycle of poverty by making it more difficult for low-income children to lift themselves and future generations out of poverty. With 52.39% of WV's K-12 students living in poverty (WV Achieves Report Card), it is tragic, but not surprising, that academic proficiency is low. Children who read proficiently by the end of third grade are more likely to graduate from high school and to be economically successful in adulthood (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Statewide in 2012-13, only 47.2% of WV 4th graders were proficient in reading; 48.3% were proficient in math; 40.5% were proficient in science; and 37.2% were proficient in social studies.

### Education Activities

To address these educational needs 20 AmeriCorps members in the Education Corps will follow a modified version of the Reading Recovery model (Schwartz, 2005; [www.readingrecovery.org](http://www.readingrecovery.org)), where six overlapping and interactive components increase personal and academic achievement.

Components include a professional learning community (agency), a leadership team, effective classroom instruction, literacy intervention, assessment and data monitoring, and family and community collaboration and support. Five Early Childhood Education Corps members will concentrate on early childhood interventions, including: teach parents techniques to help their children learn early literacy skills; mentor at-risk children to ensure children are on track to meet developmental milestones; and assist parents in learning to interact more effectively with their children and teach socialization skills. Ten School-Based Education Corps members will perform in-school K-12 mentoring by providing: academic support to children in literacy, math and science; organize and facilitate parenting workshops to help parents hone their parenting skills; before-school mentoring; bullying prevention trainings; and an array of dropout prevention services. Five Higher

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Education Corps members will: work with existing college support services to target students struggling with their coursework; provide direct academic support services to struggling students and/or refer them to appropriate services on campus; and provide peer mentoring and ensure students have the supports they need to remain in school.

The intervention proposed for members and community volunteers have been proven to be highly effective and have measurable positive impact on those served as evidenced by research and past program outcomes. Tutoring and mentoring interventions are based on solid research which has shown to have a positive impact on the academic performance of at-risk students (Hock, Pulvers, Deshler, and Shumaker, 2001). According to the ACT Policy Report, college retention interventions that include mentoring and support have shown to be among the most successful interventions for improved academic performance (2004). The LifeBridge program, throughout its long history, has shown documented increase in the following areas: increased academic success; increased employability; increased financial literacy; and increased access to community services and supports.

### Education Outputs and Outcomes

As a result of these activities, 5,000 disadvantaged youth/mentor matches will be engaged for at least one hour per week for a minimum of six months. The Education activities and outputs will lead to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children; improved school readiness for economically disadvantaged young children; improved educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle and high schools; and support economically disadvantaged students prepare for success in post-secondary educational institutions. Annually, 250 students will be mentored and: (1) 200 K-12 students will improve academic performance in literacy; (2) 200 K-12 students will demonstrate improved academic engagement (attitudes); and (3) 200 K-12 students will demonstrate improved academic engagement (behaviors). Members will utilize existing agency records, member logs, pre/mid/post year Slosson Oral Reading tests, and pre and post surveys to measure individual success.

### Economic Opportunity Need

WV's September 2014 unemployment rate was 6.6%, higher than the national rate of 5.9% (US Bureau for Labor Statistics). According to the National Skills Coalition, "middle skills jobs" make up the largest part of WV's labor market. Examples include electricians, plumbers, paralegals, dental hygienists, sonographers, commuter support specialists and many others. These jobs, which require more than high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree, were prevalent in 2012 (57%) and are projected to remain the majority of employment opportunities through 2020 (52%). However, only

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48% of WV workers had the appropriate training for these jobs, creating a middle skills job gap.

Investments in programs that prepare middle skills workers have plummeted, yet WV adults have a significant need to gain the skills to obtain these career-path employment opportunities.

Financial literacy is at the very core of healthy families and communities. A basic understanding of fiscal matters is crucial to a person's ability to develop assets and address financial concerns.

According to a 2012 Financial Capability Study of adults in WV by the FINRA Investor Education Foundation: (1) 14% of individuals reported that their household spent more than their income; (2) 60% of individuals lacked a "rainy day" fund to cover expenses for three months; and (3) 27% of individuals reported using one or more non-bank borrowing methods in the past five years. Studies also show demographics, including characteristics of age, marital status, and education level impact individual financial well-being (Taft, Hosein, Mehrizi, & Roshan, 2013). These data demonstrate how lower-income families are unnecessarily losing a substantial amount of money in conducting basic financial transactions, thereby reducing their capacity to save and ability to weather any financial storm. For these families, financial literacy could improve their ability to reduce expenses for financial services and increase saving capacity.

### Economic Opportunity Activities

To address issues of employment and financial sustainability, 20 Economic Opportunity AmeriCorps members will divide their service time to increase job skills, employment opportunities and improve financial literacy. AmeriCorps members will engage 4,000 economically disadvantaged individuals in job skills training and other skill development on topics including, but not limited to, resume building, job search skills, workplace etiquette, interview skills, budgeting and banking.

LifeBridge is partnering with Fifth Third Bank to offer a financial education program to educate members, which will enable members to provide culturally appropriate information to educate, empower, and assist economically disadvantaged individuals in financial sustainability. Members will then transfer this knowledge utilizing Brimble's indigenous financial literacy education (2013) to open the conversation about money with program participants. Conversations will open the door to address and educate on issues such as money beliefs, spending, saving, debt, interests and passions, planning, earnings, and establish plans that includes goals, priorities, and where to go for assistance.

### Economic Opportunity Outputs and Outcomes

As a result, activities will lead to improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people. Annually, 2,000 individuals will report an increase in hard and soft job related skills and 640 will improve financial knowledge as a result of working with AmeriCorps members.

