

Narratives

Executive Summary

Greenbrier Learning Center's Learning Links AmeriCorps Program proposes to have 13 AmeriCorps Members who will provide a critical link across the three main aspects of a child's daily experience (school, afterschool, home/community) to improve the academic performance of 80 3rd-5th grade students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Arlington. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for having improved the reading instructional levels of the students they serve. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 377+ volunteers who will be engaged in serving and supporting elementary students in their academic achievement.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of education and, specifically, improving educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. The CNCS investment of \$167,710 will be matched with \$143,797 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

LEVERAGED VOLUNTEERS: Greenbrier Learning Center (GLC) requests 13 full-time AmeriCorps members to effectively provide a critical link across the three main aspects of a child's daily experience (school, after school, and at home) to improve the academic performance (reading instructional levels) of upper elementary students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. GLC will further engage an additional 377+ volunteers (recruited by AmeriCorps members) in supporting children afterschool. AmeriCorps members will recruit volunteers to help with the Learning ROCKS! Program after school and in the summer in opportunities such as: volunteering during regular afterschool activities (homework helpers, reading buddies, etc.), chaperoning field trips, helping with Literacy Fairs and other special program events, assisting with food preparation, organizing and/or preparing materials and program space, and periodically participating in larger community service projects. Volunteer hours will vary throughout the year based on the opportunity; however, GLC emphasizes repeat volunteers. (In the last school year, GLC had 151 volunteers serve 3,077 hours total or an average of 20 hours each.) Finally, AmeriCorps members will heavily target parents as volunteers to increase parent engagement, thus further supporting students. To further support this goal, one AmeriCorps member will specifically focus on volunteer and community outreach.

I. **PROBLEM/NEED:** GLC serves children and families in the Columbia Heights West and Pike Village Center neighborhoods of Arlington. The organization's original afterschool program was

Narratives

established in 1994 through a grassroots effort of community organizers in response to widespread concern about the well-being of children in Columbia Heights West during out-of-school time hours. Twenty years later, GLC is well-rooted in the community where it originated, including expanding its services to two affordable housing developments at the request of local affordable housing organizations and neighboring schools in response to community demand. It consistently operates at maximum capacity and is oversubscribed by 115% with waiting lists at all of its sites and a steady pipeline of referrals from local teachers and schools.

GLC's three sites are in the 22204 zip code of Arlington, an anomaly within Arlington County. The communities that GLC serves are designated as Neighborhood Strategy Areas (NSA) under federal Community Development Block Grant criteria and Arlington County classifies them as Neighborhood Focus Areas, based on "highest needs indices" and "significant needs in human services" (Arlington County Community Housing, Planning, and Development website, 2014).

The area schools are hard-pressed to pass their Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) each year and to increase their success rates on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment. GLC actively partners with and receives referrals from five local elementary schools. In recent years, GLC has witnessed a dramatic uptick in the degree of need among students being referred to the program. Schools routinely refer their most challenged students. In fact, currently 67% of students qualify for special services within the school system either as English language learners or due to learning or behavioral concerns -- an increase of 20% from the 2012-13 school year. And, 80% of current students come from households where English is not the primary language spoken at home. As such, parents struggle to help their children with their homework. There are no other daily afterschool programs in these areas either with available space or that focus on improved academic performance -- and none that partner so closely with the schools.

Each year, about two-thirds of students referred to GLC's Learning Links AmeriCorps Program begin the year not reading on target with their respective grade levels. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010) finds that students who are not reading proficiently in upper elementary school are four times more likely to drop-out of high school than proficient readers. Within this, the rate of dropping out is twice that for black and Hispanic children as it is for white children. The students GLC serves, then, are at incredible risk of falling into the achievement gap and not graduating from high school.

II. THEORY OF CHANGE: The Learning Links AmeriCorps Program's theory of change is that

Narratives

helping students to improve their reading will increase the likelihood of students obtaining a high school diploma and therefore improve their lifetime earning potential.

A. PROBLEM: Students who are not reading proficiently in upper elementary school (3rd-5th grades) are at increased risk of not graduating from high school, negatively impacting their lifetime earning potential and overall livelihoods. Students of color are even more greatly impacted by this.

