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## Executive Summary

### Executive Summary

The Marquette-Alger Regional Educational Service Agency (MARESA) proposes to have thirteen AmeriCorps members who will provide focused one-to-one or small-group tutoring using evidence-based reading interventions and progress monitoring specifically targeted to the most salient area of reading need by grade level. Tutors will work with those students not "at", but "closest to" achieving benchmark as this is the cohort of students least likely to have services through Special Education or Title I services. Via the school's benchmark literacy screening and AmeriCorps member progress monitoring, participating students' reading growth will be documented. Service will take place in elementary schools across the Central Upper Peninsula including: Alger, Delta, Marquette, Menominee and Schoolcraft counties. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improving literacy achievement sufficiently to place them on a reading achievement trajectory that will lead to college and career readiness.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$145,361 will be matched with \$145,361 in public funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

1. Problem/Need: A significant percentage of K-12 students from the central Upper Peninsula currently read below proficiency. This coupled with a significant gap in the reading achievement between "all students" and those within the two largest subgroups: 1) economically disadvantaged (ED) and 2) students with disabilities (SWD). While overall reading achievement scores vary by school, large discrepancies between students as a whole and the two identified subgroups exist in ALL schools. Therefore, reading achievement is the focus of the MARESA AmeriCorps grant because the ability to read well and fluently is critical to success in every other content area in school and to success in college, in the workplace, and in life.

In order to establish a frame of reference for understanding the extent of the need in this community, it must be agreed that the ultimate goal of a K-12 education is to prepare students with the skills and sense of civic responsibility required for a successful entry into the world of work or into the academic life of a post-secondary education. Nationally and internationally, the focus on "college and career readiness" is being used as a key measure of accountability for K-12 education systems. The widely accepted indicator for this is the set of ACT benchmark scores known as the College and Career

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Readiness levels. A benchmark score of 22 on the ACT- READING is defined as the score that provides a student with a high probability of success in a first-year, credit-bearing college course. However, in order to reach such a benchmark, a student must be on trajectory to do so much earlier and Michigan, along with many other states, recognizes this fact. There is abundant evidence that students who read proficiently at grade three, will continue to be proficient readers. Hence, the focus of "GR,GR" will be Pre-K to Grade 5.

State assessment data underscores the need for additional support and intervention in reading. Third grade reading scores on the 2014 state reading assessment for students in the central Upper Peninsula ISDs (Marquette-Alger RESA, Delta-Schoolcraft ISD, and Menominee County ISD), show approximately 30% of students failed to achieve proficiency. The subgroup of ED students fares similarly to the "all student" group at grade three, but the failure to achieve proficiency for the SWD subgroup is a startling 54% in MARESA schools and 51% DSISD schools. Getting these students on a successful trajectory and doing so early is critical. In light of such data, selecting to focus on ED students and on SWD seems a logical choice. Selecting those students whose scores place them below proficient, but close to proficient allows "GR, GR" to serve a population that is typically underserved by Title I programs. Title I mandates that students demonstrating the greatest need be the priority, and because those students typically need so much intervention and support over a sustained period, the students whose needs are not as great do not receive service. "GR, GR" believes those students close to proficiency can acquire the skills through explicit, systematic instruction and progress monitoring to raise their performance to a proficient level.

The challenges faced by the ED and SWD subgroups, and by all students, are exacerbated by economic challenges in Michigan. Unemployment in the region is above the state average (7.4%) in four of the five participating counties with unemployment rates ranging from 8.3% to 13.1%. In addition, residents living in poverty are also above the state average (17.4%) in four of the five counties with poverty rates ranging from 18.2% to 24.8% (2012 Census Data). Michigan state assessment data clearly indicates a strong correlation between poverty and student achievement. On the 2014 3rd grade state reading assessment, 52% of ED students were not proficient compared to 25% of non ED students. Furthermore, in Marquette and Delta Counties, fewer than 1/4th of those 25 or older possess a bachelor's degree or higher. In Alger, Delta, Menominee and Schoolcraft Counties, that figure is below 1/5th. These counties located in the heart of Michigan's remote and rural Upper Peninsula, lack the corporate, philanthropic, cultural, and transportation resources of more urban areas and therefore are in need of additional academic resources and support.

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2. Theory of Change and Logic Model Program Model/Core Activities/Location Sites: Thirteen full-time AmeriCorps members serving in elementary schools across five rural counties in Michigan's Upper Peninsula will focus on the critical reading skills/sub-skills at each grade level PreK-5, to tutor students not "at", but "closest to" achieving benchmark as this cohort of students is least likely to receive services through Special Education or Title I. The proposed program model is a one-to-one (or small group of 2-3) literacy tutoring program that targets the skills and monitors progress deemed most critical at each specific grade/developmental level, giving priority to students who fall within the ED and SWD subgroups. AmeriCorps members will tutor students 3 to 5 times a week for 20-40 minutes on a full-time, extended-day and year basis not typically available in K-12 school support mechanisms.

Target Population: Members will tutor a carefully defined target population, that of Pre K-5 students who score "just below" or "just at" benchmark or proficient as determined by local school district reading screening assessments. Priority will be given to ED or SWD students. Because Title I programs are required to give priority to those students with the greatest need, few if any services are provided for those "almost" proficient. Yet it is the "almost" proficient cohort that can be accelerated over a relatively short time. That is where our program can have impact!

Intervention: Students who are not proficient in reading require systematic, explicit and intensive instruction in the foundational reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). Members will be trained to implement the following evidenced-based practices cited as strong or moderate from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guide report:

- Intervention Strategy #1: Screen and monitor all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of year and again in the middle of the year to identify students for "GR, GR" program. Universal screening is a critical first step in identifying students who are at risk for experiencing reading difficulties and who need more instruction (Gersten, Compton, Conner, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly, 2008). Members will participate in their schools' universal screening assessment, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessments at grades K-5, to identify students most at risk in reading. AmeriCorps members will be trained to administer, score, and interpret relevant DIBELS benchmark and progress monitoring assessments.
- Intervention Strategy #2: Provide intensive, explicit and systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups, three to five times a week, for 20 to 40 minutes. Members will focus their intensive, explicit and systematic instruction based on the results of the student's scores on the universal screening (DIBELS). Members will focus their instruction on the foundational

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reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary & comprehension). Instruction will be systematic: building skills gradually and introducing skills in isolation and then integrating them with other skills. Instruction will be intensive occurring three to five times per week for 20 to 40 minutes. Members will receive training on the principles of explicit instruction, an evidenced-based practice strongly recommended by IES. Explicit instruction involves high levels of teacher-student interaction and frequent opportunities for student practice with specific feedback (Gersten, Compton, Conner, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly, 2008).

Members will incorporate the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) instructional activities focused on the foundational reading skills that correspond to each student's reading need identified from the universal screening. FCRR activities were selected due to their ready availability, low cost, connection to key areas of literacy, and detailed directions.

Outputs and Outcomes: The program outputs of training, assessment, interventions, and progress monitoring will have the measurable community impact of strengthening student reading achievement at each level empowering students to attain the college and career readiness benchmark that is so critical to their success in life. Hence, MARESA AmeriCorps' "GR, GR" program outcomes are anticipated to be: increased scores on reading assessments, greater numbers of students achieving benchmark and reading at grade level, and an improvement in the literacy achievement of students, particularly among the ED and SWD subgroups. Anticipated secondary outcomes include improved overall academic performance and student attendance as well as an increased interest in reading.

Volunteer Request for Waiver: Over the fifteen year AmeriCorps program history, MARESA has supported AmeriCorps members in a variety of roles in school and non-profit organizations. As the program has shifted to a literacy-based program, so has the scope of the member's role and responsibility. Under the "Get Ready, Get Reading" program model it is imperative that members become literacy coaches, before/after school tutors, and summer support for the students they serve. This alone is a full-time proposition. The additional responsibility of a volunteer component requiring 20 volunteers per MSY is one more obligation and task for the members. The additional responsibility of recruiting, coordinating, management, and placement of volunteers within a school-based setting presents a different set of challenges. There are also schools that have restrictions on volunteers requiring background checks and/or constant volunteer supervision. This adds another layer of complication to the on-site management and the potential cost of school-based volunteers. MARESA still plans on recruiting volunteers for the National Days of Service and State Wide Events, but the concern is committing 300 volunteers a year in this capacity alone. MARESA AmeriCorps believes in

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the importance of member participation in these events and views it as a great opportunity to connect members with other state and national programs.

3. Evidence Base: The "GR, GR" program strategically selected instructional practices that were identified as having strong or moderate evidence from the U.S. Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES)'s report: *Assisting Students Struggling with Reading: Response to Intervention and Multi-Tier Intervention for Reading in the Primary Grades* (Gersten, Compton, Conner, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly, 2008). The IES publishes practice guides to develop specific and coherent evidence-based recommendations for use by educators. In order for a practice to be recommended as having strong or moderate evidence by IES, the study must have high internal validity and external validity, and must include several well designed, randomized controlled trials or well-designed quasi-experiments, in addition to at least one large, well-designed, randomized controlled, multisite trial that supports the effectiveness of program or practice.

- Intervention Strategy # 1: Screen and monitor all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of year and again in the middle of year to identify students for "GR, GR" program: Implementation of a universal screening and progress monitoring tool (DIBELS) was selected as an evidence-based practice for the "GR,GR" program. The IES panel reviewed five correlational studies (from 1999 to 2008) that demonstrated certain types of measures can be used to accurately predict future student performance in reading (Gersten, Compton, Conner, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly, 2008). The IES panel did not delineate which specific measures should be adopted in schools, but recommended three characteristics of screening measures: 1) reliability should be at least .70 (DIBELS is .92 to .97); 2) predictive validity of .60 or higher (DIBELS is .64 to .77); and lastly 3) consider both time and personnel when selecting screening measures. MARESA staff are certified DIBELS trainers and area schools consistently use DIBELS for benchmark screenings and progress monitoring.

- Intervention Strategy #2: Provide intensive, explicit and systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups, three to five times a week, for 20 to 40 minutes: "GR, GR" program will focus on providing students highly explicit, systematic and intensive instruction focused on the foundational reading skills due to the strong evidence supporting this practice throughout the literature. Simmons, Coyne, Hagan-Burke, Kwok, Simmons, Johnson, Zou, Taylor, Mcalenney, Ruby and Crevecoeur (2011) studied 206 kindergarten students identified as at risk in reading. The demographics of students studied were similar to students served in "GR, GR" program, with the percentage of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch ranging from 50% to 81%. and 9.57 %

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receiving special education services. Multilevel hierarchical linear analyses revealed statistically significant effects (.26 to .51) favoring the explicit/systematic intervention on alphabetic, phonemic and decoding skills for students who are at risk in reading.

Furthermore, the IES panel found 11 high quality studies with randomized controlled trials and quasi experimental design involved systematic instruction in several of the foundational areas of reading and concluded that there is strong evidence to support the recommendation to provide intensive, explicit, and systematic instruction in critical reading skills (Gersten, Compton, Conner, Dimino, Santoro, Linan-Thompson, & Tilly, p. 40, 2008). See page 41 of the accompanied IES Practice Guide for a breakdown of the 11 studies reviewed.

4. Notice Priority: The MARESA AmeriCorps program will be addressing "Education" including national performance measures; ED 2, the number of students that completed participation in CNCS-supported K-12 education programs and ED 5, improving student's academic performance. These performance measures found under the AmeriCorps Funding Priorities list for the 2015 grant cycle align with the "GR, GR" program goals. As stated in the Theory of Change and Logic Model, AmeriCorps members will be utilized to increase literacy proficiency in students that are "at" or just below benchmark which also aligns directly with CNCS priority "Education, improving academic performance." In order to improve outcomes for students considered ED and/or SWD, priority will be given to those subgroups when determining services.

5. Member Training: A key component of delivering a high quality literacy program is adequately preparing members before and during their term of service. Therefore, the "GR, GR" program has developed a yearlong training calendar which includes a nine-day pre-service training followed by eleven monthly meetings. These trainings are taught by on-site literacy experts with years of experience who have been trained in all areas of evidence-based reading interventions described in the grant. By placing this strong emphasis on member trainings it ensures that members are adequately prepared to provide quality service at their site for the duration of their year of service.

Pre-Service Meetings: MARESA will provide initial training to equip members with the knowledge, procedures, and tools to facilitate participation in the program. New members will:

- Become acquainted with MARESA and with service and school communities
- Understand the AmeriCorps structure, rules, and reporting requirements with a strong emphasis on prohibited activities
- Be able to implement evidence-based DIBELS assessments and explicit and systematic instruction in foundational reading skills

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- Participate in community service projects to strengthen civic and service awareness

Monthly educational meetings: Monthly meetings cover topics aligned with the goals of the "GR, GR" program including; reading interventions, student progress, data collection, classroom management, team building, community service, and use of the MCSC state management system OnCorps.

Monthly meetings have proven an efficient way to develop member relationships, establish a sense of community and adequately prepare members for Life After AmeriCorps. Members discuss issues, compare insights and strengthen their network of support. In an effort to learn about other local communities, AmeriCorps members plan service projects with an emphasis on promoting literacy. This planning process strengthens community ties and promotes AmeriCorps while instilling a lifelong commitment to service.

School-Based Service Sites: Since a majority of the members' time is spent in local schools, connecting with the site supervisor and school staff plays an integral part in the member training. Orientating members to their service site happens through a pre-service site visit, which includes completing a site orientation checklist, interviewing their site supervisor, and periodic reflection on their experience with the other members and program staff. Over the years, these visits and discussions have proven to make members comfortable with the transition into the school setting. Members are also expected to participate in school staff meetings and in-service as applicable.

6. Member Supervision: MARESA program staff provides supervision, conducts evaluation of all members and meets with Site Supervisors, building principals, for an in-depth orientation to the program operation, including data management (OnCorps), service site expectations, program priorities, policies, procedures, prohibited activities, and plans for each member's year of service. Site Supervisors ensure members understand school policies, culture, procedures, while introducing AmeriCorps members to school staff and arranging for participation in building staff meetings and in-services. The Site Supervisor will meet with the member as needed or on a monthly basis, per our service site agreement, throughout the school year to discuss member development and student achievement. The school's Title Teacher, an expert in evidence-based reading interventions, will work on a daily basis with each member and assist members in identifying students qualified for the program and develop strategies for assisting students. This close relationship allows the Title Teacher to mentor and monitor member progress in implementing the literacy-tutoring program. Together, the Title Teacher and Site Supervisor will monitor and provide feedback on the member's progress by completing and discussing the mid-year and year-end program evaluation. MARESA staff supervision is conducted through quarterly site visits, collecting DIBELS data, observing member evaluations, and

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through individual discussions at monthly AmeriCorps meetings. The combination of monitoring, trainings, and collection of student data, ensures that program goals are met and the member experience is positive.

7. Member Experience: The member experience begins with the multi-step recruitment process that has been developed over several years. Member positions are advertised in the national AmeriCorps recruitment system, Marquette Mining Journal, Munising News, Craig's List, MARESA website, Michigan Works, Northern Michigan University's Career Services Center, INDEED.com, and via word-of-mouth by partnering service sites. Because our town is home to Northern Michigan University, the Education, English, Psychology, and Sociology departments have also been key players in recruiting quality members for the program. This partnership has been vital to the success of our recruitment process.

One of the most powerful experiences members attain during their year of service is the time spent with the school-based service sites. Connecting with the Site Supervisor and school staff is crucial for gaining an understanding of the school culture, learning from experienced educators and promoting student success. Therefore, a priority for MARESA program staff is to ensure members are perceived as part of the school's team. Members are expected to participate in staff meetings and in-services such as; grade level meetings, Special Education Conference, Fall Educators Conference, and Educators Summer Institute. Through the meaningful school-based experiences members gain a network of support, strengthen leadership skills, and work as part of a team in developing the tools necessary to further their professional development. Based on past program evaluations, the school-based experience continually received positive feedback from members and it should be noted that several members have gone on to pursue degrees in the field of education while many more advanced in their education and/or professional careers. A significant number of AmeriCorps "GR, GR" alumni are currently employed in schools across the nation.

AmeriCorps sponsored Statewide events and National Days of Service also provide a conduit to connect members with other state and national programs and is an important component of the member experience. These events, such as Member Celebration, UP-Wide Service Project, and National Days of Service allow members to become civically engaged and foster a sense of community while connecting members with the AmeriCorps identity. For the last three years, MARESA AmeriCorps members have taken the lead in organizing, planning, and implementing the UP-Wide Signature Service Project, which is a highlighted service event during AmeriCorps Week. This event has allowed members to develop a service network with other AmeriCorps members,

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AmeriCorps Alumni, and VISTA members that travel from across the entire 16,377 square mile peninsula to participate in the day of service. AmeriCorps member feedback from this and other service projects continues to be positive. Members are given opportunities to reflect on their year of service throughout the AmeriCorps experience. Personal bi-weekly logs, discussion at monthly member meetings, Great Stories in OnCorps, and periodic surveys all provide venues for members to consciously reflect on their service year. The overall member experience is documented through exit surveys, year-end evaluations, and final interviews providing MARESA program staff valuable data used in the recruitment and planning process. Based on overall member reflections, the school-based service sites and opportunities for members to engage civically continue to be the cornerstone of the member experience.

8. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: MARESA AmeriCorps is committed to educating members and the community regarding AmeriCorps identification. Member identity begins during the member pre-service interview and is reiterated on day one of the pre-service training. During the pre-service training, members learn about the history of National Service, which is then partnered with the American Idealist curriculum. This curriculum highlights the life of Sargent Shriver and his social initiatives, which shaped the core values of service and AmeriCorps. Member identity is emphasized throughout the training with each member crafting an "elevator speech" allowing them to share the AmeriCorps message with service site staff, the local community, and the media. Additional requirements of the MARESA program include; posting AmeriCorps signs at service sites, wearing AmeriCorps lapel pins and photo IDs daily, and participating in National Days of Service/State Events wearing the AmeriCorps uniform.

Community awareness of AmeriCorps occurs through participation in a series of Community Service Connection events. Each member is responsible for partnering with a community organization with an emphasis on literacy in an effort to develop professionally and share the AmeriCorps mission with community leaders. Members network with non-profit organizations by participating in meetings, volunteering on service projects, and fostering professional relationships bringing community awareness to AmeriCorps, MARESA, and the members.

### Organizational Capability

1. Organizational Background and Staffing: MARESA was founded in 1963 as the Marquette-Alger Intermediate School District. Our primary mission is to provide leadership and services that enhance the delivery of instruction for our constituent school districts. As a service agency, MARESA provides educational services to all K-12 schools in Marquette and Alger counties. Services include

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administrative, fiscal, professional development, curricular, special education, and vocational education. Beyond providing a vast array of services to these local school districts, current partnering service sites, local schools, have continued participation in the "GR, GR" program for the past three years. Program success has created increased interest, engagement, and demand from these partners along with additional regional schools asking for participation in the program. This commitment to and interaction with local schools makes MARESA the ideal fit for implementing an AmeriCorps literacy program. MARESA has operated community service programs since the late 1970's and has much experience in programs operated via site placements like the one proposed. In addition to fifteen successful AmeriCorps years, MARESA had eleven prior years in federal youth employment programs through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Program, the Job Training Partnership Act and the Workforce Investment Act. From 1990-95, in partnership with the Kellogg Foundation and MCSC, MARESA was the first Michigan affiliate of the Youth Volunteer Corps, which organized site-based youth programs and later became the first AmeriCorps program administered by MARESA. In addition to state funding for educational services, MARESA receives a variety of federal funds. These include Federal Department of Education funds; Title I, Homelessness, Perkins Vocational and Tech Prep, Special Education, Preschool and Early On, and Transition services. Total federal grants administered by MARESA for 2012-13 are \$9,459,096. The \$132,494 MARESA received from the MCSC makes up 1.4 % of that federal grant budget. MARESA's fiscal team uses multiple checks and balances to manage all grant monies. Fiscal services staff handle payroll, financial transaction, and reporting. Overall operating budgets for previous years are: 2011-12 = \$21,665,741; 2012-13 = \$19,659,163; and 2013-14= \$20,688,056. MARESA's history of overseeing large budgets and acquiring funds confirms its capacity to successfully support an AmeriCorps literacy program. MARESA employs 100 professional staff within four service areas: 1) Administrative & Human Resources, 2) Finance , 3) Special Education and 4) Teaching, Learning, & Technology (TLTS). The superintendent and service area administrators regularly meet with school superintendents regarding MARESA programs. The board and superintendent review programs to ensure alignment with the organization's mission. While the AmeriCorps program and staff are directly supervised by the Associate Superintendent of TLTS, staff from all departments assist with member trainings. The expansion of "GR, GR" to school districts in other intermediate school districts (ISDs) is a natural fit. All seven ISDs in the region are members of the Upper Peninsula Center for Educational Development (UPCED), a long standing collaborative body that meets monthly with an emphasis on educational issues and actions of significance to the region. Program and fiscal staff include:

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Chad Rowley, Program Director, is in his third year being responsible for the overall program operation. This includes; supervision of the AmeriCorps budget, completion of required reports, cost share-collection, development and facilitation of member and site supervisor trainings, and serving as a liaison to the MCSC. Chad has supervised and coordinated similar site-based youth service programs offered at MARESA for the last 18 years.

Harger Boal, Program Coordinator, is a former AmeriCorps member with MARESA and has served with the Summer DNR and Transition Programs for the last three years. Harger holds undergraduate degrees in the Social Sciences and a Master's Degree in English. His roles include; daily instruction, literacy support, and community-based supervision of students.

Glenda Leach, Program Secretary, has 20 years experience providing clerical support of educational programs including 10 years with MARESA AmeriCorps. She maintains member and staff files, provides clerical assistance and inputs data.

Kristen Peterson, Literacy/Trainer, has classroom and administrative experience as an elementary principal, special education director, curriculum director, and Title I coordinator. For the past three years, she has led AmeriCorps literacy training in DIBELS, Orton-Gillingham: Decoding and Encoding, and Explicit Instruction.

Deb Asano, Associate Superintendent, has nearly 30 years of classroom and administrative experience. Deb has served as the U.P. Regional Literacy Center Director, DIBELS Regional Trainer, Orton-Gillingham: Decoding and Encoding, and REWARDS. She provides supervision for the "GR, GR" literacy program and currently serves as UPCED Director.

Rene Cope, Grants Coordinator, has five years experience working with MARESA AmeriCorps grants and oversees 81 grants from state, federal and foundation funding sources. Rene completes SOEs, PERs, AFRs, and estimated expenses and attends AmeriCorps trainings.

The current MARESA AmeriCorps program staff has a track record of completing reports on time, attending all required MCSC meetings and events, and consistently meeting the expectations of the MCSC program officers. Since its inception in 2012-13 the "GR, GR" Program has received positive MCSC program evaluations.

2. Compliance and Accountability: MARESA ensures compliance with all AmeriCorps rules and regulations by providing a rigorous and thorough orientation of members and site supervisors, as well as by communicating openly with all parties. Fiscally, MARESA complies with all federal monitoring guidelines according to the Office of Management and Budget. In order to prevent and detect service site compliance issues, program staff monitor direct service activities via the MCSC recommended

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computer management system (OnCorps) weekly, conduct quarterly site visits, and schedule site supervisor interviews at least twice a year. These visits may be scheduled or unannounced. During the site visit, MARESA program staff will use a service site checklist, based on the site agreement and member contract, to assure that program guidelines and rules are being followed. The regular reporting on the DIBELS.net data collection system ensures that members are working towards and are on target to meet all stated performance measures. Program Staff will also self-check program files via the MARESA AmeriCorps program file checklist, which is attached to each member file. This self-check will occur within 30 days of member enrollment. Final reports will look at overall program results, member pre-post data, and service site feedback that reflect the overall program quality. In situations where risk or non-compliance has been identified, the Program Director will immediately implement the MARESA AmeriCorps Corrective Action Plan (CAP). Upon discovering non-compliance issues the Program Director will communicate findings to the state commission and follow through with the Program Officer until the issues are resolved. This plan will be in writing and submitted within 30 days and will include the following; factors impacting the issue, strategies to be used in resolving the pending issue, and development of a timeframe to meet issues being addressed. The Program Director will implement these adjustments to meet program guidelines and/or requirements. During the last grant cycle, the MARESA AmeriCorps formal site visit from the state commission resulted in no compliance issues.

3. Past Performance for Current Grantees and Former Grantees Only: It is difficult to compare the 2012-2013 and 2013-14 performance measure targets with those of the 2011-12 due to a significant change in program focus two-years ago. Prior to 2012, MARESA AmeriCorps developed a broad range of performance measures, which included; increase in student grades and positive outlook of school, member development and service preparation, and volunteer recruitment. With this change in focus the "GR, GR" specifically addresses national performance measures ED2, number of students that completed participation in CNCS-supported K-12 education programs and ED 5, number of students with improved academic performance in literacy. The "GR, GR" target of 600 students completing the program has been easily surpassed during its first two years in regards to performance measure ED2. This indicates a clear demand in school districts for reading interventions among struggling readers. Based on internal monitoring MARESA AmeriCorps program staff discovered that meeting performance measure ED5 has proven a bit more challenging. The grant states "that members would refer students no longer deemed appropriate for the program to Title Services for more intensive interventions." After reviewing the factors impacting this unmet performance

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measure, the number ended up being higher than anticipated. Program staff developed a strategy to reach the unmet goal of 450, by enhancing literacy intervention training, adjusting the scope of on-site literacy support, and reinforcing the importance of working with the defined target population. MARESA program staff will closely examine the 2014-15 DIBELS data in order to monitor the effectiveness of this strategy and adjust plan as needed.

During the 2013-14 AmeriCorps program year, MARESA had three members "resign" or leave the program voluntarily without completing their terms of service. Typically, one or two members "resign" each year and this pattern has been noted in the past. Two of these members received professional paid jobs in the field of education. It should be noted that the school districts hiring these two members were highly complimentary of the caliber of the professional development provided by AmeriCorps. The third left for compelling personal circumstances without completing 30% of the term of service and that slot was converted from full-time to part-time. This made sense as school was already well-in-session. MARESA was able to fill 2.5 of these slots, so the enrollment was .5 FTE shy of 100%. MARESA's historical record of member retention and placement at program end paints a more complete picture. For example, 92% of ALL members enrolled: attained full-time professional employment, returned to college/graduate school, or continued national service. These results are similar and consistent with the fifteen-year history of MARESA's exiting AmeriCorps members. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the program's member and citizenship development initiatives. MARESA will continue to work with site supervisors to assist them in making the most qualitative overall selections for the participants in the AmeriCorps program.

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

1. Cost Effectiveness: The projected 2015-16 "GR, GR" budget has been developed and designed to accommodate all program costs, carefully taking into account the previous three years of experience at budgeting for similar literacy programming. Considerations include: intensive pre-service training for members in specific areas of tutoring, reading intervention activities, and monitoring student growth. The thoroughness and depth of this adds slightly to the cost of the program and is sufficiently reflected in the budget. Training is essential to provide members with the skill necessary to: 1) carry out the program with fidelity, 2) meet the desired outputs of increased student reading achievement at each grade level, 3) meet the anticipated outcomes of an increased percentage of students meeting college and career readiness benchmarks and 4) narrow the gap between the general student population and the ED and SWD subgroups. The expansion of the program for 2015-2016 to meet the needs of students in five rather than two participating counties with a combined area of 7,768 square

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miles result in us taking higher travel and mileage expenses due to the remote locations into consideration as does the expansion from 12 FTE to 15 FTE members. As always, costs for mileage, food and lodging are managed as efficiently as possible. Personnel, training, meeting, travel, project and materials costs found within budget document align with the program narrative elements. Our fifteen years of program delivery and accuracy with previous cost estimates tell us this is reasonable. The benefits of "GR,GR" as a supplemental literacy support program that can target students in need of support but whom often are unable to receive it due to limited resources within their current educational settings makes it a critical and cost effective service. Without "GR, GR" it is clear that a percentage of students would go un-served or underserved in the area of literacy support. The capacity of members to flexibly navigate schedules of literacy service to accommodate before and after school, evening, and weekend supports expands opportunity for students. Historically, MARESA's AmeriCorps has secured both cash and in-kind resources from diverse sources such as school general funds, community agencies and area organizations. MARESA will continue these efforts for 2015-2016 in collaboration with its school partner sites. Non-CNCS resources, of \$182,570 represent 50% of the funds needed to operate the "GR,GR" program. Total funding needed in 2015-2016 is \$365,140. Of that amount, 50 (\$182,570) is requested from the corporation. The grantee share of the total (\$182,570) is comprised of \$148,760 in cash match and \$33,810 in-kind match. The required commission fixed percentage of [Section 1 + Section 2 (180,669\*.0526\*.20)] is \$1,901. MARESA has confirmed its cash match for the Program Director, Program Secretary, and Program Coordinator. In addition, MARESA has committed the in-kind match for the reading and assessment trainings. Interested service sites have committed the necessary in-kind match for member supervisors at the school sites. To date, a significant number of our schools have expressed intent to continue as service sites and commit financial support via a combination of general funds, federal sources (with approval) and local agency support. The service site cash match for 2015-2016 will be \$9,550 per full-time member. In justifying the program cost, service sites have indicated that the MARESA AmeriCorps program has delivered high-quality, well-trained, and consistent extended literacy support allowing for additional services and student participation. The MARESA AmeriCorps program is pleased to note a reduced cost per MSY in 2015-2016 of \$12,171. The MSY for each of the previous three years has been \$12,488. An efficient expansion of the program adding members to serve additional students and sites has allowed us to provide the "GR,GR" services in a fiscally responsible manner at a lower MSY.

2. Budget Adequacy: N/A

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

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MARESA's AmeriCorps program firmly believes that the proposed interventions will indeed produce increased academic achievements in literacy for participating students for the following reasons:

- \* The careful selection of two strong evidence-based interventions: 1) universal screening and progress monitoring, and 2) direct, systematic and explicit instruction of reading sub-skills
- \* A comprehensive professional learning program that allows members to become proficient in the delivery of phonics-based, multi-sensory instructional lessons that build on critical components of each grade Pre-K through 5
- \* Ample resources in decoding, encoding and activities for student engagement
- \* A widely-recognized tool for collecting the benchmark and progress monitoring information
- \* An established system of support through monthly meetings and on-site coaching

Get Ready Get Reading has clearly measurable objectives that are reflected through ED2 and ED5 delineating both the number of students having access to the program as well as the number of students who will experience increased student achievement in the area of reading. The target population was carefully selected as it has traditionally been an underserved group within our schools.

Program staff and members will focus on the following two questions as a part of overall evaluation efforts:

1. When considering increased student achievement in reading for ED and SWD and the aggregate, does the intervention have a greater impact on one group than the others?
2. At what grade level does the intervention have the greatest impact on increased student achievement?

Proposed research design for GR,GR includes the internal components of:

- \* the collection of baseline reading data in the form of DIBELS Benchmark data in conjunction with teacher recommendation based on additional sources of data/screening that may be in use in each school
- \* subsequent benchmark data in combination with progress monitoring data as collected and warehoused on dibels.net resulting in a pre-post- format
- \* reflection log entries of the daily focus of the intervention lessons between progress monitoring

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- \* monthly meeting self-reflections
- \* mid-year evaluations by site supervisors on members
- \* end-of-year evaluations by site supervisors on members
- \* end-of-year perception data via surveys from parents and students

An external component (estimated 14-16 hours) for research design and evaluation shall be included at year-end during which time said evaluator will verify DIBELS data and create a composite data picture and conduct random sample interviews with members and site supervisors. Qualifications for evaluator include (at a minimum) teacher certification with a major in the area of elementary education or in reading. Preferred qualification will include administrative degree or experience. Budget for this component is \$1000.00

### Amendment Justification

N/A

### Clarification Summary

MARESA AmeriCorps Grant Clarification 2015

#### Clarification Items

This application is under consideration for a grant in the amount of \$149,857, 12 Member Service Years (MSYs), 13 slots, at \$11,527.49 cost per MSY.

#### A. Programmatic Clarification

1. Please revise the Executive Summary to conform to the requirements specified in the 2015 AmeriCorps State and National Application Instructions.

The Marquette-Alger Regional Educational Service Agency (MARESA) proposes to have fifteen AmeriCorps members who will provide focused one-to-one or small-group tutoring using evidence-based reading interventions and progress monitoring specifically targeted to the most salient area of reading need by grade level. Tutors will work with those students not "at", but "closest to" achieving benchmark as this is the cohort of students least likely to have services through Special Education or Title I services. Via the school's benchmark literacy screening and AmeriCorps member progress

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monitoring, participating students' reading growth will be documented. Service will take place in elementary schools across the Central Upper Peninsula including; Alger, Delta, Marquette, Menominee and Schoolcraft and counties. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for improving literacy achievement sufficiently to place them on a reading achievement trajectory that will lead to college and career readiness.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$149,857 will be matched with \$149,857 in public funding.

2. Please provide a copy of your evaluation report: See attached Evaluation Report

3. The application lacks clarity on whether adequate staff support will be provided for the members given the budgeted personnel expenses. The budget lists 10 Member Supervisors at 5% usage each and it is not clear whether additional budgeted positions will have a role in supervising members. Please provide additional explanation outlining which staff positions will supervise members, the unique supervisory roles of these staff, and how the proposed level of staffing for supervision is sufficient.

AmeriCorp Members receive staff support on a daily basis at their school-based service site from the site supervisor, typically the building principal, and are paired with the Title 1 teacher. Members are also supported by MARESA program staff through the 10 day pre-service orientation, monthly member meetings, and on-site visitations. Also note, that the 5% only represents a portion of the match supervision, since member supervisors also includes MARESA program staff and school Title 1 teacher support. Below is an outline of the roles that staff play in supervising AmeriCorps members.

MARESA Program Staff Supervision and Support:

Program Director

- \* Provide Site Supervisor Orientation, which includes detailing their specific role in member supervision.

- \* Conduct School-Based Service Sites visits ensuring site supervisors are in compliance with program rules and regulations.

- \* Conduct School-Based Service Sites visits with AmeriCorps members to discuss overall program

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experience.

- \* Responsible for providing members with on-site Summer Supervision.
- \* Available to assist with AmeriCorps members questions/concerns on an as needed daily basis via phone, email, text, or personal meeting.

Program Coordinator

- \* Provided members with on-site literacy support and follow-up visitations.
- \* Report any compliance issues to the Program Director.
- \* Oversee the DIBELS data system and provide members support as needed.
- \* Responsible for providing members with on-site Summer Supervision.
- \* Available to assist with AmeriCorps members questions/concerns on an as needed daily basis via phone, email, text, or personal meeting.

Mentor/Tutor-Literacy Trainer (MARESA Professional Staff)

- \* Provided Member Literacy training and support during the 10 day pre-service orientation and follow up on progress during member monthly meetings.
- \* Provides on-site school-based follow-up for literacy support, as needed.
- \* Provides feedback to members on reading interventions throughout the school year.
- \* Review, discuss, and interpret DIBELS data with members.

School-Based Service Site Supervision and Support:

Site Supervisor (School Principal)

- \* Meets with the member at regular times to evaluate progress.
- \* Provides daily supervision of the member, providing support and direction, conducting a formal site orientation, offering constructive feedback and evaluation of member's development.
- \* Completes mid-year and end of the school year evaluations of member.

Title Teacher (School-Based Literacy Expert)

- \* Provides on-site literacy-based support.
- \* Work with members in identifying students qualified for the program and develop strategies for assisting students.

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- \* Assist member in collecting DIBELS Data for the students participating in the program.
- \* Provide the member's with constructive feedback and strategies for improving interventions.

Based on members exit interviews and program evaluations, the amount of support given to members has been sufficient in providing them with the tools needed to support student success.

4. The application states that the program is year round - "full-time, extended-day and extended-year" - however it is not clear whether the provision of tutoring with students varies from in-school to out-of-school time. Please clarify any differentiation of member service activities during in-school time versus out-of-school time, and whether service changes during summer months.

MARESA "Get Ready, Get Reading" expects the full-time member to serve an average of 8 hours per day. This typically includes time providing services to students before school, during the lunch period, or after school. As the schools operate approximately 186 days per year, most members complete nearly all (about 1500 or 1700 hours) of service within that time frame. The addition of the pre-service training and occasional evening or weekend literacy events accounts for another 100+ hours of service. If particular schools offer regular weekend literacy support opportunity or a summer reading intervention/support program, the MARESA program staff, in cooperation with the member and the school, will encourage hours to be distributed to allow for such service. The summer literacy support is a continuation of the evidence-based intervention service however, due to the inconsistencies across schools during the summer months the individual student data will no longer be collected. Summer literacy programming offers continuing evidence-based literacy support to struggling readers to enhance their ability while preventing regression in reading.

5. The application states that AmeriCorps members will serve as tutors, but does not clearly describe how the program will meet certain requirements for tutoring programs (45 CFR §2522.910-.940) as noted under Threshold Issues on page 8 of the NOFO.

Under the MARESA AmeriCorps program model, the tutors/members will NOT be considered to be employees of the schools where they are placed. MARESA ensures that these tutors will meet the following qualifications: (1) Received a High School diploma or its equivalent, or a higher degree; and (2) Successful completion of pre- and in-service specialized training, as required in 45 CFR 2522.940.

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Please articulate what appropriate criteria will be used for selecting and qualifying tutors, including the requirements in 45 CFR 2522.910 and certify that selected tutors meet the requirements in 45 CFR 2522.910.

MARESA will only select members that have received a high school diploma or its equivalent. In fact, historically over 90% of MARESA AmeriCorps members have obtained a higher degree.

Certify that the tutoring curriculum is high quality and research based, consistent with the instructional program of the local education agency and with State academic content standards.

As evidenced in Section 2: Theory of Change and Logic Model of the Grant Application, members will be trained in a high quality tutoring curriculum in the foundational reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) that includes evidenced-based practices cited as strong or moderate from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guide report. The tutoring curriculum is also aligned to local education agency curriculum, Michigan's ELA Common Core State Standards and Michigan's Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework.

### B. Budget Clarification

1. The application lacks clarity around staff positions and roles as detailed in the narrative and listed in the budget. Please ensure position titles align between the narrative and the budget. In particular, it is not clear whether the program coordinator or the "school's Title Teacher" (as described in the narrative) are budgeted personnel. Likewise, the budget lists a Work Based Learning Technician, yet it does not appear that this individual is described in the narrative.

The Work Based Technician described above is referred to as the Program Coordinator in the grant. Adjustments will be made in the budget to clarify this person as a budgeted personnel. The "school's Title Teacher" is an added member support and is not a budgeted personnel.

2. Please verify that the criminal history checks conducted for members and staff will include an FBI fingerprint check in addition to the state registry check and the NSOPR for covered individuals with

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recurring access to vulnerable populations.

Based on the MARESA Criminal History Check policy, all members and staff are required to conduct a FBI fingerprint check, state registry check, and the NSOPR before being placed in a setting with access to vulnerable populations.

### C. Performance Measure Clarification

Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants or in the Clarification Summary field, as appropriate.

1. Please review the CNCS Performance Measure Instructions and revise the National Performance Measures selected for this application. The application selected ED2 and ED5. The Instructions clearly state that for output ED2 to be selected, the applicant must also select output ED1, as well as outcome ED5 (and/or ED27A and/or ED27B).

Changes in Egrants will reflect output ED1 as another performance measure.

2. Please confirm that all students to be counted in ED2 will come from schools in which the largest percentage of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and/or have special or exceptional needs, as defined in the ED2 performance measure.

In regard to the ED2 performance measure, a very high percentage of schools in which members serve have free and reduced lunch percentages between 50% and 91%. Currently, the program has 7 full time members and 1 half-time member all serving in districts in which the largest percentage of students come from economically disadvantaged background or have exceptional needs. Additionally, 4 full time members and 1 part-time member serve schools in which the average percentage of economically disadvantaged students exceeds 30%. One of those schools has the largest K-5 student population in our two-country area making the number of its economically disadvantaged students greater than the total number of students in some other elementary buildings. Given the geographic remoteness and rural nature of the region means, there are few, if any, opportunities for academic supports such as Sylvan Learning Centers or child care centers that may offer academic or homework support. As this is the case, we strongly believe that members may be well-placed and very effective in

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nearly all of the schools in the central Upper Peninsula of Michigan region provided the orientation of the members and the site supervisors makes the mission and the target audiences clear.

3. For ED2, indicate how much time (i.e., how many days or hours) is required in order to complete the intervention and how the program will count the number of students who meet this threshold by the end of the program.

AmeriCorps members will tutor students 3 to 5 times a week for 20-40 minutes until students reach benchmark on the specific DIBELS measure or time out of the program. Timing out is defined as not making necessary achievement gains to achieve benchmark following 25 hours of intervention centered on one targeted skill area. The program will count the number of students who meet the program goals by tracking all student data using [www.dibels.net](http://www.dibels.net). online program.

4. For ED5, please clearly state the minimum level of increase in academic performance that will enable a student to be counted under this measure and how this increase will be tracked using the selected DIBELS instrument.

All students in the program will be tracked and monitored using [www.dibels.net](http://www.dibels.net). The minimum level of increase in academic performance in order for a student to be counted in program data would be improving one level on benchmark or progress monitoring assessments.

### D. Strategic Engagement Slots

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

Although there is not a percentage set for hiring members with disabilities, MARESA program staff has and will continue to recruit through our local Center for Independent Living (CIL), Michigan Rehabilitation Service (MRS), and Northern Michigan University Disability Services office.

Clarification Summary Request -- April 17th -- Clarification Summary Request

Number 1: REVISED EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -- The number of AmeriCorps members reads 13

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members not 15 in the Executive Summary.

Number 2: -- Follow Up Clarification Performance Measure #2 --

We are currently in the process of collecting site application requests for members and assessing schools' capacities and needs for the 2015-16 school year. Final decisions on specific schools will be made in early June. The number of schools across the proposed "Get Ready, Get Reading" literacy program service area consists of 41 of which 24 have a majority of economically disadvantaged (ED) students based on free and reduced lunch eligibility at the individual school level. Of the 17 remaining schools, seven are between 49%-40% (ED) and ten are between 39%-26% (ED). Given this data, the "Get Ready, Get Reading" program will give priority to schools in which the students eligible for free/reduced lunch exceeds 50%. A school that applies but does not meet the majority ED criteria may still be eligible for a member under the "special or exceptional needs" section as described under National Performance Measure ED2.

"Children who are developmentally disabled.....or have literacy needs."

To be eligible in this instance, a school must demonstrated that the majority of their students have documented literacy needs as determined by student performance on the DIBELS Next universal screening tool in accordance with its recommended goals. In either instance, an individual school will be limited to one AmeriCorps "Get Ready, Get Reading" member for 2015-16.

Currently 13 AmeriCorps members serve twelve individual schools. Of those twelve schools, seven have a majority of students eligible for free/reduced lunch. The remaining five schools demonstrated special or exceptional needs in the area of literacy by providing evidence that a majority of their students were not at benchmark on the initial DIBELS Next Literacy Assessment.

Number 3: When the original application was submitted for Performance Measure ED1 and ED2 in egrants for the 12 MSY the program sent an error message. After contacting the egrants help desk, they said that egrants was reading the 12 as duplicated in ED1 and ED2, therefore reading 24 MSYs. The recommended solution was to note the split that you currently see in the number of MSYs (ED2, 6 MSY and 7 members and for ED1, 6 MSY and 6 members this created a total of 12 MSY and 13 members). That was the only way that egrants would accept the performance measure. This is not something that could not be changed due to the constraints of egrants.

Clarification Summary Request -- April 17th -- Clarification Summary Request

## Narratives

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# Narratives

## Continuation Changes

N/A

## Grant Characteristics