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Members will utilize existing agency records, member logs, and pre and post surveys to measure individual success.

It has become evident that climbing out of poverty takes more resources than education alone. At the intersection of needs to help individuals reach economic stability, sit not only education, but job skills readiness, financial literacy, and overall health. As a result, meeting basic needs has become an evident need to help deal with systemic poverty in the state.

### Healthy Futures Need

Food security is fundamentally linked to family economic security. With approximately 18% of WV citizens living at or below the poverty level, long-term hunger is another area of great concern. According to the USDA Economic Research Service, 14.4% of WV families experienced food insecurity at least some time during 2013. This means that even with government assistance, there are not enough resources in many households to provide a sufficient amount of food to sustain those living in the home. Long-term hunger and poor nutrition have a significant impact on the health and well-being of the population. WV consistently ranks as one of the unhealthiest states in the nation. Results of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Behavioral Risk Factor Survey in 2012 showed that WV had the third highest rate of obesity and the highest rate of diabetes in the nation. In a statewide study of WV schoolchildren, 18.8% of all fifth grade students were overweight and an additional 28.3% were obese (CARDIAC Project, 2013).

WV is a rural, mostly poor state with many counties having limited access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food and classified by the USDA as food deserts. Food deserts are communities with poverty rate of 20% or higher, or a median family income at or below 80% of the area's median family income, or a community with one-third of its rural population more than rural miles from a supermarket or grocery store. We are learning the magnitude of what living in a food desert means, and that awareness of the burden low-income families' face because of the distance and isolation, which is a key to systemic change in these communities. Food deserts contribute significantly to diabetes, morbid obesity, and other medical issues. Studies have shown (Skinner, Kelly et al, 2013) that barriers such as traditional food acquisition, income and food affordability, dietary needs, and food practices are directly related to the health and well-being of individuals as they cope with food insecurity. Providing resources, referrals, assistance, and education will provide new information, the diminished feeling of isolation, and the support of community volunteers, which affect how residents perceive themselves and their future in order to strengthen individual food security, capacity, and build community initiatives (McCullum, Christine et al, 2005).

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### Healthy Futures Activities

Twenty Healthy Futures Corps members will (1) work with existing agencies to organize, stock and run food pantries, baby pantries, clothing closets, and baby closets; (2) provide health literacy services; and (2) work with existing agencies to educate the public about nutrition and healthy lifestyle choices. Members conduct outreach with their sites to develop nutrition education activities.

### Healthy Futures Outputs and Outcomes

As a result, (1) 8,000 individuals will receive emergency food from food banks, food pantries, or other nonprofit organizations; and (2) 1,000 individuals will receive support, services, education and/or referrals to alleviate long-term hunger. Because of the activities and outputs, 4,800 individuals will report increased food security for themselves and their children as a result of AmeriCorps member-supported services.

### Veterans and Military Families Need

WV has a strong and committed history of individuals serving in the US Armed Forces. At 13.8%, the state ranks 7th in the nation in the percent of the civilian population who are veterans. According to the US Department of Military Affairs, WV is currently home to nearly 170,000 veterans.

Unfortunately, too many of the brave men and women who served in the Armed Forces face dim career prospects upon leaving the military and find themselves unemployed after deployment. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics report "Unemployment Situation of Veterans 2013" stated that the unemployment rate for veterans who served on active duty in the US Armed Forces at any time since September 2001 was 8.8%. Young male veterans (ages 18-24) who served since 2001 had unemployment rate of 29.1%, significantly higher than that of young male nonveterans (17.6%). Recent veterans also suffer disproportionately in having disabilities, which impacts employment opportunities. Approximately 26% of Gulf War-era II veterans reported having a service-connected disability in August 2011, compared with about 14% of all veterans. Despite these tragic statistics, nationally, 78,127 veterans participate in vocational rehabilitation. However, less than 1% (593) of WV veterans are participating in vocational rehabilitation training and only 8,840 (5%) are using GI Bill education benefits.

Veterans need support to secure employment when they return to civilian life. While many companies have been proactive in helping veterans, too many veterans remain unemployed or stuck in jobs with limited career potential. CareerBuilder surveyed veterans to better understand the struggles they are facing as civilian job seekers. According to the nationwide study, 56% of the veterans who returned from service over the past two years said they are currently employed full time, but 46% think they

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are over qualified for their current job. In a society for Human Resource Management poll, "Employing Military Personnel and Recruiting Veterans: Attitudes and Practices," 60% of respondents indicated that translating military skills to civilian job experience was a challenge in hiring employees with military experience. Other issues included difficulty transitioning from the structure and hierarchy in the military culture to the civilian workplace culture (48%); post-traumatic stress issues or other mental health issues (46%); and combat-related physical disabilities (22%). According to the CareerBuilder survey, veterans further reported that their biggest challenges in finding work include finding a work environment in which they feel comfortable, knowing what kind of jobs to apply for, and getting people to understand how their military experience translates to civilian work. Veterans need and deserve the best supports available to help them transition back to meaningful employment opportunities.

Veterans need information, support, and guidance to help them find educational programs that fit their potential career path, enroll in academic programs, and be successful as they work towards graduation. Military undergraduates can find it difficult to finance their education, manage time constraints, transition from military to student life, find support from other veterans, and overcome bureaucratic obstacles. President Obama has made the care and support of military families a top national security policy priority. Communities across the country have been challenged to support the needs of the veterans and their families that make sacrifices for the well-being of the nation. However, veterans remain unaware of the benefits they earned that are available to assist them. Veterans in the Persian Gulf War-era reported that they understand little or nothing about: health care benefits (58%); education benefits (57%); and life insurance benefits (71%). Those who served in Afghanistan and Iraq wars indicated that they understood little or nothing about health care benefits (52%); education benefits (41%); life insurance benefits (65%) (Department of Veterans Affairs National Survey of Veterans). Many nonprofit organizations and individuals are unaware of the issues many veterans face, such as benefits earned by veterans, how to access them, and how to best meet their needs.