B. INTERVENTION: A daily afterschool/summer program that provides focused literacy activities, daily reading practice, and overall academic support -- and that collaborates closely with schools and parents as primary partners in students' success -- will improve students' reading proficiency and, ultimately, their likelihood of completing high school.

C. INPUTS: 13 Full-Time AmeriCorps Members, serving across the three main aspects of a child's daily experience: at school; after school; at home / in the community; 3 Afterschool Program Sites, located in communities with high percentages of economically disadvantaged children and families; and 5 Public School Sites that serve economically disadvantaged students, struggle to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks, and are willing to share student information (as relevant and appropriate) to support student success.

D. CORE ACTIVITIES:

DOSAGE, DURATION, TARGET POPULATION: The Learning ROCKS! Program provides 15 hours of academic and social-emotional support to 80 economically disadvantaged students in 3rd-5th grades each week after school (Monday -- Friday) for 39 weeks during the school year at three locations in Arlington, including two affordable housing developments: Greenbrier Baptist Church; Buchanan Gardens Apartments; and Virginia Gardens Apartments. To help students improve their academic performance and provide them with every chance of graduating from high school, the Learning ROCKS! program provides: daily homework help; project-based learning to reinforce school content, common core standards, and Virginia Standards of Learning; and dedicated daily language and literacy practice and reinforcement. During the summer months, Learning ROCKS! will implement a six-week summer camp offering intensive, full-day programming (9:00am -- 4:30pm, Monday -- Friday) to prevent summer drop-off in academic gains, especially reading levels.

Learning ROCKS! staff collaborate closely with parents, teachers, and other school personnel to ensure that program activities are well-aligned with school priorities. Program staff maintain regular office hours each week at students' schools, providing program staff, teachers, and counselors with considerable opportunity to share important student information. The Parent Connection Program is currently and will be active at all three afterschool program sites: Buchanan Gardens; Greenbrier

Narratives

Baptist Church; and Virginia Gardens. Through Parent Connection, GLC presents relevant, topic-based workshops that help parents support their children's education, as well as help parents to establish a healthy household in which they and their children thrive. Examples of workshops include: How to interpret your child's report card; role-playing for parent-teacher conferences; reading with your child / strategies for making reading enjoyable; nutritional cooking on a budget; healthy lifestyles; positive behavior management techniques; financial literacy; and more.

AMERICORPS MEMBER ROLES: GLC requests 13 full-time AmeriCorps members to serve in Learning Links to ensure continuity of services for the children and families GLC serves. One full-time member will implement the Parent Connection Program and one full-time member will implement GLC's Volunteer & Outreach Program. By serving in three distinct sites where children spend their lives (at school; after school; home/community), members will serve a unique function that simply cannot be met by staff or other volunteers, truly adding value to and positively impacting the community. Toward this end, 11 full-time members will divide their time and effort across three sites and serve as a primary link across key aspects of children's lives.

(1) AT SCHOOLS (15% of time and effort) - Improving educational outcomes

a. Providing direct support to students during the school day, onsite at their schools two mornings each week for a total of six hours, under direction of teachers;

b. Exchanging relevant, appropriate information regularly with teachers /school personnel; and

c. Serving as a liaison among the school and parents, as relevant and appropriate.

(2) AFTERSCHOOL / AT GLC (70% of time and effort) - Increasing capacity to better serve children each day after school, and to do so in a way that is complementary to and well-aligned with school priorities, by:

a. Providing 15 hours of direct academic and social support to children in 3rd-5th grades each week, at the direction of Learning ROCKS! Program Manager and/or Site Coordinator; and

b. Developing lesson plans and activities to support learning and enrichment, in collaboration with Learning ROCKS! Program Manager and/or Site Coordinator; and

(3) AT HOME/COMMUNITY (15% of time and effort) - Supporting the Parent Connection Program by:

a. Recruiting parents as volunteers to increase parent engagement in the afterschool program; and

b. Implementing child-enrichment activities on a rotating basis to ensure that parents are not limited in their ability to participate due to childcare barriers.

