

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

The Massachusetts Reading Corps at Springfield College (the College) proposes to have 30 (28 half-time and 2 full-time) AmeriCorps members who will serve as Literacy Tutors, providing the Reading Corps' proven, evidence-based early literacy instruction and interventions to children ages 3 to 5 at eleven public and private preK sites in Springfield, MA. At the end of the program year, AmeriCorps members will have provided early literacy support to 480 preK students, with 336 children completing the program. Seventy percent (70%) of children who complete the program (235) will demonstrate growth in 3 of the 5 early literacy skills predictive of reading success and reading proficiency by 3rd grade. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage 500 additional volunteers to engage in service in and support the Springfield Public Schools. This program addresses the CNCS focus area of Education. The CNCS investment of \$180,680 will be matched with \$376,569 in applicant and partner funds, comprising \$121,204 in public funding and \$255,365 in private funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

More than 4,700 children in Springfield, MA, are on a trajectory of reading failure. In 2014, results from the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) showed that 63% of third graders in Springfield, MA--compared to 43% statewide--were not proficient readers. Children who can read proficiently by 3rd grade are four times more likely to graduate high school than those who do not (Hernandez, 2011). Research indicates that literate persons are better employees, more involved citizens, in better health, and more likely to raise children who also are literate and value education--productive persons who experience less poverty, higher lifetime earnings, and greater success in career and life ([www.proliteracy.org](http://www.proliteracy.org)). The implications are profound: After 3rd grade, researchers found that it is more difficult to bring children to reading proficiency or to teach them the increasingly complex, multidisciplinary information introduced in grade 4 and beyond. These implications have clearly come to fruition in Springfield, where the 2014 graduation rate was 52.1% (compared to 83% statewide) and where 15 elementary, middle, and high schools are classified as Level 4, among the lowest performing and least improving schools in the state. Many of these Level 4 schools are currently receiving support from the College's AmeriCorps School Turnaround Initiative, with 48 AmeriCorps members providing interventions around risk factors such as poor attendance, course failure, and social-emotional and disciplinary issues. In Springfield, as elsewhere in the nation, academic outcomes for low-income and minority youth lag behind that of their more affluent, white peers. In the Springfield Public Schools, 62% of students are Hispanic, 20% are African American, and 12% are white; in

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addition, 87.1% qualify for free or reduced lunch. According to the 2012 American Community Survey, Year 1, estimates, Springfield has a childhood poverty rate of 48.4%. Research has shown that children who grow up in poverty enter kindergarten with significantly less exposure to language and early literacy skills, hearing as many as 32 million fewer words than their wealthier peers do before starting school. Students who experience little exposure to speech and literacy-rich environments start off with a gap in their vocabulary that makes learning to read more difficult. This gap is difficult to close, and children who are born into more challenging socioeconomic circumstances have a harder time achieving reading proficiency by third grade (Dickenson & Tabors, 2001; Hart & Risley, 1995).

The significant achievement gap experienced by boys of color inspired President Obama to launch the My Brother's Keeper challenge to cities and towns, businesses, and foundations to connect young people to support networks that will empower them to gain important skills. A key milestone in this initiative is reading at grade level by 3rd Grade. There is strong evidence of the Reading Corps model's effectiveness in helping disadvantaged children to achieve this milestone. Research has found that the Reading Corps' evidence-based model of assessments, interventions, tutors, and coaches accelerates reading skills among struggling students in general, and students of color in particular--making Reading Corps a key strategy for closing the achievement gap (Markovitz et. al., in press, 2015).

Reading Corps began in Minnesota in 2003 and has grown to be the largest state AmeriCorps program in the country, serving more than 30,000 children per year. Reading Corps has a proven track record of helping to close the achievement gap by utilizing research-based interventions, reliable and valid assessments, and socially and developmentally appropriate practices in preK classrooms throughout Minnesota. The preK model includes ongoing rigorous training for AmeriCorps members, as well as structured and continuous support from Internal Literacy Coaches and Master Coaches, who ensure the model is being implemented with fidelity for maximum impact. The program is being replicated in several other states and regions, including Colorado, Washington DC, North Dakota, Michigan, and Iowa. Since 2012, the Springfield College AmeriCorps Program has been implementing the Reading Corps preK literacy model (Massachusetts Reading Corps) in classrooms throughout Springfield in an effort to ensure that children enter kindergarten with the early literacy skills they need to learn how to read, putting them on a path to proficiency by third grade. The MA Reading Corps has grown from 12 quarter-time AmeriCorps Literacy Tutor positions at 3 sites to 32 positions at 8 sites. This growth has been spurred by demand from the Springfield Public School District, as well as teachers and principals who have witnessed the impact of the program on their students' early literacy development. Our program is also supported by nonprofit and business leaders, early childhood

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education advocates, and foundations that have joined together in Springfield to address the need for literacy intervention at the earliest levels. Springfield College is a leader in community engagement whose mission--to educate students in spirit, mind, and body for leadership in service to others-- attracts students who are dedicated to making a difference in their communities and to pursuing careers in the human helping professions. The College has hosted AmeriCorps for the past 18 years and is currently managing two innovative programs: the Massachusetts Reading Corps and the School Turnaround Initiative. The majority of AmeriCorps members serving in these programs are Springfield College graduate students from a variety of academic majors. Program staff also recruit recent college graduates, students from other institutions of higher education in Western Massachusetts, and community members looking to serve youth in Springfield, creating a diverse corps of college students and community members. Springfield College was recently named a finalist in the Education category for the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll as a result of the outstanding service provided by students in our AmeriCorps programs and in other school-based initiatives.

2. Theory of Change and Logic Model: Springfield College will recruit 28 half-time AmeriCorps members to serve as Literacy Tutors who will reach more than 440 children ages 3 to 5 years old in up to 28 classrooms at 8 sites in Springfield, MA. Sites include several Springfield Public Schools and HeadStart, and Square One, a private provider of early education and care. Tutors serve in preK classrooms from September-June, providing evidence-based whole-classroom, small-group, and one-on-one literacy interventions. Half-time members serve in either a full-day classroom or am/pm classrooms for approximately 20 hours per week. For 2015-16, we are shifting from a model of 12 quarter-time, 20 half-time positions to 28 half-time. By eliminating quarter-time positions, our goal is to improve our outcomes in 2015-16 by ensuring that children are receiving an effective amount of literacy intervention. Data from our 2013-14 End of Year Evaluation (compiled by Minnesota Reading Corps) indicated that children are showing impressive progress in Massachusetts, but we lag behind other replication states both in the number of tutoring minutes children receive weekly, and in the number of children who are achieving targets by the end of the year. By ensuring that all tutors are in the classroom at least 20 hours week, we can increase contact and impact. Although members will cover fewer classrooms, more of our members may be able to cover both am and pm students, maintaining the approximate number of children we serve.

The Reading Corps mobilizes AmeriCorps members to implement evidence-based literacy strategies and interventions with students who need supplemental instruction to gain the early literacy

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foundation to become successful readers. The Reading Corps' theory of change is that providing schools with the staffing and support to deliver a model of benchmark assessments, evidence-based interventions, data-driven decision making, and on-going coaching for those delivering the interventions will result in increased rates of reading proficiency for children ages 3 to grade 3. This theory is based on the work of Vaughn et al. (2007), who found that effective reading programs have three essential elements: (a) valid and reliable measures for assessing student growth, (b) evidenced-based instructional interventions, and (c) a framework for educators to utilize the data for improved instructional decision-making. Reading Corps also builds on research on the importance of coaching. Joyce & Showers (2002) found that only 5% of professionals implement new practices they learn in a training session, but 95% adopt the practice when they work post-training with a coach who continues to provide instruction and feedback. All of these elements are present in the Reading Corps model. With regular coaching, observation, and feedback from the Internal Coach (a current employee of the school/site trained to support implementation of the model) and the Master Coach (a contracted employee who supports the Internal Coaches and AmeriCorps members), members embed Tier 1 (whole-classroom) interventions for all children throughout the day as a supplement to the classroom curriculum. Interventions include Sign-In, the Rhyming Song, the Alliteration Game, Strive for Five conversation, and the What Is It Bag. These interventions impact all children and focus on the Big Five early literacy skills identified by the National Reading Panel (2008) as predictive of reading success for preK students, including: alphabetic knowledge; vocabulary and meaning; phonological memory/awareness; book and print concepts; and oral language, conversation, and comprehension. Members collect benchmark data three times per year (fall, winter and spring) using valid and reliable assessments that measure these literacy skills. Members administer the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) for picture naming, rhyming, and alliteration with all children ages 3 to 5; in addition, the FAST assessments for letter names and letter sounds are also completed with 4- and 5-year-olds. Collected data is then entered into Minnesota's EdSpring data analysis system. Members review the results in a group meeting with the teacher, Internal Literacy Coach, and Master Literacy Coach to determine which children need additional Tier 2 (small-group) or Tier 3 (one-on-one) interventions. In addition to the whole-classroom Tier 1 interventions, selected children receive regular Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions (3 to 5 days per week) from the AmeriCorps member. The Tier 2 and 3 interventions focus on the specific literacy skill the child is struggling with, and the member monitors the child's progress toward the literacy goal through observation and assessment. Once a child has reached the literacy target, he or she is exited from the higher tier

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interventions for that skill.

Members are also trained to implement Talk, Read, and Write with Me, an initiative that engages parents and guardians in the development of their child's early literacy skills. Members are provided with Talk, Read, Write bags for each child in the classroom. The bags include a book, a journal, a dry erase board and marker, crayons, and instructions for the parent. The bags are sent home each week, and parents/guardians are asked to read, write and talk with their child using the supplies provided. Children can bring back the bag the following week and receive a new book to bring home. Members monitor how many bags are distributed and returned and how many times the supplies, such as journals, are used. Throughout the implementation of the model and the interventions, the Internal and Master Coaches complete regular observations, provide feedback for continuous improvement, and ensure fidelity to the Reading Corps model.

3. Evidence Base: The MA Reading Corps combines the "people power of AmeriCorps with the science of how children learn to read" (Minnesota Reading Corps, 2012). For over 11 years, AmeriCorps members in Minnesota have implemented the Reading Corps model in urban and rural schools, with diverse groups of children, including those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and English Language Learners. Previous studies have shown moderate evidence of the effectiveness of the Reading Corps model. Heisted (2008) conducted a matched sample analysis reported in the 2007-08 Minnesota Reading Corps Evaluation Report. Heisted found that according to the Beginning Kindergarten Assessment used in Minnesota Public Schools, participants in the Minnesota preK program performed better than peers in matched sample groups upon entering kindergarten on many of the early literacy skills predictive of reading success. Data from the State of Minnesota first reported in the 2011-12 Minnesota Reading Corps Evaluation, shows that graduates of the Reading Corps program also perform better than peers on Minnesota's 3rd grade reading proficiency test. In addition, Heisted (2012) also found that Reading Corps students are 3 times less likely to be referred to special education.

Recently, CNCS sponsored an evaluation of the preK Reading Corps model in Minnesota. The University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (NORC) conducted the evaluation, comparing 26 Minnesota Reading Corps sites (urban, suburban, public, and private) to 26 non-Reading Corps sites. Preliminary results for 4 and 5 year olds showed that Reading Corps children met or exceeded spring targets in assessments of essential early literacy skills--alliteration, rhyming, picture naming (vocabulary), letter names, and letter sounds while children in non-Reading Corps sites met targets only in letter names. In addition, the presence of the Reading Corps program had a

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significant effect, with effect sizes ranging from .49 to .76, in all five areas. Also notable was that in most cases the Reading Corps program was equally effective for all students regardless of gender, race/ethnicity, ELL status or school type, and when differences did exist, they favored at-risk students, e.g., enrolled at Head Start centers, ELLs (English Language Learners), non-white students (NORC, 2014).

The model is also highly replicable. The 2013-14 Massachusetts Reading Corps End of Year Evaluation (compiled by the Minnesota Reading Corps) showed high levels of fidelity regarding implementation of both assessments (>98% accuracy) and interventions (>90% fidelity), which means they were implemented as intended. Springfield College has implemented the program for 2 years with success. Results from 2012-13 showed that 97% (34 of 35) of 4 and 5 year olds who completed the Reading Corps program, meaning they were assessed in the fall, winter, and spring, showed improvement in 3 of the 5 literacy skills predictive of reading success. Additionally, 95% (20/21) of 3-year-old students showed improvement in two or more of the three areas of literacy instruction (rhyming, picture naming and alliteration). From 2012-13 to 13-14 we were able to double the number of children who completed the program. In 2013-14, of the 237 students (3 to 5 year olds) who completed the program 71% (169) showed improvement in 3 of the 5 areas of literacy measured. Among 4 and 5 year olds, 82.9% (126 of 152) showed improvement in 3 of 5 areas. Additionally, 87% (74 of 85) of 3-year-olds demonstrated improvement in 2 or more of the 3 areas measured. We exceeded our goal of serving 187 children in 2013-14, and nearly reached our target of 85% of students showing improvement in 3 of 5 literacy areas, with 71% of all children and 83% of 4- and 5-year-olds showing improvement in 3 of 5 areas. We are currently working with Minnesota replication staff to improve our practices and analyze areas for improvement. After analyzing results from our 2013-14 End of Year Evaluation, we have decided to eliminate quarter-time members and utilize only half-time. By doing this we can increase intervention dosage and improve outcomes. With two years of implementation completed, we are confident that our results will steadily improve as we learn best practices from Minnesota.

In addition, during the last three-year grant cycle, in 2013-14, Dr. Jennifer Stratton, a professor of education at Springfield College, was contracted to perform an independent evaluation of the MA Reading Corps. Her focus was on the impact of AmeriCorps members serving as Reading Corps tutors on children, teachers, and classroom instruction. Stratton collected qualitative survey data from teachers, Internal Coaches, and principals/site directors. She also analyzed benchmark data collected by the members to determine student progress in early literacy. Stratton noted that "students made

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significant gains in skills specific to early literacy development when a Reading Corps tutor [member] was present in the classroom." Teachers and administrators surveyed viewed the Reading Corps program as effective in developing both the social-emotional and literacy skills of their students and preparing them for success in kindergarten (Stratton, 2014). The evaluation also suggested a strong "ripple effect" on literacy instruction in the classroom and on professional development of teachers. "[Survey respondents] recognized that having a Reading Corps tutor enhanced the use of research-based literacy programming with greater intentionality. One classroom teacher stated, 'I have enjoyed working with the tutor and learning some of the strategies he used with my students.' An administrator noted: 'It has provided staff with tools and strategies to improve student outcomes greatly... Our teachers have integrated the practices and (have) become better teachers because of the program and the tutors [members]' (Stratton, 2014)." Survey responses also showed that having the Reading Corps enhanced collaboration. Stratton noted that "the programmatic structure of data collection and analysis to ensure the intentional and targeted interventions of Reading Corps tutors [members] created a framework that increased collaboration among staff around monitoring student progress and data analysis." Teachers and administrators also noted an enhancement of processes and practices to identify preschool students in need of more support and interventions. "One administrator noted, 'Students who may have been referred for special education are not being referred because they were caught early'" (Stratton, 2014).

4. Notice Priority: Reading Corps operates within the notice priority area of Education, in that it provides support and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes and improved student literacy rates for economically disadvantaged children as more fully detailed in the evidence base section. The Reading Corps also functions within the priority area of programs that support the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, helping children enter kindergarten ready to learn and putting children on the path to reading success by the end of third grade.

5. Member Training: Markovitz, et al. (2013) found that the Reading Corps' training was key to its effectiveness. Researchers noted that the training is specifically designed to ensure that individuals with no background in education or literacy can successfully implement the program and achieve results for students. Members and their supervising Internal Coaches and Master Coaches attend a week-long Reading Corps Summer Institute in August at Springfield College. The Institute begins with training from Springfield College's AmeriCorps program staff on AmeriCorps 101, the history of national service, prohibited activities, program requirements, civic engagement, and an introduction to the City of Springfield. Experienced Master Coaches and staff from Minnesota and Springfield train

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Springfield College's AmeriCorps members on early literacy concepts and the Reading Corps model. Members learn to implement a literacy-rich schedule of whole-classroom interventions and how to administer the IGDI and FAST assessments. Through the Reading Corps' SEEDS of Early Literacy Curriculum, members also are taught to provide socially, emotionally, and developmentally appropriate support. On the last day of the Institute, AmeriCorps members attend a Lead Teacher Orientation with their classroom teachers, supervising Internal Coaches, and Master Coaches. Members attend day-long Reading Corps trainings once each month, through February, accompanied by their Internal Coaches. Trainings build on the knowledge gained at the Institute and give members the skills they need to record and assess data, make decisions about interventions, and monitor each child's progress. Members are also trained on how to implement the program's parent engagement initiative, "Talk, Read, and Write With Me!" From March through June, tutors attend 2-hour monthly meetings focused on professional development and Life After AmeriCorps. In addition to a scaffolded training schedule, members are also given feedback from Internal Coaches and Master Coaches, who regularly observe members in the classroom and ensure that all gain 100% integrity on administering benchmark assessments and interventions before they are implemented with children. Members reflect on their service regularly, completing a "child reflection guide" built in to their intervention scripts that prompts them to think about how they interacted with a child during an intervention to ensure they are being sensitive, encouraging, and developmentally appropriate. Members debrief with the Internal Coach and Master Coach after observations to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Members also reflect on their overall experience as an AmeriCorps member at monthly trainings, in weekly online journals, and at the annual Midyear Training, where they provide a "great story" about their service. Great stories are also provided by members as a final reflection at the last member meeting. Throughout the year, members are asked for feedback on the program through training evaluations and at one-on-one midyear and end-of-year evaluations with both Springfield College AmeriCorps staff and Internal Coaches. Members are asked for feedback on program implementation, training, and member support.

6. Member Supervision: AmeriCorps members are supervised on site by an Internal Literacy Coach, an employee of the school district or preK site, and receive additional support from a Master Literacy Coach, a Springfield College AmeriCorps Program staff position. Internal Literacy Coaches have a background in education and solid knowledge of early childhood literacy skills and development; they are identified and/or hired by the sites. Similarly, the program's Master Coaches have a strong

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background in education, coaching, and literacy, and are hired by and report directly to the Springfield College AmeriCorps Program Director. Internal coaches complete observations and coaching sessions with each member once a month to ensure members are correctly implementing interventions, monitoring student progress, and fulfilling program requirements. Master Coaches complete two observations per month, also providing feedback on coaching and tutoring strategies. Internal and Master Coaches conduct integrity checks before each benchmarking period (fall, winter, spring) to verify members are correctly administering assessments so that the data collected is accurate. The AmeriCorps Program Directors review tutor journals on a regular basis, making sure members are having a positive experience. In addition, the Program Director is present at all member trainings and meetings, conducts one-on-one midyear and end-of-year evaluations with all members, and schedules additional meetings as needed to provide constructive feedback to members. The Program Directors also monitor member journals to ensure members are not engaged in prohibited activities, review tutor timesheets to monitor progress toward completing hours, and conduct site visits twice per year. Corps staff maintain regular contact with Internal and Master Coaches via email and phone on any issues at the site.

7. Member Experience: All Reading Corps members engage in meaningful service experiences that support children in developing essential literacy skills, and support teachers in providing effective instruction and practices in the classroom. Members are coached each month in effective practices from Internal Literacy Coaches and Master Coaches, and work daily with school staff who model and support their growth in practice. For members interested in a career in education, the hands-on Reading Corps experience is invaluable. For others, being part of Reading Corps builds essential career skills such as professional communications, exposure to the responsibilities of a "work week," and the training and support of AmeriCorps. In addition, the MA Reading Corps program includes a strong network of training, structured reflection, and group service projects that foster a powerful member experience and a lifelong commitment to service. At Summer Institute, members learn about the history of national service and AmeriCorps, including the mission and functions of both the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA). Members are encouraged to educate others about their service and the role AmeriCorps plays in the Springfield community and across the country.

The program brings together members who are Springfield College students as well as members recruited from other colleges and the surrounding community. Together, they serve and participate in local events that connect them with AmeriCorps members from Springfield College's other

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AmeriCorps program, the School Turnaround Initiative, building esprit de corps and allowing for meaningful shared experiences in the community. Members participate in an all-Corps service project in the fall, providing logistical and leadership support for the College's annual service event, "Humanics in Action Day," when more than 1,800 college volunteers (students, faculty, and staff) participate in more than 100 service projects, including more than 600 volunteers serving directly in the City's Schools. Members work together to recruit, train, and manage the groups of college volunteers; to plan and implement projects at their service sites; and to manage rakes, clean-up bags, and other project-specific supplies. Corps members also participate in the MSA-sponsored AmeriCorps Opening Day event, which brings together more than 1,200 Massachusetts AmeriCorps members to kick off the year of service. Members learn about the service of other members across the Commonwealth, further reinforcing their sense of belonging to a larger service movement. Reflection on the meaning of their service is a key element of the MA Reading Corps member experience. Members write weekly journals responding to prompts that challenge them to reflect meaningfully on their service experiences, the students they serve, and their growth as engaged members of the community. The Program Director reviews these online journals to gauge individual member's progress and provide feedback and assistance if needed. Twice per year, members share their most meaningful service experiences by writing "Great Stories" that are shared with the MSA State Commission. Members leave the Reading Corps program with a passion for service and a commitment to continuing to make a difference in their communities: in 2013-14, 95% of members who participated in Reading Corps indicated that after participating in the program their commitment to civic engagement and community service increased. In addition, 100% indicated that service would continue to be a part of their lives after leaving the AmeriCorps program.

8. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification: AmeriCorps members are required to wear service gear while on site so they can clearly be identified as AmeriCorps members by school staff, parents, students, and community members. Members are provided two t-shirts and a name badge with the AmeriCorps logo prominently placed on the front. Service agreements signed by Internal Coaches outline their responsibility for ensuring all members are in AmeriCorps gear while on site, and sites are provided with an AmeriCorps sign that must be displayed. At Summer Institute, members learn about the importance of AmeriCorps identification and the ability to speak to others regarding their role in the community, and are encouraged to prepare an "elevator speech" about their role.

### Organizational Capability

1. Organizational Background and Staffing

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Springfield College is in its 18th year of successful AmeriCorps Programming. Since 1995, we have responsibly managed many grants to support community service and outreach, including funding by CNCS (Learn & Serve: Higher Education), Massachusetts Campus Compact (AmeriCorps\*VISTA), the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD COPC), the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, and the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts. Since 2012, we have secured two additional grants supporting the MA Reading Corps: from the Funder Collaborative for Reading Success, and the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation. In addition, the College provides complementary member service through an AmeriCorps School Turnaround Initiative grant, awarded in 2013. The AmeriCorps program has effectively responded to the needs of the District and the children of Springfield by adopting evidence-based programs and practices that address proven risk factors for drop out and help disadvantaged youth achieve academic success. Springfield College AmeriCorps Members serve nearly 1,000 students per year, and together, the MA Reading Corps and the School Turnaround Initiative are providing support to at-risk children in Springfield from their first classroom experience through high school graduation.

The College and the AmeriCorps staff have built strong partnerships with community partners and the Springfield Public School District. District leaders, school principals, site directors, and teachers regularly collaborate with program staff to ensure the service provided through AmeriCorps is truly meeting the needs of their students. The demand for AmeriCorps support has grown each year: the District has consistently requested the addition of new school sites and more classrooms for both Reading Corps and School Turnaround. Partners and District leaders truly value the service being provided as part of their efforts to turn struggling schools around and ensure that children are entering kindergarten ready to learn how to read: they have witnessed the impact of our AmeriCorps programs on academic success and achievement and are eager to continue and expand services. Reading Corps and Turnaround members currently serve in 15 Springfield Public Schools. In addition, there is a strong network of agencies, foundations, and businesses in Springfield collaborating to address the goal of reading proficiency by the end of third grade. The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, one of the MA Reading Corps' strongest supporters, has been leading the charge, pulling together a variety of organizations to fund effective literacy programs in Springfield, participating in the National Campaign for Grade Level Reading, and implementing the Reading Success By Fourth Grade: Read! initiative throughout the city. Springfield was named an All-America City by the Campaign for Grade Level Reading and other organizations for its work towards reading success by fourth grade, and the city, as well as the MA Reading Corps, is highlighted for its efforts in a white paper distributed by the

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Campaign.

The College's AmeriCorps staff are experienced users of the eGrants/MyAmeriCorps online application and program management system. The College's financial statement is independently audited annually, and the AmeriCorps Program successfully completed a three-year audit in 2005 by the U.S. Inspector General. Shannon Langone serves as program director, and reports to Dr. Theresa Vecchio, Interim Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students. Ms. Langone has been with the SC AmeriCorps Program since 2007. She is currently pursuing a master's degree in Psychology with a concentration in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. She has developed quality relationships with the community partners, provided excellent oversight to members, provided training to incoming AmeriCorps program directors in MA, and is skilled at organization and writing. Serving as assistant program director is Springfield College AmeriCorps alum Elayna Roberts, a graduate of Springfield College, who was hired in 2014. She has an M.S. in Psychology, with a concentration in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and is familiar with the program and its requirements. Elizabeth Miller and Nicole Gauthier serve as Master Coaches, providing support for implementation of the Reading Corps model and for Internal Coaches and AmeriCorps members. Ms. Miller, who has a master's in early childhood education and experience as a preK classroom teacher and center director, has been a Master Coach since 2012 and is well versed in the Reading Corps model. Ms. Gauthier, who was recently hired as a Master Coach, worked with the Springfield College AmeriCorps program for six years as program coordinator and assistant director. She has a master's of education with a concentration in student personnel administration and is a highly skilled coach of young adults. In addition, the program is hiring a part-time administrative assistant to support the AmeriCorps staff. Springfield College is a widely-recognized leader in community collaborations with a strong mission rooted in service and engagement. We were recently named as a finalist in the education category for the President's Higher Education Community service Honor Roll, and as a member of the Honor Roll with Distinction for General Community Service. For the past eight years, the College has secured matching funds from the City of Springfield, the Funder Collaborative for Reading Success, and the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, and has continued to contribute its own significant cash and in-kind resources to meet community needs.

### 2. Compliance and Accountability

During Summer Institute at Springfield College, AmeriCorps members receive training on prohibited activities and federal regulations on appropriate service. Prohibited activities are outlined in the member handbook, the member contract, and the member service description. The member service

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description is an addendum to the contract that outlines member and site responsibilities. It is reviewed and signed by the member and Internal Coach at the beginning of the service term. Internal and Master Coaches also receive training on prohibited activities at Institute, and members are regularly reminded of the prohibited activities at member meetings. Program staff monitor tutor activities through weekly journals, and site visits twice per year. If AmeriCorps staff discover a member has engaged in a prohibited activity, he or she is contacted immediately, instructed to stop the activity, and reminded of the prohibited activities. Members who engage in prohibited activities are subject to the program's disciplinary process, which includes a verbal warning for the first offense, a written warning for the second offense, and release for cause for a third offense. Sites and coaches found to have engaged in prohibited activities are subject to the same process, with the third offense resulting in removal of the AmeriCorps member from that site. Any violation of prohibited activities will be reported immediately to the MSA by program staff.

### 3. Past Performance

Compliance: In the 2010-11 MSA State Commission Site Visit Report, the program was cited for BEST PRACTICES in 8 of the 10 program management systems, including member recruitment, training, selection, and supervision, and the program continues to maintain high standards for program management and compliance. The Program Director often trains incoming new AmeriCorps directors on member human resources at the MSA Program Directors' Kickoff training.

The 2013-14 MSA site visit revealed that FBI fingerprint checks were not initiated until the second day of orientation. Although members did not begin direct service or have contact with vulnerable populations until after this date, the training hours had to be disallowed. All members were instructed to amend their time sheets to show no hours were counted on the first day of orientation. Program staff verified this change was made. For orientation in 2014-15, all fingerprints were completed and checks initiated on the first day of orientation. In addition, the program completed a self-audit of all national service criminal history check procedures during the assessment review period initiated by CNCS. All instances of noncompliance regarding criminal history checks were addressed and new procedures were put in place to ensure future compliance.

Enrollment/Retention: In 2013-14, the Springfield College MA Reading Corps program had a 97% enrollment rate and a retention rate of 81.8%. Six members were exited for cause: three had scheduling issues that prevented them from meeting the demands and requirements of the program; one transferred to another college out of state; and two did not meet their hours requirement at the end of the year. To address retention, the program offers trainings such as time management and self-

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care to ensure members are able to handle the responsibilities of being an AmeriCorps member. In addition, program staff are implementing a set of fixed schedules that candidates must review and agree to before signing on with the program. Program staff also are working on a strategic recruitment plan to engage more community members in service with the program. Although we will continue to recruit undergraduates, we will focus on graduate students who can commit to the program for 20 hours per week.

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

#### 1. Cost Effectiveness

Springfield College has successfully raised funds for its AmeriCorps Program for the past 18 years. In addition to providing cash match, our partners contribute substantial staff time for internal coaching, member supervision, and training. The College commits both cash and in-kind match totaling more than \$100,000 per year. We are able to provide the required 50% match with cash and in-kind from the College, our partner sites, and private funders. For 2015-16, a total cash match of more than \$142,712 is expected from Springfield Public Schools (\$18,000), the Funder Collaborative for Reading Success (\$83,962), HeadStart (\$1,500), Square One (\$1,500), and the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation (\$37,750). The cost per MSY has increased from \$13,300 to \$13,730, the maximum allowed for FY2015. The increase allows us to add additional staff to the program and have adequate funding for support in other areas such as training, supplies, and background checks.

#### 2. Budget Adequacy

Springfield College has many years of experience in delivering an outstanding AmeriCorps program within budget and that meets the needs of our members and the community. The requested budget allows for appropriate training materials, assessment tools, supervision, data collection, and replication support from Minnesota Reading Corps staff. For 2015-16, the addition of a part-time Administrative Assistant to focus on paperwork and other administrative tasks will allow program senior staff to shift their focus to recruitment and retention and spend more time at community sites.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

Each year, the Minnesota Reading Corps research and evaluation team provides a comprehensive report on the Reading Corps program in Massachusetts. The evaluation focuses on the scope of the program, the fidelity of program implementation, the primary literacy outcomes for participants, and the effects of the program on key stakeholders' beliefs, opinions, and professional practices.

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During the next three-year cycle, we also hope to evaluate differences in development of early literacy skills between children in Reading Corps classrooms and those in non-Reading Corps classrooms. We are working with the assessment professionals from the Springfield Public Schools to identify the most appropriate way to measure and compare the literacy skills of children who receive Reading Corps services versus those who do not. Evaluation results will be used to help the SC AmeriCorps Program make continuous improvements in program implementation and fidelity, and support growth and replication.

### Amendment Justification

n/a

### Clarification Summary

Clarification 5/18/2015 15AC170297

The budget has been adjusted to reflect the new award amount with lower cost/MSY. We are also requesting 2 additional members through 2 no-cost/MSY. We have updated our match column and member numbers in the budget, and performance measure targets to reflect this request.

The Massachusetts Reading Corps requests an additional 2 no-cost MSYs in order to expand Reading Corps services in 2015-16. The two new MSYs would cover 2 half-time Literacy Tutors (1 MSY) and allow for the conversion of 2 half-time, 10.5 month tutors positions to 2 full-time, full-year positions (1 MSY). The 2 half-time tutors would be placed at Brookings Elementary School, a new host site for the program. The no-cost expansion will allow the program to serve an additional 32 preK children, add 2 new Springfield Public Schools classrooms (am/pm), and to offer year-round support (12 as opposed to 10 months) in 2 full-day, full-year classrooms by creating 2 full-time tutor positions. With the additional of only 2 new members and the conversion of two pre-existing slots to full-time, the program staff--including a full-time Assistant Director, full-time Director, part-time administrative assistant, 2 Master Coaches and several Internal Coaches--is well-equipped to handle any additional support needed by the members. The Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation is applying for \$100,000 (cash) from the United Way to support efforts in Springfield around grade-level reading, \$56,832 of which is earmarked for Reading Corps expansion in Springfield. If the United Way grant is not awarded, the Davis Foundation and Springfield College have committed to providing the funds to cover the no-cost MSYs. The funds will cover living allowances for the two new half-time positions (\$6,050 each) and additional living allowance for half-time tutors converted to full-time (from

## Narratives

\$6,050 to \$12,530), as well as FICA and health insurance for the full-time members. Springfield College has been successfully implementing the Reading Corps model for the past three years and is well-positioned to support additional members and one additional site. Brookings Elementary School is a long-time partner of the college and currently hosts members of the College's School Turnaround Initiative, who provide Academic Coaching and School Counseling to children in grades K-5. With funds included in the new grant for internal and master coaching, the program will be well-equipped to monitor the additional sites and members.

Clarification Items: 15AC170297

4/14/2015

Massachusetts Reading Corps at Springfield College

### A. Programmatic Clarification

Members will be placed at the following six schools, in 28 classrooms:

Boland Elementary School, 6 classrooms;

Margaret C. Ells Elementary School, 4 classrooms;

Milton Bradley Elementary School, 2 classrooms;

Springfield HeadStart, 7 classrooms;

Square One (a private, nonprofit provider of early education and care), 5 PreK classrooms;

Springfield YMCA, 4 PreK classrooms.

Our original application listed Washington Elementary and Indian Orchard Elementary, but due to budget constraints and the inability to provide internal coaching, these schools will not be continuing with the program in 2015-16.

Springfield YMCA was not included in the original application; however, the City of Springfield recently received a state-funded PreK Expansion Grant to be administered by the Springfield Public Schools. The expansion grant includes the addition of 11 new community PreK classrooms in Springfield, at HeadStart, Square One, and the YMCA, as well as funding for a three-quarter-time Internal Coaching position to oversee Reading Corps literacy tutors in all 11 new classrooms. If the Year 3 continuation request is approved for the Springfield College School Turnaround Initiative, Milton Bradley Elementary will also receive an Academic Coach and a School Counselor. The services provided by the School Turnaround Program at Milton Bradley will focus on children in grades K-5

## Narratives

only and will not overlap with the services provided by the Reading Corps in PreK classrooms.

### B. Budget Clarification

1. The following items and support are included in the MRC replication fee:

- a. State specific evaluation plan
- b. Review of evaluation plan with state replication partner and ServeMinnesota evaluation consultants, as well as additional analyses as needed
- c. State-specific year-end report
- d. Guidance and support around evaluation
- e. Use of the online, custom-built EdSpring database for student reporting, including benchmarks, progress monitoring, interventions, and Talk, Read, and Write
- f. Talk, Read, and Write intervention bags and materials
- g. Use of online tools for managing applications/recruitment
- h. Online collection of responses for year-end survey of members, internal coaches, master coaches, and school staff
- i. Ongoing technical assistance from the VP of Replication and Lead Literacy Consultant
- j. SEEDS Train the Trainer to prepare local trainer to deliver SEEDS training
- k. Summer Institute training and ongoing trainings (4) for tutors and coaches
- l. Onsite coaching and observations (3 to 4 times per year) from the Lead Literacy Consultant
- m. Training materials (handbook, progress monitoring notebooks, ELLCOS, goal-setting books
- n. Intervention bags and materials
- o. Travel expenses for Lead Literacy Consultant

These expenses are described in a Technical Services Agreement, and detailed progress invoices outlining costs incurred are sent to the program each quarter.

2. All current staff, and the staff for 2015-16 (the Program Director, Assistant Director, Administrative Assistant, and Master Coaches), have completed the required background checks, including home state, Massachusetts CORI, FBI fingerprint check, and SORI. No new staff will be hired in 2015-16. The program has an ASP (2014-034) on file for background checks of school and center staff (including Internal Coaches), who are required to undergo FBI fingerprint checks and state background checks as a prerequisite for their employment. The ASP requires the program to secure

## Narratives

documentation that all staff have cleared the required background checks and have gone through the proper steps/processes. The program will run SORI checks on all school or center staff. This process, and the status of the current program staff, requires no additional funds in the budget for background checks. In the unlikely event that a new staff member is hired in the program office, the funds for his or her background checks would be taken from the program supply line.

3. Our original budget request was for \$13,730 per MSY, and we have reduced that significantly, based on the amount of funding we are being considered for, to \$13,304.86 per MSY. Further reductions would make it difficult for us to appropriately support the model and the members. We are currently matching at a much higher percentage than required (63%) and it may be difficult to raise additional outside funding to make up for any further cuts.

### C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. The benchmark assessments given to all 4- and 5-year-old children (IGDIs and FAST assessments) in picture naming, alliteration, rhyming, letter names, and letter sounds help determine which children need additional Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions, which are usually approximately 5 minutes long and are focused on a specific skill. These interventions ensure that the child is getting a consistent dosage of additional support as a supplement to the Tier 1 instruction and interventions administered by the tutor and the classroom teacher every day. The short interventions are developmentally appropriate for 4- and 5 year-old children, allowing for efficient support that does not take significant time away from Tier 1 instruction in the classroom. Tutors are expected to be in the classroom at least three to five days per week and to implement the Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions every day they are on site.

### Continuation Changes

n/a

### Grant Characteristics