### Veterans and Military Families Activities

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans recommends using a peer approach in which veterans help other veterans to achieve their goals. Ten Veteran or Military connected family members will serve for one year terms to help build the capacity of veterans from all eras thrive after they return home. Military connected members understand the cultural barriers that are frequently encountered by those that need services most because they are military-connected members from the local

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community. Anecdotal program evidence shows that these local connections help members bypass barriers like mistrust of outsiders, feeling of isolation, and sense of shame in asking for help.

AmeriCorps Members create bridges to help individuals and families access needed services and supports. The benefits of an AmeriCorps program in the community are four-fold: (1) Members of the community serve their own communities; (2) Veterans have the unique ability to reach out to and earn the trust of other veterans struggling with transition, allowing programs to serve those that would otherwise not be helped; (3) through the AmeriCorps experience, members gain the personal and professional skills to go on to competitive employment; and (4) AmeriCorps members leverage their service by increasing community volunteers and a sense of civic responsibility.

Ten Vet Corps members will: (1) provide community education on working successfully with veterans and providing job skills training to returning post 9/11 veterans, veterans who are in transition facilities, and other high risk individuals experiencing difficulties transitioning back to self sufficiency; (2) be engaged in peer mentoring and academic support to the same target demographic to help these individuals set professional goals and pursue a course of study that will help them fulfill those goals; assist in leading community training opportunities for employers, community service providers and other stakeholders. Vet Corps members will provide individuals living in transition with job skill training, coaching and mentoring those individuals until they obtain gainful employment, for three hours per week for at least six weeks. Members will continue to follow up with employed individuals every three months to ensure they have the support needed to sustain employment. In prior years, members reported many accounts of impact they created in the lives of veterans, including assisting veterans who were homeless or in transitional living who have moved on to gainful employment and now self-sufficient and supporting themselves.

### Veterans and Military Families Outputs and Outcomes

As a result, 1000 veterans and/or individuals living in transition will receive hard and soft job skills training and veteran resource assistance, including academic support. As a result, 600 military veterans will show improvement in job skills and/or employment. 600 veterans will report increased knowledge and usage of available veteran services.

LifeBridge currently operates a separate competitively funded Veteran Corps program. The Vet Corps program (application #15AC168059) will be entering year 3 of its competitively funded grant cycle. Should this multi-focus intermediary application be approved, LifeBridge will withdraw the 2015-2016 Vet Corps grant continuation and merge the programs into one grant.

Theory of Change as a Multi-focus Intermediary

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LifeBridge AmeriCorps members and leveraged volunteers will be engaged in the following interventions: providing academic support and mentoring to children and their families; increasing college retention rates; providing parents and guardians with resources to promote healthy development and education in the home; improving access to healthy foods and nutrition information; providing financial literacy services; providing job skills training; and serving veterans and military families. LifeBridge AmeriCorps makes decisions about how to serve vulnerable populations by integrating the best evidence-based practices with member expertise, the preferences of those being served, and the supporting community organizations (Hanely, Kania, & Kramer, 2012; Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010).

WV, while relatively homogeneous racially, is socially diverse. Because of the state's mountainous terrain, communities are physically isolated from one another and often develop their own identity and set of norms. As a result, programs and interventions designed to work in one area may not be effective in a community that is less than 30 miles away. The most successful human services programs operate on a community level, where trust is established among residents and physical barriers are diminished. LifeBridge AmeriCorps embraces this model of community-based programming with a multi-focused approach and helps economically disadvantaged individuals "where they are" and helps them overcome economic challenges by accessing the employment, education, and human services they need to live healthy, productive lives.

Community-based program design is a social program design method that enables social service providers, organizers, designers and evaluators to serve specific communities in their own environment. In an effort to implement an integrated response to meet critical human needs, a statewide partnership was developed among LifeBridge, United Ways of WV, and targeted community organizations. This collaboration leverages resources available, reduces redundancy of services, and maximizes the specialties developed within each organization to best serve vulnerable populations.

LifeBridge has developed a coordinated network of comprehensive child and adult education services and supports, financial and job skills training services, and an effective human service referral system that is adaptable to best meet the needs of vulnerable populations across the State of WV.

LifeBridge AmeriCorps provides overall direction to the program; assists in the identification of community needs; recruits and trains members; recruits sites for members to serve; trains supervisors to manage members; evaluates the program; and helps disadvantaged AmeriCorps members engage in educational pursuits or job opportunities after their service is complete. Community sites also identify specific needs in the community; recruit and train members; supervise the day-to-day

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activities of the members; and develop specialties and trusting relationships to address the unique attributes of economically disadvantaged individuals in their community. AmeriCorps members provide a number of different activities, depending on the priority area they are addressing.

The benefits of a multi-focused AmeriCorps program in communities are four-fold: (1) Members of the community serve their own communities; (2) AmeriCorps members serve vulnerable and at-risk individuals, children, and families who would otherwise go unserved; (3) through the AmeriCorps experience, members gain the personal and professional skills to go on to competitive employment; and (4) AmeriCorps members leverage their service by increasing community volunteers and a sense of responsibility.

All members will enhance community development by initiating new partnerships for agency sites, recruiting new volunteers, and responding to changing community needs. All members will provide quality information and referral services to assist economically disadvantaged individuals access the services and community supports they need to thrive in their communities. Each LifeBridge member will recruit and train a minimum of 25 non-duplicated volunteers, which will result in 1,750 volunteers engaged in communities across WV. All members will be encouraged to recruit a diverse pool of volunteers to engage youth and adult volunteers.

AmeriCorps members are a highly effective means of addressing community needs because they are a part of the communities they serve. Members understand the cultural barriers that are frequently encountered by those that need services the most. A few of these barriers include mistrust of outsiders, feeling of isolation, and sense of shame in asking for help. Members work within their communities to reduce these barriers and create bridges to help individuals and families access needed services and supports. Members will keep abreast of the most critical needs in their communities and use their community service projects to help meet those needs. AmeriCorps members add value to communities across the state. They do not replace employees, but add to the services and resources available to help those most in need. Members enable organizations to provide the critical one-on-one services to help vulnerable individuals address significant issues, increase their quality of life, and assist the organization in reaching stated goals and objectives.

### Notice Priority

As identified above, LifeBridge AmeriCorps will address four CNCS areas of Education, Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families through a multi-focus intermediary approach and all of the CNCS requirements. As part of the multi-focus intermediary approach, letters of continued support and commitment from agencies are attached.

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### Member Training

The LifeBridge program has designed a multifaceted training program to ensure members have a powerful service experience and develop a strong and life-long ethic of service. The training program is broken down into 4 phases: beginning, developing, performing, and closing. In the beginning (months 1-2), members will receive training in topics to include an orientation to AmeriCorps, ethics of service, site specific skill building, policies and procedures, and building portfolios. These activities will build teamwork amongst members, prepare them to handle uncertainties, and begin developing personal and professional goals. In developing (months 3-4), members will receive training in problem solving, conflict resolution, time and stress management, which will help them reflect on issues affecting persons and families being served and how to best handle them. During performing (months 5-9), members will continue skill building and leadership training, and learn more about systems affecting both families and communities served. In closing (months 10-12), members will learn about life after AmeriCorps, finalize their portfolio, and work on personal hard and soft employment skills. Each phase has skill building training components and reflections built into the process.

To begin their year of service, members are paired with a professional mentor from the business community who helps them create personal and professional goals. They also participate in a 3-day pre-service orientation program that is highly experiential in nature. The training program will enhance the skills necessary to be successful during their service year and beyond and learn the regulations of the AmeriCorps program, including prohibited activities. During the 3-days, members will also receive extensive evidence-based training in academic support, mentoring, financial literacy services, and job skills training.

Members receive ongoing support from their community mentor, from the program, and from returning members. Throughout their year of service, members will receive 200 hours of training and personal development that targets the following skills: community leadership, problem solving, conflict management, increased emotional intelligence, and effective communication. Members will have the opportunity to fully explore their ethic of service and motivation for participation in the AmeriCorps program. Each training an AmeriCorps member attends will have a structured reflection component incorporated to ensure that members are making the connection between their service and community improvement. Site supervisors will provide frequent and structured reflection opportunities for the members. All requirements are documented in the supervisor and member handbook.

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### **Member Supervision**

LifeBridge AmeriCorps staff will work diligently with site supervisors to ensure that members have a positive and productive year of service in an environment that supports their personal and professional growth and fosters a productive work ethic. Site supervisors will be selected by the host site and trained by the LifeBridge program. They will be engaged in site supervisor training prior to member recruitment and will be trained on member management, prohibited activities, member reflection, mediation, and member selection.

Each member will have a site supervisor who will act as the direct supervisor for the member. The site supervisor will be responsible for the day-to-day supervision of the member, schedule the service time, and approve or deny requests for leave. Member discipline will be handled jointly with the site supervisor and the Director or Associate Director of the LifeBridge AmeriCorps program. Members will receive a site orientation during which the site supervisor will review the service description, agency policies and procedures, general expectations of the host site, and an orientation to the community. All members will receive site-specific training to better enable them to serve clients of the host sites more effectively. LifeBridge AmeriCorps views the site supervisor as an integral part of member recruitment, training, supervision, assessment, and improvement process. They will inform AmeriCorps staff of the status and development of the member and the program progress.

### **Member Experience**

LifeBridge AmeriCorps members connect with other national service participants in WV in several ways. Members participate in the statewide Mountain State Leaders program on community leadership and developing community service projects. During the 2014-2015 program year members could opt-in to West Virginia's Disaster Corps program in partnership with the State Commission and the American Red Cross. If they choose this option, they may be deployed during local and area disaster events in accordance with their training for up to three consecutive days or for not more than five total days during the year. These hours will count in the training portion of the member hours requirements for the AmeriCorps year. Members also participate in cross stream service projects with Senior Corps programs and the AmeriCorps\*VISTA program of the UWCWV.

LifeBridge AmeriCorps will recruit the majority of its members directly from the communities being served. This is a key element to program success and removing trust barriers. All agencies requesting AmeriCorps members from LifeBridge AmeriCorps will be required to conduct outreach activities to local high schools, institutions of higher education, and/or vocational schools. This direct contact also promotes the use of the Education Award as a recruiting tool.

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The LifeBridge program will make a concerted effort to recruit and train members with disabilities and members from traditionally underrepresented populations. The LifeBridge program has a strong history of working successfully with these populations. A secondary goal of the LifeBridge program is to help interested members move to competitive employment or pursue higher educational opportunities.

### **Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification**

LifeBridge AmeriCorps understands the importance of ensuring that members identify with the larger AmeriCorps program at the state and national level. Each AmeriCorps member will receive member gear clearly displaying the AmeriCorps logo, consisting of one tee shirt, one sweatshirt, one polo shirt, one pin, and specific instruction on how to identify themselves to the community. They will also receive training on working with the media and highlighting the impact of the program on local communities. At the end of their service year, each member is given information on the AmeriCorps Alumni Association so they can broaden their professional network.

### **Organizational Capability**

The mission of the United Way of Central WV (UWCWV) is to identify needs, develop and mobilize resources, and implement programs in a manner that models shared leadership, enhances organizational capacity, and builds better communities. In 1994, the first AmeriCorps grant was awarded to the organization for 18 members to serve four counties. The program has grown over the year to include all of the state's 55 counties. Throughout its history, the LifeBridge AmeriCorps program has consistently reached its stated outcomes. As the oldest and largest full-time AmeriCorps program in WV, the State Corporation office and the WV Commission for National and Community Service (WVCNCS) often requests that the LifeBridge program be a host for various national and state organizations to learn about National Service programs. The program also provides technical assistance for new AmeriCorps applicants and programs.

UWCWV is experienced in successfully managing federal funds and National Service programs. In addition to the LifeBridge programs, the organization also manages Foster Grandparents, RSVP, and AmeriCorps\*VISTA programs. Approximately \$1,718,036 comes directly from CNCS to support all these National Service programs, and \$411,154 non-federal dollars are used as match for these programs. Throughout its history, LifeBridge AmeriCorps has raised the required match funds through donations made from communities and the agencies it supports.

UWCWV has the necessary administrative capability to manage the AmeriCorps program, following all federal rules and regulations. The organization is comprised of three divisions: Internal Operations,

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Resource Development, and Community Services. LifeBridge AmeriCorps, LifeBridge Vet Corps, Senior Corps, and AmeriCorps\*VISTA programs are under the direction of the Community Services Division. UWCW is acutely aware of the need to demonstrate transparency as stewards of public funds. An internal control system is in place to record, track, and ensure that revenues and expenses are properly documented and credited to the correct account line items. A local certified public accounting firm conducts an A-133 audit annually. WVCNCS also conducts a financial compliance review six months into the program year. The program is consistently found to be in compliance with all federal and AmeriCorps-specific regulations and provisions. LifeBridge is required to report outcome measures twice a year to the WVCNCS. Yearly compliance reviews and continuation grants are based on successful outcomes.

Program staff for LifeBridge AmeriCorps includes a part-time Community Services Division Director, full-time AmeriCorps Director, full-time Program Associate Director, full-time Program Assistant, and limited contract staff. Lisa Hudhall is the Community Services Division Director. She has over 25 years of experience in nonprofit program and fiscal management. Lacinda Fresquez, Director of the AmeriCorps Program, holds a Masters degree in Nonprofit Administration, a Bachelors degree in Business Administration and Accounting, and is a veteran of the U.S. military. Lacinda is the primary contact for the grant. Darnitta Elswick, Program Associate Director, was a National Service participant for seven years, serving one year with AmeriCorps State and six years with AmeriCorps\*VISTA. Kerri Cooper, Program Assistant was a National Service participant for six years, serving with LifeBridge AmeriCorps for four years and AmeriCorps\*VISTA for two years.

LifeBridge AmeriCorps uses limited contract staff to assist in site visits and assist with basic administrative tasks. The program engages former AmeriCorps members or other community members with extensive knowledge of National Service to complete the aforementioned tasks.

Program staff members are paid from a variety of sources, with all time charged to all grants and contracts properly documented on time sheets.

### Compliance and Accountability

LifeBridge AmeriCorps has entered its 20th year of service to WV and is well versed in the AmeriCorps rules and regulations. To ensure full compliance, the program undergoes at least one full review of program policies and procedures from the WVCNCS. Program staff will attend CNCS sponsored meetings and trainings to ensure the program has the most up-to-date information on provisions, rules, and regulations.

To ensure compliance at the service site location, LifeBridge has a mandatory training for all host sites

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prior to the beginning of the program year. All pertinent rules and regulations are covered at this training and LifeBridge conducts at least one site visit each year to further ensure compliance. LifeBridge AmeriCorps believes that clear and consistent communication between the members, the host sites, and program staff is the key to assuring compliance. As part of the member agreement, members are required to report any concerns they have regarding their service activities to the Director or Associate Director. Program staff will immediately initiate an investigation and take appropriate action if necessary. Host sites are also required, as a part of the site agreement, to report any concerns with the member service or program requirements to LifeBridge staff. All concerns will be investigated and addressed in a timely fashion and program staff will solicit assistance from WVCNCS as needed. In the event that instances of risk of noncompliance are identified, the program or host site will create a plan of action to rectify the situation. The LifeBridge program has a good working relationship with WVCNCS and does its due diligence to bring any problems or potential problems to the Commission's attention so that the situation can be dealt with in a transparent and effective fashion.

### Past Performance for Current Grantees and Former Grantees Only

During the many years of service, thousands of individuals and families have had their lives changed for the better. Hundreds of AmeriCorps members have pursued gainful employment. Over the last three years, the LifeBridge program consistently met, and often exceeded, outlined performance measures. More than 12,000 adults were assisted with job training skills, and 1,300 individuals were able to secure employment. AmeriCorps members leveraged their service by acquiring 11,300 new community volunteers who worked collaboratively to keep abreast of, and address the most critical needs in their communities in 2,240 service projects. Using Slosson's literacy tests, 90% of children tested demonstrated improvements, with 42% improving up to one grade, and 48% improving one grade level or higher. An example from the field comes from Monongalia County. "The Shack" provides academic support and mentoring to children who are identified as at-risk, with low levels of literacy. Member intervention consisted of reinforcement activities with site words, fluency, and phonics. Students were administered Slosson's Oral Reading Tests to assess student literacy improvements and results indicated 80% of students receiving intervention services improved one grade level or above in literacy. In early childhood (birth to 72 months), children were testing on developmental milestones. They were given pre, mid, and post mastery skills tests. Over 27% of the children mastered all pre-tests, and 59% demonstrated improvements.

LifeBridge acknowledges the CNCS ongoing request to increase targets related to actual performance

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and is working to align them more accurately. Target numbers for this application have been increased based on prior year averages, and scaled to accommodate the current MSY request. Monitoring of target numbers will occur quarterly, and modifications will be requested if needed. The compliance reviews and the A-133 audit for the last full year of program operation did not identify any compliance issues or areas of risk. The LifeBridge AmeriCorps program has a strong commitment to be good stewards of federal funds.

The LifeBridge program initially had 100% enrollment in the most recent full year of program operations, but it was not maintained because members were exited for personal and compelling circumstances or for non-compliance with the member contract. Staff and sites will continue to interview candidates more thoroughly and ensure members understand the obligations to both the site and the AmeriCorps program. LifeBridge provides its participants with the skills, knowledge, and self-confidence to tackle the challenges they may face both personally and while in service. An open-door policy and a relaxed environment is maintained so that program members are engaged to share their experiences. Members are encouraged to add content to trainings that help them address their challenges. The staff also concentrates on making sure members have the skills they need to go on to competitive employment. This is done by ensuring the roles members have at the sites are integral in advancing the organization's mission, that members perform tasks that fit into the larger goals of the program, and that they are integrated as members of a team. The end of service surveys completed by members consistently demonstrate that because of the program, members have become more aware of their skills, interest, values, work ethic and personality, and civic responsibility. Further, 98% of surveyed members would encourage others to join AmeriCorps.

### **Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy**

The proposed budget meets the expectations of CNCS AmeriCorps programs and has been developed to be as efficient as possible. The program utilizes its financial resources prudently and effectively. The budget supports appropriate levels of staffing and adequate staff compensation, and line items are appropriate to meet the needs of the program. The proposed budget includes member support for ongoing personal and professional development and does not exceed the maximum cost per Member Service Year (MSY) of \$13,730. LifeBridge is requesting below the maximum cost per MSY, at \$12,901, and will continue to pursue grants from public and private sources to help support the program. Cash match funding will continue from established partners, which assists in meeting the cost of personnel, benefits, supplies, contracts, training for staff and members, program evaluation, and other general operating costs. The cash match is not a fee for service. In addition to the cash

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match, partners will supply a significant amount of in-kind contributions related to member support.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

LifeBridge AmeriCorps has developed a comprehensive evaluation plan that outlines its Theory of Change, including the need for the program; activities to address these needs; outputs; clear and measurable long-term outcomes; and data collection methods and an Evaluation Design, complete with research questions and details that outline how and when the data will be collected. This evaluation plan has helped to strengthen the program design over the last 20 years by demonstrating a positive impact on communities across the State. As a result, the program has seen continued and ongoing growth to meet the increasing needs of the most vulnerable populations in West Virginia.

#### Theory of Change

While relatively homogeneous racially, West Virginia is socially diverse. Because of the State's mountainous terrain, communities are physically isolated from one another and often develop their own identity and set of norms. As a result, programs and interventions designed to work in one area may not be effective in a community that is less than 30 miles away. The most successful human services programs operate on a community level, where trust is established among residents and physical barriers are diminished. LifeBridge AmeriCorps embraces this model of community-based programming and helps economically disadvantaged individuals where they are and helps them overcome economic challenges by accessing the employment, education, and human services they need to live healthy, productive lives.

Community-based program design is a social program design method that enables social service providers, organizers, designers, and evaluators to serve specific communities in their own environment. In an effort to implement an integrated response to meet critical human needs, a statewide partnership was developed among LifeBridge, United Ways of West Virginia, and targeted community organizations. This collaboration leverages resources available, reduces duplication of services, and maximizes the specialties developed within each organization to best serve vulnerable populations. By serving as the umbrella organizer of the LifeBridge AmeriCorps program and performing all required administrative, training, and financial activities required by CNCS, LifeBridge AmeriCorps effectively and efficiently meets community needs through National Service participants, especially in communities without the capacity to develop AmeriCorps programs on their own.

To ensure LifeBridge is meeting unmet needs in communities across West Virginia, host site representatives and the staff of LifeBridge AmeriCorps meet to discuss and evaluate the program to

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determine changes needed for continued growth prior to the beginning of each program year. These meetings are held in each of the five (5) regions of the State. Because the geography and population varies greatly and each region has unique needs, each program year is tailored to meet the most critical needs of the state in each focus area. The annual budget for evaluation is \$2,000.

### **Education**

The Education activities and outputs will lead to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children; improved school readiness for economically disadvantaged young children; improved educational and behavioral outcomes of students in low-achieving elementary, middle and high schools; and support economically disadvantaged students prepare for success in post-secondary educational institutions. Evaluation tools will consist of agency records; Slosson Literacy Tests; parent, teacher, and student surveys; and qualitative stories of success.

### **Economic**

The Economic activities and outputs will lead to improved economic well-being and security of economically disadvantaged people. Participants will be assessed in areas including, but not limited to, completed resumes, job search skills, interview skills, and time management. Success will be determined through the number of individuals with improved job skills, skills, job readiness and currently searching for employment, and those who obtained employment as a result of interventions.

### **Healthy Futures**

The Healthy Futures activities and outputs will result in increased food security for participants and their children. Evaluation will focus on the impact of the AmeriCorps program in reducing food insecurity. The program will utilize agency records to evaluate the amount of food received and post-assessment surveys completed by participants to evaluate the value and effectiveness of information provided, and participants assessment of learned and applied knowledge.

### **Veterans and Military Families**

The Veterans and Military Families activities and outputs will result improved job skills and/or employment and increased knowledge and usage of available veteran services. The program will utilize agency records, post-assessment surveys completed by participants to evaluate the value and effectiveness of information provided and participant assessment of learned and applied knowledge. Participants will be assessed in areas including, but not limited to, completed resumes, job search skills, interview skills, and time management. Success will be determined through the number of individuals with improved job skills, skills, job readiness and currently searching for employment, and

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those who obtained employment as a result of interventions.

### Research Questions

To ensure outputs and outcomes are met, a process and outcome evaluation will be conducted for each priority area and for the overall program.

Specific process research questions include:

How many member of the target population were served in each targeted CNCS area?

How many hours of service were provided to the target population in each targeted CNCS area?

How many service projects were conducted?

What types of service projects were conducted?

How many volunteers were recruited?

What types of service did volunteers perform?

How many community workshops were conducted by AmeriCorps members?

What kinds of workshops were conducted?

Specific outcome research questions include:

Were the outcomes in each CNCS area met? If not, why? If yes, what contributed to the success?

How were communities impacted by support from AmeriCorps members?

How was the capacity of organizations enhanced by AmeriCorps members?

Specific member development research questions include:

How many members were enrolled in the LifeBridge program?

What was the retention rate of members in the program?

How many members enrolled in educational programs?

How many members obtained employment at the end of their year of service?

How much training did each member receive?

How did the program impact AmeriCorps members professional development?

### Research Design

LifeBridge AmeriCorps program staff will lead the development and execution of a comprehensive AmeriCorps program evaluation. An external contract evaluator will assist staff in developing measurement tools, collecting and analyzing data, and reporting progress towards the outcomes. The Community Services Advisory Committee of United Way of Central West Virginia will provide

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program support and advice for the program evaluation on an ongoing basis. This committee, in cooperation with representatives from the host site agencies and communities served, will conduct a mid-year and end-of-year review of the program to assess the program's progress towards meeting performance measures, and offer recommendations to help strengthen the program. The results of these reviews will be shared with site supervisors and members, and used to facilitate future program planning and improvement.

### Data Collection Methods

Data collection will involve a quasi-experimental design utilizing pre- and post-data obtained through observation and self-evaluation/reporting. Pre-testing such as questionnaires and observation will be employed to establish baseline data. The final evaluation report will be based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation will focus on the specific performance measures and goals established for each CNCS priority area.

Data will be collected directly from participants, their families, and teachers utilizing the data collection tools and instruments identified under each CNCS priority area. Data will be collected throughout the program year. The evaluator will work with program staff to assure the integrity and confidentiality of the data collected. All sites and members will be asked to participate in the evaluation measures such as testing, questionnaires, progress reports, and data collection and compilation. Members will be trained to collect data and report monthly logs to the LifeBridge staff. AmeriCorps members will be responsible for administering tools, maintaining monitoring forms, and submitting results to LifeBridge staff.

### Evaluator Qualifications

Qualifications of the external consultant will include skills and at least 2 years of experience in evaluation design, data collection, quantitative and qualitative analysis, communication, and a demonstrated history of successful program evaluation.

### Timeline

The overall time allotted for this evaluation is 3 years. Because LifeBridge AmeriCorps is an existing program with evaluation instruments already in place, the evaluation will begin at the start of the program. Below is a more detailed annual timeline for each program year:

Review previous evaluation results and refine evaluation plan: Months 1-3

Train members, staff, and site supervisors to collect and report data: Month 1

Hire an evaluator: Month 1-3

Vet plan with evaluator: Months 4-5

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Begin data collection: Month 1

Continue data collection: Months 1-12

Provide ongoing training on data collection as needed: Months 2-12

Clean data: Months 1-12

Conduct analysis and write report: Month 13

Submit reports to CNCS: Month 13

Reflect on lessons learned with program staff and evaluation team: Month 13

### Amendment Justification

n/a

### Clarification Summary

April 17, 2015

C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. To track the success of the interventions a minimum level of improvement on a post-test or survey must be defined. The applicant did not provide a minimum level of improvement for any of the performance measures (PM). Please provide minimum improvement levels that must be reached for beneficiaries to be counted in all performance measure output and outcomes.

Each of these items has been updated in the performance measure module as needed.

Economic Opportunity

O2 Output- 4000 will receive training or skill development services based on attendance logs.

Outcm5580- Minimum level of improvement: measured by the acquisition of at least one skill, as noted in performance measure module. 2,000 clients show improvement based on pre/post surveys. The Performance Measure module will not allow an addition or change in the data collection tool. The only choice available in the instrument section is Other.

Healthy Futures

H11 Output- 10,000 individuals receive at least one service based on tracking and intake forms at sites.

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H12 Outcome- Minimum level of improvement: measured by the number of individuals who acquire knowledge of at least one new available community hunger related resource based on pre/post survey. Target is 4,800.

### Education

Output ED4A- Target number was increased in the performance measure module to indicate the number of student-mentor matches sustained during the 6 month intervention period. 1,000 Matches will be sustained for at least one hour per week over 6 months.

Output ED3A- 5,000 student-mentor matches will be started.

Outcome ED27B ¿ Minimum level of improvement: In order to be counted in the target of 200, a student must have a 10% improvement in at least 2 areas based on a teacher pre and post survey.

Outcome ED5 - Minimum level of improvement: Of 250 students tested, 200 students will improve at least one month or more in scores based on pre and posttests of reading levels using Slossons standardized testing.

### Economic Opportunity- Financial Literacy Training

Output O1 ¿ Number of economically disadvantaged individuals receiving financial literacy services.

Outcome O9 - Minimum level of improvement: measured by the acquisition of at least one skill (banking, budgeting, interest, investments, credit) based on a pre and post test.

### Veterans Job Skills Training

OUTCM18783- Minimum level of improvement: 600 Veterans will demonstrate improvement by the acquisition of at least one skill, via a pre and post survey. This is noted in performance measure module.

2. The applicant has a target of 200 students for PM outcomes ED5 and ED27B. This is only 4% of he

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expected 5000 students who will sustain a mentor/mentee match for at least six months. Please provide a compelling explanation for why a 4% improvement is a significant and rigorous standard to attain.

5,000 is the target number of student mentor matches started. 1,000 matches will be sustained over time. However, pre and post testing is only possible for 250 of those 1,000 students due to rolling start and end dates, limited funding and scheduling challenges. 200 of those tested will show improvement which is an 80% improvement rate.

3. Applicant determined performance measures outcm5580 and outcm18783 have ¿Other¿ listed as the measurement tool. Please change these PM to reflect the pre- and post-test that will be used to measure beneficiary improvement.

For OUTCM5580 and OUTCM18783 data will be collected and measured using pre and post participant surveys measuring acquisition of at least one skill over the course of the intervention. The Performance Measure module will not allow an addition or change in the data collection tool. The only choice available in the instrument section is ¿Other¿.

April 13, 2015

1. The applicant did not have 100% retention in the last grant cycle. Please provide a corrective action for how the program intends to improve retention rates.

AmeriCorps candidates undergo two interviews with site and/or LifeBridge staff and service shadowing before selection is made. Member retention is of vital importance to both the sites and the program. Members receive training from both LifeBridge and their host sites. LifeBridge will continue to engage members and ensure all communication is clear, consistent, and follow-up support is in place.

Orientation of members will incorporate goal development to ensure member buy-in to program, site, and personal goals. The message will focus on volunteer impact and outcomes, with the objective to produce a heightened sense of belonging, acceptance and recognition, increased self-esteem, and a mutually understood and shared responsibility for achievements. Orientation will also include exercises to enhance teamwork, leadership skills, and esprit de corps. Member trainings throughout

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the program year will include sessions designed to aide member growth, and include topics such as self- awareness, conflict management and communication, and civic engagement. Host sites receive training prior to recruitment and orientation of AmeriCorps members. Training will be designed to enhance member recruitment, selection, and orientation. Sites will be trained to identify volunteers who are good candidates and to consider factors in member selection, such as: extenuating circumstances, future goals, impact of service requirements, logistical obstacles, perceived reliability, general interests and motivation. LifeBridge will emphasize the importance of, and ensure sites have a clear orientation plan so members feel welcomed and are able to bond with the organization. This plan should include maintaining open communication, and to identify and document training needs and opportunities for professional development. Host sites will be encouraged to involve members in appropriate staff meetings, retreats, and training events. The goal is to help the AmeriCorps member feel integrated into the organization and its mission, so their service has personal value and merit. Lifebridge will ensure site service descriptions incorporate multiple activities that provide a variety of volunteer assignments designed to engage and challenge members. Members will be encouraged to become more involved with community organizations, and both host sites and LifeBridge will assist in finding (offering) opportunities for them to participate in additional projects. Sites will provide constructive and positive feedback on all aspects of member performance and assist with creating achievable goals and objectives. Sites will provide projects, tasks, and assignments throughout year that meaningful to the member and the community they serve, which allow the member to develop and exercise leadership.

Explanation for why cost/MSY cannot be decreased.

West Virginia is a rural state situated entirely within the Appalachian region. LifeBridge AmeriCorps members primarily serve in nonprofits in rural areas with extreme poverty without the infrastructure to develop AmeriCorps programs on their own. To respond to changing community needs and to improve the lives of those living in poverty as a multi-focus intermediary, LifeBridge staff members perform a minimum of one site visit per year, per site. LifeBridge central office is in excess of fifty miles from most sites, and sites are typically isolated from one another; therefore, LifeBridge travel costs are higher to manage sites across the state and train members with limited access to public transportation.

Performance Measure Clarification

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Removed ED27 as an outcome and replaced with ED27B. Revisited and revised Education performance measures to include ED3A and to properly align outputs and outcomes for ED5 and ED27B.

O9, Outcome 5580 and Outcome 18783: A pre and post identical survey will be administered to evaluate change in knowledge or skills acquired. The survey will include questions that measure the individual's knowledge and/or skills in: making a budget; understanding the importance of saving; having or knowing how to open a bank account; tracking their money; understanding pros and cons of credit; knowing how to obtain credit scores; and understanding college financial aid. Improvement is measured by the individual's change in knowledge and/or skills in at least one of the financial literacy topics presented.

H11: AmeriCorps Members will work with existing agencies, food banks, nutrition programs and other community health services to provide nutrition education, information on healthy food choices and other healthy lifestyle choices. Dosage is one day. AmeriCorps members ensure individuals receiving services are counted only once through agency reports that identify both unduplicated and returning individuals receiving dosages throughout the year. Success/improvement is measured by individuals who report: 1) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods; and 2) assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.

### Continuation Changes

n/a

### Grant Characteristics