In addition, the full-time Parent Connection AmeriCorps Member will dedicate 100% of time and

Narratives

effort to integrating parent participation into afterschool activities and designing and facilitating bimonthly Parent Connection workshops at each of GLC's afterschool sites. The full-time Volunteer & Outreach Program AmeriCorps Member will dedicate 100% of time and effort to recruiting volunteers to support Learning Links performance measures, ensuring that volunteers are well-integrated into program activities and effectively utilized, raising awareness about community service and volunteerism, and organizing community service projects for children and families. GLC's full-time Assistant Director will oversee the AmeriCorps Program; members will be supervised by program staff at each program site. Clear parameters are set with each partner to delineate acceptable and unacceptable assignments and support.

SIGNIFICANT AND UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS: AmeriCorps members will fulfill a truly unique role, serving across sites (at school; after school; at home / in the community) in a way that optimizes student support and therefore improved educational outcomes. Specifically, members will serve in the schools that feed to each of the respective afterschool program sites so that they will be visible to the same students both at school and after school. They will also support Parent Connection workshops at the same site, so that they also see the parents of the children they serve at school and after school. Serving across these separate entities and organizations is a truly significant and unique contribution that allows for optimal academic gains by ensuring that children do not "fall through the cracks," that information to support students' academic gains is shared across school/afterschool/home, and that strategies are consistent across them.

E. OUTPUTS AND INDICATORS: 80 students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds will participate in daily activities to support reading and academic achievement (e.g. Guided Reading, buddy reading, literature circles, literacy fairs, book distributions, and more). The Learning Links AmeriCorps Program will support National Performance Measure ED5: Education/K-12 Success -- number of students with improved academic performance in literacy and/or math.

F. OUTCOMES: The short-term outcome is that at least 80% (64) 3rd-5th grade students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds will improve their reading proficiency per school-based, standardized assessments of reading instructional levels at the beginning and end of the school year. The mid-term outcome is that students' improved reading proficiency will ensure that they can fully participate in school and keep up with academic content in middle and high school and successfully graduate from high school. The long-term outcome is that students will have better livelihood opportunities and increased lifelong earning potential.

Narratives

III. EVIDENCE BASE: GLC's Learning ROCKS! Program has an outstanding record of achievement with 80% or more student participants consistently improving their reading instructional levels each year, as verified by externally validated metrics (school-based, standardized assessments). This is documented in GLC's Evaluation Report sent to AdditionalDocuments@cns.gov. GLC is able to achieve such strong results because it employs instructional and supportive approaches that have strong evidence of success, using a multi-lateral approach to student literacy development. After school and through the summer, GLC implements a modification of the Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading strategy (widely and successfully used throughout schools today) to provide small group, leveled intervention partnered with direct instruction in phonics and comprehension strategies. Additionally, we provide each student with free books on their level to own, and we host workshops for parents to promote strong literacy households. The following studies provide strong evidence of a causal relationship between the intervention and students' improvement:

Allington, R., A. McGill-Franzen, G. Camilli, L. Williams, J. Graff, J. Zeig, C. Zmach, and R. Nowak. 2010. Addressing summer reading setback among economically disadvantaged elementary students (2010). *Reading Psychology* 31 (5): 411--27.

* Relevance to the program model: Impact of book distribution and summer support for families in defeating the achievement gap.

* Methodology: Control group study (students receiving free books versus not) correlated with reading scores.

* Strength of the findings: The distribution of free summer reading books resulted in a moderate increase in both reading scores and summer reading frequency. The reading score increase was roughly equivalent to other summer interventions, such as summer school.

Evans, M., J. Kelley, J. Sikora, and D. Treiman. 2010. Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations (2010). *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 28: 171--97.

* Relevance to the program model: Exposure to books during elementary grades

* Methodology: Statistical Analysis of student populations and home libraries

* Strength of the findings: Having books available at home is strongly correlated with a 3 year jump in schooling across the world (from 9.4 years to 12.6). Children from what the report classifies as "modest" benefit the most from each additional book in elementary school.

Narratives

IV. NOTICE PRIORITY: The Learning Links AmeriCorps Program directly supports the CNCS focus area of education, engaging AmeriCorps members in using evidence-based methods to improve the educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children / improving student academic performance. Specifically, it supports National Performance Measure ED5. GLC and its Learning Links AmeriCorps Program is eligible to re-compete as a non-profit organization that has operated an AmeriCorps Program for six years in good standing.

V. MEMBER TRAINING: AmeriCorps Members will participate in an intensive, two week orientation prior to the start of the school year. The first week will focus largely on team-building exercises and developing "esprit de Corps", understanding AmeriCorps and GLC personnel policies (including ensuring that they are aware of prohibited activities), and becoming familiar with the neighborhoods and community in which they will serve. Members will also obtain certification in CPR, First Aid, and food safety during this time. The second week will focus almost entirely on working effectively with children. As a part of their orientation, AmeriCorps Members will participate in two full days of the Arlington Public Schools' new teacher orientation focused on language arts and math, maximizing opportunities for them to understand the curriculum and school priorities and thus better support student achievement. In addition, during the second week of orientation, Members will learn about and reflect on their own learning styles, as well as learn and practice appropriate and useful tutoring and behavior management techniques. In addition, Members will begin to develop a repertoire of activities that they can use with children in a variety of situations and settings. Finally, the second week of orientation will also set the stage for being an active part of a professional learning community or Community of Practice. Using the Critical Friends model, AmeriCorps Members provide regular peer observation and feedback to one to consistently improve their practice. All members also participate in a DISC assessment to identify and learn about their work and leadership styles so they can learn how to best support and work with one another. Portions of the orientation will be conducted by Learning ROCKS! Program staff, while other aspects of it will be facilitated by outside contractors (e.g. the Red Cross, local schools, etc.). Members will also receive their AmeriCorps uniforms during orientation which they will be required to wear each day of service. Full time Members will engage in a total of 80 hours (10 full days) of orientation.

In addition to a pre-service orientation, GLC provides ongoing professional development with at least three hours/week dedicated to learning. AmeriCorps members are provided with a professional development framework for the year and asked to create their own, personal professional

Narratives

development plans, giving them some degree of control and input. Each month ("First Friday"), corps members are expected to participate in small groups focuses on specific skills (e.g. redirecting behavior; designing lesson plans). The small groups will have time to discuss their evolving plans, holding each other accountable for growth, and they will be responsible for seeking out/designing these monthly meetings with staff support. Groupings will change every three sessions. If accountability becomes an issue, or corps members desire more material, these groups can also serve as book groups for new research/new ideas. Once a month, staff will have speakers present on a specific topic relevant to members' service. Speakers/topics include, among others: reading strategies; behavior management; understanding performance measures; project-based learning; summer learning; Department of Human Services' Child and Family Services; parent engagement; stress management; and career development. And, finally, once each month, members will be able to go off site to meet with partner organizations or shadow experts in the field.

VI. MEMBER SUPERVISION: As evidence of its commitment to members' growth and development, GLC's Assistant Director - a senior position within the organization - will oversee the Learning Links AmeriCorps Program, including participating in all required AmeriCorps trainings and briefing staff on relevant information, ensuring that all activities are well-coordinated with both program and partner goals and in compliance with external (CNCS/OVCS) requirements. The Assistant Director also plays an important role in orientation, making sure that members are familiar with all policies and practices, including prohibited activities. The Program Manager and Site Coordinators will provide daily supervision to AmeriCorps Members regarding their service at their school sites, afterschool, and for Parent Connection activities. Program staff are always onsite with AmeriCorps members during their regular service hours and serve children and families alongside them. All program staff are exceptionally well qualified to supervise and support Members in their roles: they are bilingual, veteran educators who maintain strong ties to the schools through weekly office hours and regular partner meetings. Program staff themselves participate in regular professional development opportunities outside of the organization to improve their own skills and practice, as well as in regular team meetings. All GLC staff receive ongoing feedback and coaching, including an interim review and thorough annual performance evaluation. As an integral part of GLC, AmeriCorps members will also receive interim reviews and final performance evaluations.

VII. MEMBER EXPERIENCE: GLC's recruitment efforts will target individuals who are qualified

Narratives

to tutor and serve children and will prioritize members of the community that GLC serves, particularly those with second language skills. Specifically, at a minimum, all Members will have at least a high school diploma or equivalent, some experience and skills working in a formal setting with children (e.g. classrooms, camps, other afterschool programs, etc.), and clear all criminal background checks that GLC performs on all staff and volunteers who work with children. In addition, based on the largely non-native English speaking population that GLC serves, the organization's recruitment will prioritize potential Members who are bilingual in English/Spanish, /Amharic, and/or /Arabic. (In fact, GLC currently has four AmeriCorps members who are bilingual in Spanish/English and/or Amharic/English and has previously had a member who was a former student/beneficiary of GLC's programs.) GLC has a long history of successfully serving the communities in which it works. Full-time Members will receive an annual stipend of \$12,534, health insurance, and weekly professional development. In addition, limited housing will be available to AmeriCorps members who qualify for affordable housing through GLC's long-time partnership with the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH).

GLC is strongly committed to ensuring a positive experience for AmeriCorps members throughout the year and beyond. The robust professional development plan not only provides members with continued skill development, but also is designed to maximize members' input and own interest areas so that they can grow in areas of their own interest and work together to support one another's development. GLC's Community of Practice utilizes the Critical Friends / Instructional Rounds models that is based on the research of Richard Elmore, Anrig Research Professor of Educational Leadership at Harvard Graduate School of Education, to foster AmeriCorps members' self-reflection and improved instructional practice. Each year of the Learning Links AmeriCorps Program, AmeriCorps members have grown considerably in their practice and demonstrate their newfound skills through a capstone project in which each member (working in pairs) is responsible for designing one full week of the Learning ROCKS! summer camp that will result in clear learning outcomes for students. This skill -- to be able to say that they are able to design and implement a highly effective afterschool and summer program -- is one that is valuable to future employers, particularly those in education or youth-serving organizations. Finally, GLC encourages Learning Links AmeriCorps members to collaborate with other local AmeriCorps members to develop joint community service or other projects and to generally provide ongoing networking and esprit de corps. Members' experience at GLC tends to serve as a "training ground" for future public service. Many of GLC's Learning Links AmeriCorps Program alumni have since gone into teaching, social work, or other public service roles.

Narratives

VIII: COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION: GLC's AmeriCorps members and the communities that they serve will be well-aware that they are AmeriCorps members and part of a national community service movement. Each AmeriCorps member will receive five t-shirts and one fleece jacket during orientation with the AmeriCorps and GLC logos prominently displayed on them. GLC requires that the AmeriCorps logo must be prominently displayed on their outermost layer of clothing any time that members are serving (daily). GLC clearly communicates to its school and community partners the role of AmeriCorps members as part of a national community service movement and their uniform further establishes them as such. (In fact, GLC frequently hears students positively comment on members who serve in their schools during the day: e.g. "That's Elsa; she's my AmeriCorps member.")

Organizational Capability

I. ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING

EXPERIENCE: GLC is exceptionally well qualified to implement the Learning Links AmeriCorps Program. It has the experience, staffing, and management structure to implement the program and has built on its strengths, developing improved capacity each year. GLC's qualifications are most clearly demonstrated by its record of successfully serving students. Seven years ago, prior to the Learning Links AmeriCorps Program, only about two-thirds of GLC's Learning ROCKS! students improved their reading instructional levels each year. By the end of the first full year of the Learning Links AmeriCorps Program, results climbed to over 80%. And, each year since, the results have continued to be above 80% with GLC achieving its best results in the organization's 20 year history this past school year (2013-14): 92% of students improved their reading. This is significant as GLC also expanded its program to serve 33% more students and has been serving students with greater levels of need.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION: GLC is committed to ensuring the success of the program and has dedicated time and effort of its senior leadership team to overseeing the program. The Assistant Director has direct oversight responsibilities, ensuring compliance with all requirements, and the Program Manager provides daily direction and guidance to the full AmeriCorps team. The Program Manager and Site Coordinators provide daily direct supervision and serve children and families alongside members. GLC has a six-year history of successfully administering the AmeriCorps Program and has also been a 21st Century Community Learning Center (federal grant) sub-grantee for over nine years.

Narratives

ENGAGING PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS: GLC's established Learning Links AmeriCorps Program provides a critical link across the three main aspects of a child's daily experience: at school, after school, and at home / in their communities. AmeriCorps Members will serve at each of three sites (at school, afterschool, and at home/community). GLC's proven model for multi-site service delivery results in unparalleled, seamless support for children and their families, and is a proven, effective model with student achievement at an all-time high. Its efficacy is clearly tied to this multi-site, holistic approach to supporting children; serving across multiple sites has not once been a challenge for GLC. Learning Links will leverage existing partnerships with AHC, Inc.; the Arlington Partnership for Affordable Housing (APAH), as well as five local, public elementary schools -- all of which have a high level of student need -- to improve educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children.

II. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

GLC places great emphasis on ensuring compliance with external regulations and has designed its internal policies and procedures to align with these requirements as well as our own stringent ethical standards. As a youth-serving organization, GLC is first and foremost concerned about the safety of the children in its care and requires that all staff, AmeriCorps members and volunteers clear four levels of background checks. Children are always in the line of sight of a staff person or AmeriCorps member with cleared backgrounds. Further, all staff and AmeriCorps members must have current CPR and First Aid certifications on file and are responsible for knowing and being able to enact GLC's emergency procedures if needed (including carrying cell phones on them at all times for emergency alerts and/or other emergency use).

GLC's Assistant Director oversees the program and ensures that it is in compliance with all regulations. If there is a concern, she flags it and addresses it directly with program staff, taking corrective action as needed. (GLC has not had to correct any compliance issues in the past; however, it has adopted measures to keep pace with new AmeriCorps regulations as they are enacted.) GLC maintains active Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with all partners that clearly delineate acceptable and unacceptable service for AmeriCorps members. Members are encouraged to report any concerns to their Site Coordinators; corrective action is taken within a week. (In fact, GLC recently addressed a concern by a member that she was being asked to make copies at a school; senior staff met with the school principal within two days and corrected the situation.) In addition, the Program Manager makes regular site visits to the school placements to ensure that AmeriCorps

Narratives

members are serving in an appropriate capacity and are generally having a positive experience.

III. PAST PERFORMANCE: GLC has a strong record of successful past performance. It has exceeded all performance targets during the last three years of program operations, although it was challenged to fully meet the Strengthening Families Initiative which was later dropped by Virginia's OVCS. Last year's results were the strongest in the organization's 20 year history, with 92% of students improving their reading per externally validated, standardized school-based assessments. GLC achieved 100% member enrollment in the last full year of program operations and has done so every year since the program's inception. GLC would have had 100% member retention in its last full year of operations but had several members resign due to health concerns that could not have been anticipated: one member was hospitalized by her family for mental health concerns; one member had ongoing, doctor-validated health concerns that prevented her from completing her 1,700 service hours; and one member returned home to care for her mother who was diagnosed with cancer. While GLC will not specifically ask potential members of future cohorts about their health status per law, it will emphasize the expected 1,700 hour service commitment, and have recruited members sign contracts prior to orientation, including review of key policies and procedures (leave policies, illness policies, etc.). Further, GLC will support an overall healthy service environment by educating members about self-care and healthy lifestyles (e.g. stress management) and supporting their participation in proactive health measures (e.g. flu shots).

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

I. COST EFFECTIVENESS: GLC's cost per member service year is \$13,730. While this rate has gone up in order to keep up with the increased member living stipend, GLC has also increased its match to 46% of the total budget, a 25+% increase over GLC's 35% match three years ago. GLC has also since expanded its Learning Links AmeriCorps Program to include more members in order to serve 33% more students. As such, GLC requires \$143,797 (compared to \$78,000 three years ago) in non-Corporation funds to support its program. Based on strong current partnerships, existing funding relationships, and current/past gifts, GLC expects to secure the match from the following private sources: Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation (\$35,000); Giving Circle of HOPE (\$10,000); Community Foundation of Northern Virginia (\$10,000); Scheidel Foundation (\$20,000); Washington Forrest Foundation (\$25,000); E*TRADE (\$40,000); and community partners (\$4,000). GLC has been able to fully meet its match requirement each of the last six years with no problems. Having provided services to children in Arlington for the past 20 years, GLC is confident

Narratives

that the budget is sufficient to carry out the program effectively and fully supports the activities described in the narrative. GLC asserts that the program design is cost effective (averaging less than \$3/hour of service for each student) and that the benefits of improved educational outcomes (specifically, reading instructional levels) for economically disadvantaged children are well-aligned with CNCS priorities and justify the costs.

II. BUDGET ADEQUACY: Based on its 20 years of experience, including six years as an AmeriCorps*STATE grantee, GLC is confident that this budget is sufficient to support the previously outlined performance outcomes.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

GLC has established an internal evaluation process that incorporates short- and long-term assessment and monitoring of its Learning Links AmeriCorps program. The Assistant Director and Program Manager oversee the evaluation process, which includes data input management and analysis. Based on the Corporation for National and Community Service regulations (§2522.710), because GLC is applying for less than \$500,000 annually in CNCS funds, it may conduct an internal evaluation of the program.

BACKGROUND: GLC's theory of change is that bolstering students' reading instructional levels in upper elementary grades will lead to improved likelihoods that they will graduate from high school and therefore have a variety of options open to them for their livelihoods -- including post-secondary education -- that will provide greater lifelong earning potential (than those who do not have high school diplomas). GLC's logic model supports this theory of change with specific inputs, activities, and outputs toward short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. GLC's evaluation plan is designed to monitor outputs and short-term outcomes. Additionally, GLC is currently identifying ways that it might track medium-term outcomes (namely, high school graduation) as its first cohort since the inception of the Learning Links AmeriCorps Program approaches high school graduation in the next few years.

DATA COLLECTION: Each AmeriCorps member is responsible for supporting a small group of students and ensuring that those students make appropriate gains. To support this, AmeriCorps members are responsible for: collecting data for their respective small groups; inputting data into GLC's online database (KidTrax / nFocus) weekly, monthly, and quarterly as appropriate; and reviewing data with an eye toward specific goals for each student. Data points include: demographic information, including school-based interventions; program attendance; homework grades; reading

Narratives

instructional levels; program-based "expectations" points; and student survey results (capturing attitudes on reading, school, and ability to make good choices). Demographic information is collected from student registration forms, report cards, and school-based reports (e.g. Individualized Education Plans). Program attendance is collected from daily attendance logs. Reading instructional levels are captured from student report cards. And, program-based "expectations" points are derived from daily AmeriCorps member and staff observations of students while survey data are collected electronically. Site Coordinators ensure that members input data on time and accurately and support members in reviewing results for individual students.

PURPOSE: GLC utilizes its data in several ways. First, GLC analyzes the data to evaluate its progress against specific targets. Second, and equally important, GLC utilizes the data to inform strategies and support for individual students. For example: If a student survey demonstrates a poor attitude toward reading, program staff can support AmeriCorps members to make reading activities more fun and engaging for that particular student, hoping to improve their overall attitude and, in turn, their likelihood to read (practice) more and improve their reading level. Third, GLC utilizes the data to understand trends occurring either at a site, across certain student populations, or across the entire group. This information can then be used to replicate and/or modify strategies.

VALIDITY: GLC uses internal data to verify outputs such as daily attendance logs, as well as for information such as student surveys. (GLC also uses daily sign-in sheets for community volunteers which it then inputs into an online database.) GLC uses externally validated data for tracking short-term outcomes. Specifically, GLC collects reading instructional levels either from students' report cards or directly from the schools. Reading instructional levels are based on students' performance on standardized, norm-referenced reading assessments. Most schools that GLC partners with use the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), the results of which reading specialists then translate into reading instructional levels.

Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

A. Programmatic Clarification

1. GLC will target recruitment efforts to bring on members who are qualified to tutor, in alignment with 45 CFR 2522.900-950. Members will hold at least a high school diploma or GED and will have specialized pre- and in-service training in alignment with curriculum priorities for Arlington Public

Narratives

Schools (APS), the local education agency, including attending two full days of APS' new teacher orientation at the start of the program year for language arts and math.

2. The Assistant Director will oversee the program and will attend all AmeriCorps trainings, webex conferences, calls, and more. The Assistant Director will conduct two trainings at the beginning and middle of each year for AmeriCorps member supervisors to ensure that they are well trained in adequately supervising and supporting members. The Assistant Director will also address any concerns on an ongoing basis to ensure that members are adequately supervised and well supported. Finally, AmeriCorps member supervision and compliance will be a portion of staff's interim and year-end performance evaluations each year.

B. Budget Clarification

1. Per the application instructions, GLC included costs for criminal background checks on members in Budget Section 1 under "Other Program Operating Costs." The line specifically includes \$624 or \$48 x 13 members. GLC conducts all of the same extensive background checks on staff as on AmeriCorps members. GLC does not include the cost of staff background checks in the budget because, as an organization that serves children, it would have this cost for staff even if it did not have the AmeriCorps program.

2. GLC conducts a six-point criminal history check on all members and staff that does and will include: FBI fingerprint check; state of residence registry; NSOPW; Virginia criminal history check; Virginia Child Protective Services check; and a lexis nexis search.

C. Performance Measure Clarification

1. Performance Measure ED1 has been added.

2. All students come from schools in which the largest percentage of students come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and/or have special or exceptional needs as defined by ED1 and ED2 performance measures.

3. The program will track and report an unduplicated count of students who enroll and complete the program by using daily attendance logs that are tracked through GLC's student database.

4. Students must attend a minimum of 100 days (300 hours) of program in order to complete the program. (This is not a drop-in program; as such, students attend almost every day once they are enrolled in the program, except for sick days or emergencies.) GLC will only count students who have attended at least 100 days of program.

5. GLC defines improved academic performance in literacy using reading instructional levels noted on

Narratives

students' report cards. Reading instructional levels correspond to grade level expectations (e.g. 3.1 is third grade, beginning of year). Students must successfully improve by at least one instructional level.

6. Reading instructional levels are based on norm-referenced assessments that are given to students in their schools by their teachers and interpreted by school-based reading specialists. The assessments are conducted at the beginning and end of the year and their corresponding grade levels are noted on students' 1st and 4th quarter report cards. The reading assessment is appropriate to the program in that GLC aligns its program with Arlington Public Schools (the local education agency) curriculum priorities for students to be able to read proficiently (on grade level). The assessments are not designed to test students on particular content that they cover in school or at GLC's program; rather they assess students' overall reading proficiency. GLC is able to meet national service reporting requirements by reporting 1st quarter (pre-test) results in the fall and 4th quarter (post-test) results by the end of the program year. While GLC cannot establish causality, GLC's AmeriCorps program has a clear record of results such that there is a strong correlation between participation in GLC's program and student academic achievement. Six years ago, before GLC implemented its Learning Links AmeriCorps program, about 60% of its students improved their reading each year. Once GLC began its Learning Links AmeriCorps program, results jumped to 80% and most recently 92%. GLC serves students who are at risk of falling into the achievement gap or failing to make adequate gains in reading each year. Teachers regularly credit GLC's Learning Links AmeriCorps Program with providing students with the extra support that they need to make expected gains. GLC has close partnerships with each of the five public schools where its students are enrolled, including School Partnership Agreements and Memoranda of Agreement with each school that allow GLC to access student data and discuss student needs and progress with teachers, counselors, and other school staff as necessary and appropriate.

D. Strategic Engagement Slots

1. GLC does not specifically target its recruitment for members with disabilities. However, GLC typically has 1-2 AmeriCorps Members each year who do not disclose their disabilities on their official AmeriCorps applications but later share this information with us in confidentiality. GLC has a strong history of making accommodations for members who need it, including those with physical disabilities as well as learning disabilities.
2. GLC is not requesting additional MSYs under strategic engagement slots.

Narratives

E. MSY with No Program Funds Attached Clarification:
GLC is not requesting no-cost MSYs.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics