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Executive Summary

As the leader in a rural south central Iowa multi-focus consortium, AmeriCorps Youth Launch (AYL) will mobilize 25 members and an additional 460 leveraged volunteers to inspire academic and personal success in regional youth through academic assistance, mentoring, service learning, and 35 cultural/enrichment opportunity programs. This community school partnership will focus on building Developmental Assets to improve student attitudes toward academic engagement. Over three years, members and volunteers will provide intensive services and enrichment opportunities to promote educational success for 3760 students annually. This CNCS project will focus on Education, matching \$174,296 from CNCS with \$170,838 from outside sources.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM/NEED: A common greeting between African Masai warriors is "Cassarian Engeri", asking "how are the children?" The response to this greeting is not only a polite pleasantry, but a measure of the health of the entire Masai tribe. Like the Masai, in the US, if the children are thriving the community is also healthy. Unfortunately, substantial data indicates that in very real ways, the children of south central Iowa are not well. Many middle school and high school youth in rural south central Iowa experience economic, cultural, and opportunity poverty, and lack the developmental assets to overcome those barriers. The small, isolated communities and schools have inadequate resources to meet some of the basic needs of the youth in the region. To address this problem/need, the AmeriCorps Youth Launch (AYL) program creates in-school and out-of-school academic and personal success programs, provides extensive enrichment opportunities, and builds the capacity of small rural communities to provide ongoing youth programs.

Economic Poverty: Poverty in the six-county region composed of Decatur, Ringgold, Wayne, Lucas, Union, and Clarke counties is prevalent and severe. The entire region qualifies as primarily Beale 9 (completely rural) with just 3 of 44 communities qualifying as Beale 7 (urban population 2,500 to 19,999 not adjacent to a metropolitan area) according to USDA codes. The median household income of each of the six counties is below the state average: Clarke \$44,211; Union \$41,795; Lucas \$44,020; Ringgold \$43,655; Wayne \$38,447; and Decatur the lowest in the state of Iowa at \$34,942 (Iowa average, \$51,129; national average, \$53,046). Children aged 0-18 living in poverty in the six counties include: Ringgold 29.5%; Wayne 26.5%; Decatur 26.2%; Lucas 25.4%; Union 20.9%; Clarke 19.1% (Iowa average, 16.2%; national average, 21.6%). Source: 2010 US Census Bureau Small Area Income and Poverty Statistics. The six school districts served by AYL report from 48.3%-65.6% free/reduced

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lunch students (Iowa average, 41.1%, Iowa Department of Education 2013-2014). The cumulative effects of rural poverty adversely impact youths' educational success, outlook for the future, and development of positive assets. Extensive data relates poverty to poor student engagement and performance. The 2011 Iowa Department of Education report of the standardized Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores shows a 24% discrepancy in both reading comprehension and math for 8th grade students eligible vs. not eligible for free/reduced meals. The ETS Center for Research on Human Capital and Education, 2013, addressed the issue of poverty: "While education has been envisioned as the great equalizer, this promise has been more myth than reality. Today, the achievement gap between the poor and the non-poor is twice as large as the achievement gap between Black and White students. These differences undoubtedly contribute to the increasing stratification in who attends and graduates from college, limiting economic and social mobility and serving to perpetuate the gap between rich and poor." A 2009 "Child Trends" Research Brief (Moore, Redd, Burkhauser, Mbwana and Collins -- "Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options") states: "Child poverty merits attention because a substantial body of research links poverty with lower levels of child well-being. For a variety of reasons, when compared with children from more affluent families, poor children are more likely to have low academic achievement, to drop out of school, and to have health, behavioral, and emotional problems." There is a strong case for the implementation of programs in southern Iowa that work to address and mitigate the effects of poverty on kids.

Cultural and Opportunity Poverty -- Geographic Isolation: The issues facing southern Iowa, however, are not solely economic. The geographic isolation of the region presents real challenges to engaging, encouraging, and inspiring young people. In this homogenous society with limited cultural opportunities, youth lack regular exposure to diverse learning, enrichment, and cultural experiences readily available in larger population centers. Support programs and educational facilities such as museums, art galleries, and science and performance centers in urban areas are not available in these small rural communities and, for many residents, a trip to Des Moines, the nearest urban area, is a 200 mile round trip. The time and expense to these facilities is a barrier for schools and for individuals alike.

Lack of Developmental Assets: In 2009, to further investigate and identify the issues specifically facing the southern Iowa youth, grant funds were used to acquire and administer a Search Institute "Developmental Assets, a Profile of Your Youth" survey instrument. The results indicated some startling statistics related to how youth view their school, their community, and themselves. Only 35% of the 1,062 youth surveyed felt their school provided them with a caring and encouraging

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environment. Only 27% felt they had positive and responsible adult role models in their life. Only 32% of these young people felt their community valued them and only a shockingly low 19% reported spending 3 or more hours a week involved in "creative activities." This local data, along with the general demographic data related to issues facing youth in poverty, clearly points to the need for a multi-focus intermediary approach including a broad array of asset building interventions such as in-school and out-of-school mentoring, academic assistance, and exposure to cultural and other enrichment opportunities.

Addressing the Problem -- The AYL Multi-Focus Consortium: To address the impact of pervasive economic, cultural, and opportunity poverty present in the target region, AYL leaders have established partnerships with Graceland University, public schools, communities without schools, and community partners. These consortium partners will provide academic assistance, mentoring, and enrichment opportunities as described in the Theory of Change. AYL is based out of Graceland University, an oasis of learning, diversity, and accessible community resources in the region. Graceland, accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, has been identified as a first tier Regional University in the Midwest category by U.S. News and World Report. With a focus on education and a mission directly aligned with the service mission of AmeriCorps, Graceland is an ideal institution for providing the vision as well as the programmatic and fiscal oversight required of a program such as AYL. Public schools and their leaders have proven to be strong partners and have welcomed AYL programming that augments and strengthens the existing educational curriculum. These public schools are an important part of the consortium as they are the center of the communities in which they operate. The idea of communities where there are no public schools may be a foreign concept to many who are not familiar with the extreme rural nature of southern Iowa. However, many small communities in the region have no school building and students may be bussed up to 25 miles one way to attend school. Such communities are extremely rural with very limited organizational infrastructure and financial resources, and lack the capacity to operate an independent AmeriCorps program. In these communities, AYL's organizational capacity allows for a multi-focus intermediary program providing youth support systems and positive youth development activities to improve perspective on school climate, improve academic engagement, and encourage educational and personal success. AYL has developed a successful model to serve rural youth effectively.

THEORY OF CHANGE: The Multi-Focus Intermediary priority provides an excellent platform for a Theory of Change that will meet the needs of the youth in the AYL service area. Multiple performance

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measures were chosen to reflect the multi-focus design. To boost asset development and build community development capacity, AYL delivers in-school, out-of-school, and enrichment activities in a variety of ways. From well-documented needs of economic, opportunity and cultural poverty and lack of Developmental Assets in the regional youth, the AYL Theory of Change envisions a long-term outcome of youth maturing into engaged citizens and successful adults leading rewarding lives. The three Performance Measures of the AYL multi-focus intermediary approach will utilize 30 AmeriCorps members and 460 leveraged volunteers to address identified youth needs. Members will establish community school partnerships to assist youth to build developmental assets and improve academic engagement. The AYL multi-focus approach 1) improves the lives of youth and 2) identifies and utilizes community resources to build capacity for youth programming. Existing AYL efforts provide in-school services to identified at-risk youth primarily during school hours. Expanding the existing program to provide activities and services in the rural communities where there are no schools will open the doors of opportunity and more effectively meet the identified needs of AYL youth.

In-School Program: The AYL In-School Program contains the aligned National Performance Measure. The proposed intervention will utilize 10 AmeriCorps members (6 full-time and 4 half-time) serving in 7 school districts to work with 140 identified at-risk youth who start the education program (ED1). The role of AYL members and leveraged volunteers will be to serve as mentors and academic assistants, and provide exposure to cultural and enrichment opportunities. Identification of at-risk students served will be a collaborative effort of the site supervisor, teachers, administrators, and community youth leaders, and will be based on numerous factors including free/reduced lunch eligibility, family issues, grades, homework completion, behavior, and school attendance. Community school partnerships will be developed by members to assist at-risk students in building Developmental Assets and improving academic engagement (attitudes) indicated by a positive change in perspective on school climate (ED27A). To connect the intervention to the outcome, members will utilize Search Institute's findings that increased Developmental Assets lead to success in school as demonstrated by improved academic engagement. Since small rural schools cannot meet all student needs to build these assets, AYL members and leveraged volunteers will assist at-risk students for at least one hour a week for 36 weeks of school (36 hours). 126 (90%) of the identified at-risk students who start the AYL in-school services will complete the program (ED2). A pre/post Developmental Assets Rubric survey will measure improved academic engagement (attitude). 113 (90%) of the youth completing the program will demonstrate an attitude of improved academic engagement measured by improved

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perspective on school climate (ED27A).

Out-of-School Program: Program history has demonstrated that AYL cannot reach youth in the most effective way by focusing on service solely during the school day. The proposed intervention to address this need is to provide out-of-school programs for at-risk youth during after school, weekends, and summer to build Developmental Assets and pave the way to personal success. The role of 16 AYL members (6 full-time and 10 half-time) will be to provide out-of-school programming for 120 at-risk youth meeting for at least 3 hours per session for 20 sessions throughout the year. While rural communities where many at-risk youth reside often have resources such as a church, park, and sometimes a community center, they lack the structured programs that can link the community together to provide a stronger and more positive answer to the question, "How are the children?" Placing AmeriCorps members in small communities without schools, and continuing existing out-of-school programming will result in the short-term outcome of building Developmental Assets in youth. The initial stages of this intervention will involve identification of specific community needs and unique resources available to begin local youth programming. Links with the school system will be established to provide continuity with the school-based programs. AYL will collaborate with local program partners to provide training for volunteers in positive youth development and developmental stages of youth. This out-of-school program expansion into small rural communities will reach and serve youth where they live. AYL will leverage resources such as food pantries, retired citizens, parents and other volunteers to provide in-kind program support such as snacks, mentors, and academic assistants. To determine short-term outcomes of the out-of-school programs, a Developmental Asset Rubric survey will measure the increase in assets for each youth from onset to completion of their program with a target goal of 108 (90%) of youth attending the out-of-school program demonstrating an increase in Developmental Assets.

Enrichment: To overcome cultural and opportunity poverty, the proposed intervention of all 30 AYL members will be to collaborate with community partners to provide exploratory and enrichment activities. At least 35 exploratory opportunities for 3500 regional school-age youth will be provided during the program year. The role of AmeriCorps members will be to assist in planning the activities, network with community partners, recruit targeted youth, and provide assistance to ensure participation. One key partner in providing these cultural opportunities is Graceland University with a diverse student population from 48 states and 31 countries, and an ethnic diversity of 27%. As many Graceland students in this diverse population are involved in service-learning, internships, and other community based programs, the opportunity to expose rural youth to diverse American and world

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cultures is readily available. One AmeriCorps member will serve on the Graceland campus as a liaison to connect youth with extensive enrichment opportunities across the curriculum such as art, music, drama, sports, curriculum-based camps and many worldwide performing artists that come to the university campus. AmeriCorps members will provide reflection opportunities to link student experiences to educational and personal success. Activity and attendance logs will document the enrichment opportunities and attendance. 12 minimum and 2 quarter-time members will partner with schools, Iowa State Extension, and SAFE Youth Coalitions during the summer to offer short-term programming such as academic support, day camps, service opportunities, and enrichment activities during summer out-of-school time. Bringing these activities to small communities will provide previously unavailable opportunities.

A strong linkage exists between the identified need and the AmeriCorps members and leveraged volunteers. Through the AYL multi-focus program, multiple interventions implemented by AmeriCorps members and volunteers will meet unique needs leading to consistent mid-term and long-term outcomes. These interventions will ensure that area youth continue to improve academic engagement, make productive use of out-of-school time, set higher aspirations for their future, graduate from high school, and have improved resources and greater opportunities to become engaged and successful citizens, leading full and rewarding lives. Through the AYL program, youth will thrive, AmeriCorps members will grow, and communities will continue to develop. "How are the children?" "The children are well!!!" This is the true measure of a successful outcome for the AYL program.

EVIDENCE BASE: Based on CNCS definitions, AmeriCorps Youth Launch is a Moderate Evidence based program that uses the framework of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets to guide interventions of AmeriCorps members and volunteers. The goal is to increase educational success and academic engagement of south central Iowa youth.

Program Specific Study: In 2012-2013, AYL completed an independent quasi-experimental study that demonstrates, through actual data at a high confidence level, that the methods utilized by AYL correlate to a higher level of Developmental Assets among the youth served by the program compared with those not served. During the 2012-2013 school year, a study was completed in which a pre/post assessment rubric was administered to 127 AYL participants. This pre/post tool was also administered to 183 youth not participating in the program. The assessment tool measured on a 1-5 scale the youth's assessment of the degree they possessed each of 14 Development Assets which were a focus of the program. The differential of results from the control group was significant. The average

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differential in the scores on all surveyed assets from the pre-test to the post-test of the participants showed a much higher degree of possession of assets than the control group. The participants indicated an improvement of .43 on the 5-point scale while the control group showed only a .05 improvement. In addition to validating the AYL approach, the pre-test results are utilized by AYL members to identify specific needs of students and develop specific interventions for those individual students.

Relevant Program Study: The Search Institute provides extensive broad-based experimental research that shows with certainty that the possession of Development Assets leads to higher levels of school and personal success. Since 1989, Search Institute has been studying assets in the lives of young people. Investigators theorized that real innovation and education reform begins with all adults paving a path of purpose, hope, joy, and connectedness for every youth. To date, about three million young people have been surveyed. From this research, Search Institute identified 40 Developmental Assets that act as powerful positive influences on adolescent behavior proven across all cultural and socioeconomic groups of youth. Research also shows that too few young people are exposed to these basic building blocks of healthy development. According to Search Institute data, the average young person experiences only 18.6 of the 40 assets, a finding consistent with the results of the Search Institute "Developmental Assets, a Profile of Your Youth" survey administered to all middle school and high school youth in south central Iowa in 2009. Significant Search Institute research of nearly 150,000 youth demonstrates conclusively that more Developmental Assets result in greater demonstration of school success, service, valuing diversity, good health, leadership, resisting danger, and controlling impulses. In fact, the Search Institute studies show that Developmental Assets have as much, and often more, influence on student achievement, including reducing risk-taking behaviors, skipping school, alcohol and drug use, than other demographic factors and school reform strategies. AYL has chosen this evidence-based framework to prepare prescriptive plans for educational success of youth. The U.S. Department of Education awarded Search Institute one of the national 2010 Investing in Innovation Fund's program designations for the 40 Asset framework.

In summary, research and data provided by the Search Institute make a strong case that students who possess the most Developmental Assets demonstrate increased positive behaviors and attitudes and are less likely to participate in high-risk behaviors. The quasi-experimental research done locally demonstrates that the AYL program activities are effective in increasing the degree of these assets in program participants. These two considerations are a good demonstration that the AmeriCorps Youth Launch program is operating as a Moderate Evidence based program as defined by CNCS.

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NOTICE PRIORITY: The AmeriCorps Youth Launch program fits the funding priority of Multi-Focus Intermediary, a new focus area that perfectly aligns with the structure and needs of this very rural, severely under-resourced area. Graceland University provides the non-profit capacity to serve as the lead organization with a proven track record of high quality program design and implementation over the past seven years of AmeriCorps funding. Graceland will engage multiple small communities and organizations (consortium) that lack the necessary capacity to administer an AmeriCorps program independently. Continuing the emphasis on education, consortium members will identify and address their own diverse community needs to ensure that "all the children are well". Because many youth in poverty cannot succeed in school until other basic needs are met, consortium members will tailor programs to specific situations and provide measureable impact to address those needs. In this application, Graceland University, the "lead" agency, will be referred to as the multi-focus intermediary.

MEMBER TRAINING: AYL members will receive high quality and on-going training to equip them to provide effective service to their local youth and communities. An AYL orientation retreat at Graceland University includes an explanation of the AmeriCorps National Service Program, prohibited activities, AYL program activities/interventions, and performance measures. In addition to these topics, AYL members will receive training on the required topics of citizenship, communication, disaster response, volunteer management, and Life After AmeriCorps. These training topics will be led by local residents who specialize in these areas: life coaches, legislators, Graceland professors, emergency management personnel, and career specialists. Youth Development training is provided by Youth Launch Leaders, a partner organization, which provides trainings for AmeriCorps members and volunteers who work with youth. This training focuses on Search Institute's Developmental Assets and how members might increase them in the at-risk youth served by the AYL program, resulting in an improved perception of school climate and engagement. Site supervisors provide specific member training regarding their community and its unique service needs. AmeriCorps members will also join together once a month for a two-hour "AmeriCorps Lunch and Laugh" in rotating locations offering members the opportunity to visit other program sites. These lunch meetings provide on-going trainings and tips focused on Search Institute's Developmental Assets and the opportunity to network through team building activities. The sessions will strengthen leadership skills of AmeriCorps members, build group solidarity, allow for discussion and problem solving of common issues, and enhance regional team efforts.

The AYL Program Director will ensure that all members are made aware of and adhere to prohibited

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activities. Those activities are listed in AYL Member Service Agreements which are completed prior to a member beginning his/her term of service. The rules and prohibited activities are included in the AYL Member Handbook which is reviewed carefully during the member orientation retreat.

Prohibited activities are listed on site agreements, thoroughly discussed with site supervisors, reviewed with members at monthly training sessions, and provided to volunteers.

MEMBER SUPERVISION: AYL members receive high quality guidance and support from their site supervisor. Because in a multi-focus endeavor the nature of the individual needs in communities will vary from site to site, site supervisors are selected with reference to those needs and the community resources available. Member management is a team effort between site supervisors and the Program Director. Day-to-day supervision and guidance of members in their work environment is the responsibility of the site supervisor. Members complete Activity and Attendance Logs which report youth identified and served, hours of assistance provided, activities completed, and assets addressed. Members and site supervisors work as part of the team which develops the list of at-risk youth served by the program, their needs, and proposed interventions. Site supervisors provide the day-to-day support and guidance to members to ensure they are not participating in prohibited activities and that they are planning and leading activities which align with the mission and goals of the AYL program. Site supervisors receive training at the beginning of the service year on AYL priorities, expectations, regulations, prohibited activities mission and goals. Throughout the year, the Program Director remains in close contact with all sites and site supervisors to assure quality programming and compliance and to address problems and issues as they arise.

Site supervisors provide members with excellent guidance and support throughout their service. The primary goal of the site supervisor is to serve as a professional mentor for members. Site supervisors are located at the same site as their member, available to assist members in developing and implementing activities at the site and staying on target in meeting program goals. The site supervisor will also assist the member in identifying additional community needs that align with AYL goals and mission. Feedback, activity logs, and time sheet monitoring help site supervisors assure that members are on track to complete all required service hours and performance measures.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE: AmeriCorps members gain valuable skills and experiences as a result of their training and service that can be utilized and will be valued by future employers. Through service in the community, members develop personal connections with government, school and other community leaders. These skills and connections are valuable assets and can often elevate members as they pursue employment after their term of service is completed.

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AmeriCorps members have access to meaningful service experiences and opportunities for reflection. AYL members do more than help youth with homework. They work on building community and school support systems, intrinsic values, and life skills in all youth they serve, and in turn, build these same important life skills within themselves. Members play an active role in identifying needs, initiating activities, and organizing events to increase community impact. Each member has an opportunity to reflect on their service through Activity Logs, student data sheets, photographs, and their own Great Stories, recording the "wow" experiences of the month. Each monthly training includes an opportunity for members to share and reflect on the prior month's service and plans for the future month. Reflection (making meaning from experience) is something modeled at every training session because it is an essential component of effective service.

AmeriCorps members have the opportunity to establish connections with each other and the broader National Service Network. They are linked through the Graceland University AYL Facebook page, monthly newsletters, and weekly 'Inspirational Notes'. Additionally, when opportunities are available AYL members connect with other AmeriCorps programs to participate in trainings, Days of Service projects, and other AmeriCorps activities allowing the opportunity to build esprit de corps.

AYL members develop a lifelong ethic of service and civic responsibility that carries on after their term of service. Many AmeriCorps alumni stories demonstrate that continued civic participation. Recently an AYL alum was elected to a local Agriculture Extension Council. Another alum was selected to serve on the regional Community Foundation Board of Directors. AYL alumni continue to serve their local communities, giving free music lessons, mentoring, serving on local boards, and planning community-wide events.

AYL recruits AmeriCorps members from the communities in which the program operates. A high percentage of AYL members are local residents, serving in their local communities. This offers a benefit to the program as the local members are familiar with the specific needs and opportunities in their area. Local communities continue to benefit as members remain in their targeted area and continue to contribute to the promotion of youth development and community capacity after their service term.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION: AYL members will know they are AmeriCorps members through intentional and on-going emphasis on the meaning of AmeriCorps service. The AYL Orientation Retreat equips them with the essential knowledge and skills to successfully begin their assignments as AmeriCorps members. The orientation allows members to identify with each other and build an AmeriCorps heart of service. At the orientation, members take

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the "AmeriCorps Pledge" and create and practice elevator speeches for response to the common question "What is AmeriCorps?" Presentations and meetings held at the local AYL sites strengthen leadership skills of members, build group solidarity, and enhance the broad regional team efforts. Members demonstrate pride in their organization by wearing AmeriCorps gear daily and speaking publicly about the mission and values of AmeriCorps. Members are required to make presentations to local organizations to enlist volunteers and explore how AmeriCorps members, youth, and these community organizations can partner together in service projects. Members write articles regularly for local newspapers and school newsletters to feature and promote special AmeriCorps activities and projects. AYL members also prepare "AmeriCorps Radio Spots" which air daily on a local radio station serving the AYL communities. These efforts clearly demonstrate how members make AmeriCorps a significant presence in south central Iowa.

Organizational Capability

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING. Graceland University provides sound programmatic and fiscal oversight, a model for AmeriCorps sponsorship in a rural setting. Located in Lamoni, Iowa, near the center of the six-county AmeriCorps Youth Launch regional service area, the university was founded in 1895 by Community of Christ. Graceland's vision, mission, and values are well aligned with the AmeriCorps community service philosophy. The University's Values and Vision statements proclaim "Graceland values learning, wholeness, and community. Graceland encourages development of these values for the enrichment of lives and the betterment of the world...inspiring and empowering persons for transformational service and leadership." These words speak to Graceland's abiding commitment to providing experiences to benefit individuals, their communities and their world, now and in the future. The university's strong, seasoned management team has the administrative, accounting, payroll, and human resources capacity to support the training and service delivery requirements of AYL. In total, Graceland successfully administers over \$22M in Federal funding annually. In addition to the current AmeriCorps grant, Graceland has administered for over 20 years Federal student financial aid and three significant Federal Trio programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. Dr. John Sellars, president of Graceland and signatory contact for the AYL grant, reports to a 27-member Board of Trustees and chairs the Executive Council. AmeriCorps Youth Launch is located in the Enrollment division under the direction of Greg Sutherland, BA, Executive Director of Affiliate Relations and the secondary contact for the AYL grant. Mr. Sutherland has a long history of employment including Vice President for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admissions. Mr. Sutherland and the AYL Program Director Shannon

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Harris meet weekly and share offices two doors apart. As a past AmeriCorps member, Ms. Harris has a firm understanding of and a deep commitment to the services provided by AmeriCorps and more specifically by the Youth Launch program itself. Ms. Harris has a BA degree in Business and has had employment experience in student financial aid and admissions. Shirley Kessel, a Youth Development Specialist, provides significant guidance to the AYL Program. She has a BA in Education and has taught in elementary and middle school classrooms for 21 years. Over the past ten years, she has worked for non-profits in grant management. In addition to her role as past co-director of AYL, Ms. Kessel directed the School to Work program in Lamoni Community Schools, the Iowa Department of Health State Incentive Grant for three years, the Drug Free Communities Support Grant in Lamoni for five years, and the Drugfree Coalition Mentoring Grant for one year. She serves on multiple county, regional, and state boards and excels in community organizing and capacity building. The Accounting Department, under the direction of the Vice President for Business and Administrative Services with specific oversight from Director of Accounting Services, Katie Still, provides real-time operating budget information to the Program Director who is responsible for grant expenditures. Graceland is audited annually. The Accounting Office is responsible to assure that appropriate accounting practices are followed and that required reports and financial information are completed using financial accounting best practices. This department has significant experience in Federal and state grant accounting processes and provides very good financial oversight to AmeriCorps Youth Launch. Graceland University supports the AmeriCorps Youth Launch Program at all levels, is aligned with the mission of AmeriCorps, and possesses all the needed administrative skills, experience, and leadership to successfully administer the AmeriCorps Youth Launch grant.

In addition, AYL leaders have leveraged the support of Graceland to establish a very broad-based consortium of dedicated and committed partners who provide the physical, financial, and human capital that makes this program possible. In addition to the funds provided by CNCS, \$173,556 cash and in-kind support is being provided by foundations and other institutions for the AYL program. As valuable as these contributions are to the program, the real strength of the program lies in the numerous site partners who will be providing the people, places, and program that are at the heart of the AYL service to the youth. There are 19 individual organizations that make up the multi-focus AYL consortium including schools, Iowa State Extension offices, community recreation programs, faith-based groups, and community centers that are eagerly anticipating the opportunity to participate as program sites in the AYL program. In addition, over 30 other organizations such as food pantries, police departments, community libraries, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and community clubs such as

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Lions, Optimists, and Rotary routinely provide support services and materials to the program.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY: Graceland University and the AYL Program will work to prevent and detect compliance issues through multiple checks and balances that have been implemented at all levels. With an office located at Graceland University, the AmeriCorps Program Director is no more than sixty miles driving distance to each service site. This allows the director to maintain close contact with site supervisors and AmeriCorps members. At the beginning of the program year, members and site supervisors are required to participate in an initial orientation that focuses on AmeriCorps basics, AYL program goals, activity alignment with position descriptions, and prohibited activities. Throughout the year the program director makes regular visits to each AYL site, visiting with members, site supervisors, and other community partners to assure that members are remaining compliant and being held accountable if instances of noncompliance have occurred. These ongoing and frequent site visits will allow for early detection of compliance issues so they can be addressed in a timely manner. Ongoing contact with site supervisors, members, and service sites along with monthly member training sessions, a yearly orientation meeting with site supervisors, and a monthly newsletter all include valuable and definitive information about compliance and prohibited activity regulations. The AYL program will hold itself and service site locations accountable if instances of risk or noncompliance are identified. The AYL program director will take immediate corrective action as guided by AmeriCorps/ICVS policies and make any necessary reports to ICVS. The AYL program will comply with AmeriCorps rules and regulations including those related to prohibited and unallowable activities. The AYL Director attends all program director trainings conducted by the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service in order to stay current with rules, regulations, policies, and prohibited activities. In addition to frequent and on-going site visits, site supervisors are required to ensure that members serving at their sites submit activity logs outlining the member activities, youth served, and a description of services provided. The AYL Program Director monitors member timesheets through the IowaGrants timekeeping system to ensure members are on track to meet required services hours.

PAST PERFORMANCE: Overall, AYL has been successful in meeting its program goals. The data collected over the previous 3 years shows that AYL efforts have increased academic engagement in a significant number of youth in the region. Member activities have led to an increase in assets in the youth served. Youth have been exposed to a multitude of enrichment opportunities also leading to an increase in academic engagement. Over 1000 volunteers have been recruited to assist in the AYL program offerings including academic assistance, after school program support, mentoring, service-

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learning and enrichment opportunities. There has been a need to reevaluate and refine some of the AYL program goals initially established. For example, changes were needed with the pre/post rubric language and administration methods. The language of the rubric was refined to be more age appropriate to the population of students served. Lack of computer availability at some locations created challenges. This was addressed as the asset rubric became available to members in a hard copy format, allowing for more convenience in administering the assessment. The summary analysis of the pre/post survey data from the previous 3 years shows strong evidence of the program's positive impact. Additionally, the analysis shows that youth involved in the program for more than one year experience even further improvement. Member Enrollment: For the 2013-2014 grant year, member enrollment was 100% enrollment. The AYL Program Director works closely with sites early to begin the screening and engagement process to assure that members are selected, trained and prepared to serve in a timely manner. With increased awareness of the AYL program in south central Iowa region, the number of applicants continues to increase every year. Member Retention: For the 2013-2014 grant year, the AYL program achieved an 85% retention rate. Three members exited due to acquiring full-time employment or enrolling into school. Two other members were released for cause. The AYL program offers a powerful member experience and will continue to achieve a high retention rate. The AYL program will continue to implement improvements in the screening process and in on-going monitoring of members' hours completed to ensure members are aware of the requirements to successfully complete their term of service.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

COST EFFECTIVENESS: Corporation Cost per Member Service Year: The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) cost per Member Service Year (MSY) for the AYL program is \$13,290 for a program consisting of 14.07 MSY's distributed among full-time, half-time, quarter time, and minimum time. Cost per MSY has decreased from the previous year and is well below the \$13,930 maximum allowed MSY cost reimbursement established by CNCS. A restructuring of the manner of delivery of services and the associated distribution of members in the service region has allowed for a more efficient program budget while at the same time expanding the scope of service to small rural communities included in AYL's area. In the restructuring and redistribution plan, the multi-focused aspect of AYL will be expanded. Full-time and half-time members will continue serving in local schools with a broad "wrap-around" personal support emphasis designed to strengthen academic and personal success in that environment through a focus on the Search Institutes' Developmental Assets. Also utilizing Developmental Assets, part time members will continue to

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partner with various community entities to provide after-school and out-of-school activities during weekends and summer months. These elements of the service model have been in effect through the existing program for 3 years. In the new model, however, half-time members will also serve year-round in very small rural communities where there is no school through which to support youth programming. These members will receive extensive training on youth development and will focus on family events, community events, after school programs, and summer events that will provide opportunities that simply are not present in these very small communities. All of the member and program expense elements reflected in the program design are accommodated in the budget proposed in this grant application. The past success of AYL, accompanied by the thoughtful plan of evolution for the program, and the administrative resources and experience offered by Graceland University and the leaders of the program are all evidence that the program can be carried out successfully.

While the overall cost per MSY has declined, the program is extending its reach to very small, rural communities in the region that have not been served directly in the past. Additionally, even acknowledging the fact that the service region of AYL is a resource-poor rural area with a very high poverty rate and a scarcity of corporate and philanthropic resources, the percentage of matching funds in this grant proposal has increased to 48%. Contributions from local school sites, Extension, cities, civic organizations such as Optimist, Rotary, Lion's Club, faith based organizations, and significant financial and in-kind support from Graceland University and the Dekko Foundation not only make the finances of the program work but strengthen and broaden the support of the mission of youth development which is the impetus for the program.

This leveraged support of AYL is significant. As the program has become more widely known in the region, support has grown and the program has been able to continue to increase local share of costs to meet or exceed program goals. AmeriCorps members meet with organizations and clubs such as Optimist, Rotary, Lion's Club, schools, and faith groups to present the vision of AmeriCorps and explore how these groups can be involved with volunteers, monetary and other resource support. Private foundation funding, including a match from the Dekko Foundation, provides a large part of the local match. Graceland University provides major support for this program through financial and in-kind support. The university and AYL enrichment programs -- Southern Iowa Special Olympics, Art Academy, History Day, Writers' Workshops, sports camps, STEM focused opportunities such as Science Camp and Math Tours, special activities related to national days of service, and many more enrichment opportunities provide outreach to over 3500 youth annually. South central Iowa counties are eligible for funding from the Dekko Foundation to support individual projects that promote the

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development of children from birth through 18. Since its inception in 1981, the Dekko Foundation has contributed nearly \$100 million to Iowa communities within its six county geographic limit. The Foundation's focus, fostering economic freedom through education, supports the educational projects that benefit young people in targeted communities. The proposed budget in this AmeriCorps application includes \$90,800 in support of the common goals of the Dekko Foundation and AYL that allow for multi-focus capacity building in the area of youth development.

Many citizens of this region model and practice the AmeriCorps way of life on a daily basis. Their annual income parallels the living stipend of AmeriCorps members. These citizens give all they are able to give in terms of time and support for their communities. In-kind resource commitments come from a variety of sources. Area churches, school systems, community coalitions, service clubs, Iowa State Extension, social service agencies, and Graceland organizations such as Enactus, Campus Ministries, athletic teams, and the Gleazer School of Education are current partners in providing learning supports to increase educational success. Each partner offers services that are part of the AYL Support Toolkit. As this program grows and new programmatic needs emerge, new community partners will provide needed resources. Site supervisors offer in-kind support from each county. Each service site offers office space, supplies, and program resources for AmeriCorps members. Graceland University has committed financial and in-kind support such as office space, supplies, equipment, telephone and Internet services, meeting space, and accounting and administrative services.

This broad-based commitment of money, time, and other resources made in the AYL program by a multitude of youth development entities is a very good investment. The number of resources and assets in rural communities is limited and even declining in many small Iowa towns. Certainly, one of the most important of these assets are the youth, and the question of survival of rural Iowa into the future hinges in no small way, on the abilities, success, and creative thinking that those youth will bring to those communities. Through the use of an evaluation tool for measuring perspective on school climate and student success, supported by the science of the Search Institute, the AYL program will continue to demonstrate a positive impact on the developmental assets on youth served by the program. The Search Institute has shown that students with increased assets are much more likely to succeed as adults. This bodes very well for the abilities and the potential for success of the youth and the communities served by the program.

BUDGET ADEQUACY: The budget includes \$186,996 in CNCS share and \$173,556 in Grantee share (\$104,029 in private foundation and local match funds and \$69,527 in indirect cost rate support). The people who commit portions of their lives to service as AmeriCorps members in support of the AYL

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mission are the heart of the program. The proposed budget is adequate to recruit, train, develop, and support the AYL members and staff required to successfully implement, evaluate, and assess the many elements of the multi-focus program described in the narrative and specifically enumerated in the detailed budget of this proposal. Extensive thought, planning, and effort has been expended in the development of the AYL program design. In addition to CNCS funding, the budget includes and relies heavily on the participation of numerous partners in both financial and programmatic ways. The AYL program leaders have a successful track record of collaborating with schools, foundations, and other public service and youth serving organizations to create a committed cadre of program partners who are eager to leverage their contributions against the funding made available by CNCS. Those partners understand that their contributions help improve and ensure the wellbeing of the youth in their region while at the same time bolstering the future health of their individual communities. The contributions of these partners go beyond supporting the match requirements of this application. Their funding goes to support program supplies, materials, places to work, equipment, and other needs not specifically covered by the budget lines enumerated in this grant proposal. It is exactly this broad ranging support of the program that assures not only its financial success but its programmatic success as well. The partners in the AmeriCorps Youth Launch program are invested in the success of this multi-focus endeavor! Their support is what ensures that the desired program outputs and outcomes become reality and the answer to the question "how are the children" moves closer to "all the children are well."

Evaluation Summary or Plan

Theory of Change Summary: As described in depth in the Theory of Change, the AYL program moves from the well-documented needs of economic, opportunity, and cultural poverty and lack of developmental assets in regional youth to a long-term outcome of youth growing up to be engaged citizens and successful adults leading rewarding lives.

AYL has developed assessment instruments that measure the outputs and outcomes that are aligned with the AYL Performance Measure inputs and interventions. These tools include a pre/post Developmental Asset Rubric, attendance logs, activity logs, and an annual partner, member, and alumni program evaluation. The 3 Performance Measures interventions that will be evaluated include in-school, out-of-school, and enrichment/exploratory activities.

In-School: AmeriCorps members establish community school partnerships to assist identified at-risk youth for 1 hour per week for 36 weeks during the school year to build developmental assets and improve academic engagement (attitudes). 140 at-risk youth participants will start a school-based

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asset building program and receive academic assistance to improve academic engagement. 126 at-risk youth will complete a program of school-based asset building activities and academic assistance by meeting with an AmeriCorps member or volunteer for at least 36 hours during the school year. 113 of the at-risk youth participants that complete the program of asset building and academic assistance will demonstrate an improved academic engagement as measured on a Developmental Asset Rubric. Search Institute research shows that this improved academic engagement enables youth to set higher aspirations for their future and increases the likelihood that youth will graduate from high school and grow up to be engaged citizens/successful adults.

Out-of-School: AmeriCorps members and volunteers will provide out-of-school programs for at-risk youth during after school time, weekends, and summer to build Developmental Assets and personal success. A minimum of 120 youth will start and complete an out-of-school program. 108 of these youth participating in out-of-school programs will demonstrate an increase in personal success assets measured by a positive change on the Developmental Asset Rubric. A positive change on the rubric is an indicator that youth have made and will make more productive use of out-of-school time and set higher aspirations for their future. Because of this, youth will be more likely to graduate from high school and will grow up to be engaged and successful citizens.

Enrichment: AmeriCorps members and volunteers will provide a minimum of 35 exploratory and enrichment opportunities that will build Developmental Assets, provide exposure to diverse cultural experiences, and improve academic engagement for 3,500 youth. The youth that participate in these exploratory and enrichment opportunities will build Developmental Assets resulting in higher future aspirations and an increased propensity to graduate from high school and become successful and engaged citizens.

Research Questions: The hypothesis of the AYL program is that an increased presence of Developmental Assets in the lives of youth impacts academic engagement, future aspirations, and personal success.

Proposed Research Design: AmeriCorps Youth Launch uses the framework of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets to guide interventions of AmeriCorps members and volunteers. A Developmental Asset pre/post rubric has been designed to measure the short-term outcomes of performance measures. This pre/post rubric is administered to every at-risk youth participating in in-school and on-going out-of-school asset building programs. Research and data provided by the Search Institute make a strong case that students who possess developmental assets to a larger degree demonstrate increased positive behaviors and attitudes while at the same time demonstrating a lower

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propensity for high-risk behaviors. In order to assess the differentiated impact of the AYL program, this study was expanded in the 2012-13 year to include a control group of non-participants. This quasi-experimental research is a significant element in the assessment of the effectiveness of the AYL program and is described in some detail under the Program Specific Study section of the Evidence Based portion of this application. This study, done locally, demonstrates that the program activities of AYL have been effective in increasing the degree of assets present in the youth served by the program. The ongoing assessment plan for the AYL program includes repeating this Program Specific Study as the formal evaluation for the three year grant cycle.

Evaluator: The Developmental Asset rubric was developed in collaboration with Dr. Katie Bash, Graceland Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness. Ms. Bash, a professional in the field of assessment, was engaged to help establish a tool to measure the sequential Developmental Assets proven to impact academic engagement and positive change in perspective of school climate. As part of Graceland University's support of the AYL program, Dr. Bash and other highly skilled professional faculty and staff remain available for ongoing refinements of the program assessment tools and students in advanced statistical studies are included in data and survey evaluation.

Estimated Budget: While much of the cost associated with assessment of AYL is part of Graceland's ongoing in-kind support of the program, a budget of \$2,000 to cover the costs of administering an annual program evaluation survey and the Program Specific Study (formal evaluation) is included in the proposed budget. AYL leaders are also pursuing other funding to continue to elevate and refine the evaluation instruments currently being utilized to evaluate the program and its participants. Between the in-kind support from Graceland, the proposed budget, and the opportunity for additional third party funding, the resources available for assessment instruments and activities are adequate and even robust.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

2015-2016 CLARIFICATIONS

NARRATIVE CLARIFICATIONS

COST PER MSY

CNCS maximum cost per MSY for programs operating in rural communities is \$13,930. Because of

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experienced leadership and efficient budgeting, AYL is able to manage an AmeriCorps youth service program at \$13,285 per MSY, which is \$645 less than the CNCS allowable amount.

PROGRAMMATIC CLARIFICATIONS

Graceland University serves as the lead organization in the AmeriCorps Youth Launch consortium and this grant application serves as the university's support of the program. AmeriCorps Youth Launch has submitted signed letters of commitment and/or memorandums of understanding from members of the proposed consortium as required for consideration as a Multi-Focus Intermediary. The proposed members of the consortium are: WE CARE Tingley After-School Program, Kellerton United Methodist Church, Davis City United Methodist Church, Iowa State University Extension, the Dekko Foundation, and Lamoni SAFE Coalition.

BUDGET CLARIFICATIONS

Adjustments were made to the budget to accommodate reductions from the original application to the CNCS suggested dollar amount.

1. Currently, all AmeriCorps Youth Launch program staff have completed criminal background checks on file. It is expected that these individuals will remain in their respective positions. If a new staff person were to be hired, AYL will identify other resources to ensure these costs are covered and that the criminal background checks are completed and on file for every staff person.
2. The AYL training schedule and associated budget amounts have been updated in the budget narrative and are as follows: Pre-service Full Day Training for full/half-time members in September: \$10 lunch x 16 members = \$128. Youth Development/Best Practices Lunch and Laugh in October, November, January, February, and March: 5 trainings @\$60 each for refreshments=\$300. Pre-service Full Day Summer Member Trainings in May: \$10 lunch x 9 members=\$72. Life After AmeriCorps training for all members in Jul: refreshments for 25 members=\$95. \$155 for supplies and training materials for the pre-service trainings. The Youth Development/Best Practices Lunch and Laugh training materials are provided by a partner organization, Youth Launch Leaders.
3. The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (ICVS) and CNCS co-sponsor training events. The \$1795 budgeted for ICVS trainings under Staff Travel will be used to attend events fulfilling training requirements of ICVS and CNCS.
4. Refer to the response number 2 under Budget Clarifications.
5. The base is \$269,636 as enumerated in the budget narrative in Section III part B.

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PERFORMANCE MEASURE CLARIFICATIONS

1. The AmeriCorps Youth Launch Out-of-School program performance measure has been modified to opt into the national performance measures according to CNCS guidance. This remains consistent with the goals of the AYL program.

2. The performance measure, AmeriCorps Youth Launch Enrichment, has been removed. The Youth Launch Enrichment component of the AYL program remains a part of the AYL program as part of Other Community Priorities.

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT SLOTS

We are not interested in pursuing this opportunity at this time.

MSY WITH NO PROGRAM FUNDS ATTACHED

We are not interested in pursuing this opportunity at this time.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics