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## Executive Summary

UTEC will have 18 AmeriCorps members who will support low-income, high-risk youth as they seek social and economic success in Lowell, Massachusetts. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for serving 350 youth total, with 125 of these youth receiving 1:1 or small-group services from members. Of these, 75 youth will demonstrate progress towards increased employability, 50 youth will enroll in HiSET [MA equivalent of GED] classes, and 15 youth will attain their HiSET during the service year. In addition, AmeriCorps members will leverage 40 volunteers who engage in community-building or service activities with UTEC youth. This program focuses on the CNCS focus areas of Economic Opportunity and Education. UTEC's three agency-wide outcome areas (education, employment, and non-recidivism) also align closely with My Brother's Keeper priorities through Milestone 3 "Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career," Milestone 4 "Successfully Entering the Workforce," and Milestone 5 "Keeping Kids on Track and Giving Them Second Chances." UTEC's service population also aligns with My Brother's Keeper population focus on young men of color. Of youth served by UTEC, 75% are male and >85% identify as people of color. The CNCS investment of \$236,255 will be matched with \$171,404 in private funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

1) PROBLEM / NEED: Lowell is the fifth largest city in Massachusetts, with about 106,000 residents, located about 35 miles northwest of Boston. Lowell has a significant Latino population at 17.3% and an Asian population of 20.2% (US Census 2010). There are about 17,000 youth between the ages of 16-24 in Lowell, and they face a number of challenges. POVERTY: 19% of Lowell households live below the poverty line, compared with 11% statewide (Census 2013 data). GANG INVOLVEMENT: Lowell Police estimate that 1,500-2,000 youth are involved in 25-30 active gang sets, well above the average among cities of comparable size. UNEMPLOYMENT: Lowell's unemployment rate is consistently ~2% higher than the state average (MA Dept. of Labor stats, monthly). DROPOUT RATES: Lowell High School is the second-largest in the state, with a 4-year graduation rate in the bottom 10% of MA districts. UTEC also serves a small number of youth from nearby Lawrence, where high school graduation rate in 2013 was the 4th lowest in the state (MA Dept of Education, 2013).

2) THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL. UTEC's mission and promise is to ignite and nurture the ambition of our most disengaged young people to trade violence and poverty for social and economic success. Like CNCS, UTEC believes that the prevalence of poverty holds an important

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role in the problems and assumptions that our young people face. In particular, these forces sometimes create the need, the space, and the place for problems such as gang or criminal involvement. Our Youth Empowerment Corps members serve opportunity youth (ages 16--24) who are living in Lowell or Lawrence AND fit our proven-risk criteria: gang involved, criminally involved, and/or parenting. Last year, 77% of youth had a criminal history, 53% were gang-involved, and 51% were parenting or expecting.

Youth who become gang or criminally involved often have higher rates of educational interruption and eventually drop out of school. Also, many youth living in poverty hold the pressing need to provide financial support to their families and often put their education or long-term goals aside to offer immediate support. As a result of their education being interrupted, they have lost time to develop skills and do not see themselves on a path toward secondary/post-secondary education or have clear plans for stable employment.

Even when proven-risk opportunity youth do agree to join programs, it can take a significant amount of time and patience to engage youth so that they attend structured programming regularly. This is hardly surprising, since so many variables related to risk factors are directly related to positive relationships and trust. Variables critical to gang involvement include: serious stressful events, family support, family deviance, "delinquent self-concept," and exposure to violence. (Howell and Egley, 2005)

AMERICORPS ROLE: Out-of-school youth living in poverty often have not had adult role models or a community (i.e., the social capital) to help them navigate institutions and systems that will lead to their employment or educational success. Many youth are stuck in holding patterns of poor decision-making, which their social environments do not encourage them to break out of. Best practices for mentoring point to the importance of a sustained relationship of at least 1 year. (Grossman, J. B. & Rhodes, J. E., 2002.)

UTEC's Youth Empowerment Corps serves as full-time mentors and social-capital builders for our proven-risk opportunity youth. Youth Empowerment Corps (YEC) members are ideally positioned to provide unconditional support and positive social modeling for our youth in the variety of settings constructed in our model: on the job in UTEC social enterprises, in the classroom, and in social / community settings. YEC members focus on the positive relationships and modeling that support the "social success" so critical to opportunity youth with histories of gang and criminal involvement. YEC members provide unconditional positive supports and create opportunities for youth to build social capital amongst themselves and as members of the wider community. Concurrently, UTEC staff

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deliver programming, set expectations and hold youth accountable, and train youth in education and employment skills required for the "economic success" of our mission.

**INTERVENTION MODEL:** Most YEC members serve in UTEC's integrated Workforce Development and Education (WFD) model, a tiered program that allows young people to progress as they master soft and hard skills within our social enterprises (currently Mattress Recycling, Culinary Services, and Furniture Design) and demonstrate that they are reliable. WFD provides an internal pathway for job experience as youth learn industry-specific skills and, most importantly, the interpersonal "soft skills" required to excel in any workplace, which is the focus of YEC member activities. Youth also attend preparation classes for the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET, the MA equivalent to GED) and receive small group tutoring and additional 1:1 tutoring from YEC members as they prepare to take the HiSET component tests. Additionally, youth attend weekly social justice workshops and regularly meet with Transitional Coaches (case managers) for wrap-around support. The embedded mentoring by YEC members make UTEC's program more relational and more effective than traditional employment skills training programs. YEC members also supplement the core model by providing youth leadership opportunities in Civic Engagement and through drop-in Enrichment activities that are open to other community youth, providing a bridge from outreach to enrollment for additional opportunity youth.

**DOSAGE SUMMARY:** Enrolled youth spend more than 30 hours per week onsite at UTEC and are served by YEC members for an average 75% of that time. Youth without a high school credential spend half their day at work and half in education. All youth spend Friday mornings in personal and professional development workshops or SoJust workshops that focus on social justice issues and civic engagement. It may take a youth 9-24 months to complete the Workforce program, so to facilitate youth progress, it is broken into distinct stages. YEC members provide mentoring and coaching throughout: (1) Transformational Beginnings orientation level, (2) Workforce levels of bench, crew and skill, (3) Independence level with internal or external internship and continued UTEC supports. Youth receive on-the-job training for 20 hours per week, with member coaching for avg. 15 of those hours. (Note that 1 member day includes 2 youth work shifts.)

**MEMBER ACTIVITIES:** YEC members embed mentoring best practices into our full-time employment program. Members serve across four major program areas: Education, Workforce, Enrichment, and Civic Engagement. In every area, members engage young people in the program activities through positive modeling and personal coaching. Since staff are charged with setting expectations and holding youth accountable, YEC members can serve as a neutral-seeming

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intermediary. A young person who is frustrated with a Workforce program manager's instructions to re-do a task might be inclined to walk out for the day; the positive coaching of a YEC member can help to redirect or return that young person to programming. This division of roles and responsibilities supports opportunity youth's continued engagement, which is a significant barrier to serving proven-risk opportunity youth (Bloom, Ivry, & Thompson, 2010). YEC members provide another layer of positive relationships to connect our disengaged opportunity youth back to program interventions, through four service areas:

**EDUCATION:** 4 Members serving in Education provide individual and small-group tutoring to support personalized instruction as our out-of-school youth prepare for HiSET to increase their educational attainment and improve employment prospects. These members are required to have a high school diploma in accordance with CNCS requirements for tutoring programs. Members also work with program staff to adapt lesson plans that tie educational concepts from HiSET materials to UTEC's Workforce skills -- e.g., creating a culinary-themed lesson on tripling a recipe as a framework for students to work with fractions. For youth who have struggled in traditional classrooms, YEC support is critical to connecting academic concepts to real-world functions that youth may appreciate more and grasp more easily. Education Members typically work in small tutoring groups of 1:4 (max) and 1:1 when youth are preparing for specific HiSET test components.

**WORKFORCE:** 10 Members mentor youth as they practice industry-specific hard skills taught by staff program managers -- Mattress, Catering, Café, Commercial Kitchen, Woodworking -- while modeling and facilitating positive workplace habits. Members' mentoring is critical as opportunity youth practice basic workplace communication and teamwork. Youth who have no practice in taking the initiative or troubleshooting problems in a work setting benefit from the on-the-job coaching that members provide to supplement formal skills training provided by staff members. Members also provide tutoring-style youth preparation for industry-recognized certification exams, specifically OSHA 10-hour and ServSafe Food Handler.

**ENRICHMENT:** 2 Enrichment members plan and support drop-in center activities offered 4 days per week. Drop-in hours are open to ALL youth in our age range, not just those already enrolled at UTEC, making Enrichment an important piece of UTEC's outreach and engagement of new opportunity youth. The UTEC program center is open for sports, breakdancing, pool and other casual activities, and YEC members "float" during drop-in hours to provide mentoring in a more social context and to engage opportunity youth who are not yet enrolled in UTEC's core programs. Members also work with youth to create additional Enrichment activities and special events, ranging from the first ever

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UTEC Spring Formal to holiday meals and other celebrations for "the UTEC family."

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: The final 2 members take initiative in our integration of civic engagement across the program model. Our staff Social Justice Educator delivers the SoJust workshops that introduces young people to social justice concepts ranging from food security to criminal justice, and facilitates conversations about race, class, gender, and other social factors that directly affect the lives of our opportunity youth. Members help youth to translate those workshop concepts into action through community events. Last year, young people who wanted to implement anti-discrimination poster campaigns -- ideas sparked by their SoJust topics -- worked with YEC Members to bring those youth-led projects to fruition. Members also worked with young people to produce a Social Justice Film Festival that showcased youth-made short films about racism, sexism, and homophobia. Collectively, members develop community engagement activities to help our disengaged young people feel like they are members of the wider community beyond UTEC. In addition to Days of Service, members work with young people to plan and execute events that facilitate prosocial connections and provide free, safe, youth-driven activities. Youth Empowerment Corps members plan, promote and produce events that have included: holiday meals and parties for our youth and their families; the first ever UTEC Formal Dance; and a Post-Secondary Fair to bring college and trade school representatives to UTEC and encourage youth to explore future educational and employment opportunities. YEC also works with youth on community responses to any incident of violence in Lowell. Last year, youth and members organized a community response to gun violence in the city. Members also supported youth with a memorial dinner at UTEC after one of our young people died of an illness and collected youth's ideas about a more permanent memorial at the program center, two of which were then enacted: a new UTEC shirt based on a design by the late youth and a plaque in his memory on UTEC's wall of graduates.

YEC members also engage community partners and volunteers to engage with youth through other activities. Last year, Build A Garden Day connected the Mill City Grows community garden leaders from Mill City Grows (a local, urban agriculture nonprofit) to our young people and resulted in garden boxes that UTEC youth use to grow their own fresh, healthy produce. Athletic events like a basketball day and a handball tournament at public parks serve two purposes: outreach to additional opportunity youth who aren't yet connected to UTEC, and positive community engagement and visibility for UTEC-enrolled youth.

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MEASURES: YEC mentoring contributes to National PM O2: Number of economically disadvantaged individuals receiving job training and other skill development services.

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10 Members' service in Workforce crews will support 125 enrolled youth. Of these, 75 youth will demonstrate short-term progress toward improved Economic Opportunity by completing at least 1 Workforce level OR increasing Workforce performance review scores. This job training and skill development will result in long-term economic opportunity improvements. Within their first year of UTEC completion, at least 60% of youth will obtain employment and maintain employment, and/or be enrolled in post-secondary education. YEC service also contributes to National PM output ED2: Number of economically disadvantaged students that completed participation in CNCS-supported education programs and outcome ED26: Number of students acquiring a HiSET [MA equivalent for GED]. Through the tutoring and computer literacy skill development of 4 members, 50 opportunity youth will be served in UTEC's onsite HiSET preparation classes. For the PM definition of completion, we track youth receiving 10 hours or more of services. Of these, at least 15 (30%) will earn their HiSET. Our long-term expectation is that 55% of youth without a high school credential will receive their HiSET within 2 years of enrollment at UTEC. Comparatively, only 1% of adults in MA without a high school credential passed the GED test (American Council on Education, 2012). Agency-wide, UTEC also measures Crime Prevention, which does not align with National Performance Measures but is important to note here. Criminal records are a major barrier to successful economic outcomes. YEC members' positive engagement of opportunity youth and facilitation of free, pro-social activities contributes to reduced criminal involvement by providing positive alternatives -- and thus improving Education and Economic performance. Additionally, tracking recidivism aligns with My Brother's Keeper milestone 5 and its commitment to "second chances."

3) EVIDENCE BASE: UTEC is a data-driven organization and is currently at Preliminary Evidence level. UTEC is deeply rooted in a positive youth development framework, and YEC service supports the "drivers of success" that we see in youth who complete our programs, including: Workforce Development services consistent with National Transitional Jobs Network practices; case management and mentoring; and multiple pathways from in-house program to external institutions in the form of job, college, and vocational training placements. (Butts, J. A., et al, 2010.) YEC members' service directly addresses additional drivers of success, including: a) Trusting relationships with adults who serve as an ally (Bauldry, S. and Hartmann, T., 2004.) b) A feeling of belonging to a community that extends beyond UTEC (Grobe, T. et al. Commonwealth Corporation), which is further expanded by the special events and service activities that YEC members implement. c) Leadership opportunities to engage and shape community practices that affect youth (White House Council for Community Solutions, 2013. Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth) by working

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with YEC members to develop and execute special events and community activities as detailed above. UTEC also has a growing evidence base of our own. Social Impact Research (SIR), the independent research department of Root Cause, compared UTEC against a set of standardized indicators in two categories: program performance and organizational health. Based on this analysis, the model was classified as high performing. While they did not identify AmeriCorps service by name, SIR specifically cited UTEC's commitment to "strong relationships with participants so that youth know that there is a caring, trusting, and stable adult who is always available. UTEC creates these relationships through intensive mentoring that happens one-on-one and in group settings, through formal and informal mechanisms." (Social Impact Research, 2013)

Most recently, UTEC's Evaluation Department assessed performance for youth who first enrolled 2 or more years ago and by definition have received YEC member service. After 2-3 years of involvement, 73% of youth were still productively engaged with UTEC, employed, and/or enrolled in higher education. In addition, 31% obtained their HiSET with YEC member tutoring and support. Finally, and significantly for their long-term economic opportunities an overwhelming majority had not been convicted (96%) or arrested (85%) since enrollment at UTEC. (Outcomes Report 2013, UTEC) As noted above, arrests are a significant barrier to economic opportunity, although crime prevention itself is not an AmeriCorps Performance Measure.

These measures demonstrate UTEC's effectiveness compared with external baseline data for comparable populations: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY: Only 22% of young people leaving the criminal justice system secure jobs earning at least the equivalent of 10 hours per week at minimum wage. (Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 2013. Review of proven risk young men and subsequent employment.) EDUCATION: In 2012, only 1% of adults in MA without a high school credential passed the GED test (American Council on Education). RECIDIVISM: 55% of proven-risk young men recidivate within 3 years. (MA Dept. of Admin and Finance & Harvard Kennedy School, 2013.) The intensive mentoring and 1:1 supports by YEC members are an essential differentiator between UTEC's service delivery and these comparison groups.

4) NOTICE PRIORITY: YEC fits well within the Economic Opportunity funding priority, supporting UTEC's core mission to help proven-risk opportunity youth achieve economic success. We also seek to recruit opportunity youth for AmeriCorps service, and each year's member cohort has included 10-20% former youth clients. YEC is also within the Education priority by providing HiSET preparation and tutoring to opportunity youth who did not complete high school. (UTEC also supports youth who then pursue post-secondary education, though this is not a focus of YEC service). YEC aligns with My

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Brother's Keeper milestone 3, "Graduating from High School Ready for College and Career," by increasing high school credential attainment for youth who have previously left school without a diploma and by building job readiness skills for those youth, corresponding to My Brother's Keeper milestone 4, "Successfully Entering the Workforce." Finally, YEC services supports reducing criminal activity in alignment with My Brother's Keeper milestone 5, "Keeping Kids on Track and Giving Them Second Chances," although reduced recidivism is not among AmeriCorps national performance measures.

5) MEMBER TRAINING: Member training begins with an intensive orientation process. Week One focuses specifically on AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps policies, procedures and skills, emphasizing teambuilding and learning about the Lowell community. Members are trained in relevant service topics, such as outreach and an overview of gang issues. This portion of Orientation is facilitated by UTEC's AC PM. Week Two of orientation is part of UTEC's agency-wide Orientation and Teambuilding Week, an annual, mandatory 15-hour session covering UTEC's model, outcomes and values. Also in Week Two, members will meet with their direct supervisors for training on the workings of their programs. In Week Three, members begin their regular day-to-day schedule.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES: On the first day of Orientation, members are trained to know and understand AmeriCorps Prohibited Activities. Throughout the year, both members and staff are reminded of any Prohibited Activities issues. Since all members serve at a single site and are overseen by a seasoned AmeriCorps Program Manager, the detection and prevention process is simplified.

TRAININGS: All new members complete the 32-hour BEST Youth Worker Certificate training by Health Resources in Action, an interactive introduction to principles of Positive Youth Development. This immersion in youthwork and mentoring practices and reinforces the role and boundaries of youthworker / youth relationships, an important area for members who are new to the field (and are often close in age to the opportunity youth they are serving). Members also complete a Diversity training and "Power of Teams" workshop with an external trainer. In-service trainings include Gang Awareness Training (to alert members to local gang colors, symbols and language), Boundaries, Trauma-Informed Approaches, or other youthwork skills. Members are also exposed to topics like Civic Knowledge, Community Assessment, Project Management, Public Speaking, and Team Leadership. Members will be expected to demonstrate confidence in their skills in these areas in order to successfully complete their term of service. UTEC includes at least two "Life After AmeriCorps" guest speakers each service year, usually at least one is a YEC alum who now works in the community. The AmeriCorps Program Manager ensures that training hours do not exceed allowed

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20%. 6) MEMBER SUPERVISION - GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT: UTEC's YEC program is managed by a dedicated AmeriCorps Program Manager (AC PM) who is an AmeriCorps NCCC alum and has managed UTEC's growing service programs for the past 3 years. The AC PM reports to UTEC's Senior Director of Programs. Each YEC member is supported by two senior staff members: the AC PM and a program-specific supervisor (e.g., an Education Crew member is supervised by the HiSET Instructor). Both supervisors ensure regular check-ins with and coaching for a member. Minimally, the direct supervisor will meet with the Member on a bi-weekly basis. The AC PM will meet with the whole group once a week. Member and AC PM individual check-ins are formally scheduled a month into the Corps Year, again at the mid-year, and finally at the end of service. 1:1 meetings are otherwise scheduled on an as-needed basis between the AC PM and Members. UTEC prioritizes ongoing feedback and open communication among members and staff at every level. The AC PM trains all staff supervisors in essential AmeriCorps expectations, regulations, and Prohibited Activities at the beginning of the service year. UTEC emphasizes Prohibited Activities to staff to ensure that no staff member inadvertently puts an AmeriCorps member into a position of concern. If a new supervisor is hired during the service year, the AC PM individually trains that person. Finally, direct supervisors complete a mid-term and end-of-term performance evaluation with their YEC members. The AC PM also undergoes the same evaluation process with YEC Members. The AC PM will then assess all paperwork and schedule meetings to address any discrepancies found in the documents. If there is any issue with a YEC Member, there is a 3-step warning process in which the AC PM and Direct Supervisor meet with the Member to address concerns. The first instance results in a documented verbal warning. If issues persist, the next meeting involves a documented written warning. If the issue(s) is still not resolved, the final warning results in termination. This process is documented in member contracts and addressed in orientation. Lastly, there is a programmatic evaluation completed by the Members at the mid and end of year period. This evaluation specifically refers to Member experience and how they think YEC can be enhanced; feedback is taken into consideration for the following service year.

7) MEMBER EXPERIENCE - UTEC prides itself on efforts to professionalize the youthwork field, and that commitment to high-quality professional development to provide effective service applies to our YEC members. UTEC recognizes YEC members as uniquely positioned to carry our organizational values and program best practices into the community as young professionals who move on to serve and work at other agencies. We train all members to the standard to which UTEC staff are held, and when staff position openings permit, we often hire former members. Notably, two YEC alumni who

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are now on UTEC's staff received awards last year: Geoff Foster, Director of Organizing, was named Youth Worker of the Year by Health Resources in Action's BEST Initiative (2013); Tom Southerton, Senior Transitional Coach, received the Superstar Foundation's Veronica Award for outstanding social service involving transformational relationships (2013). REFLECTION AND CONNECTION: Members attend two all-Corps retreats, in September and May (in addition to an agency-wide retreat in Nov/Dec). Each retreat agenda will include: teambuilding activities, discussions on projects to date and challenges met, activities to reflect on and discuss the meaning of service; and recreational activities. Members reflect on trainings and service through Weekly Journals, due every Monday along with their Timesheets, and on additional reflection forms for each training. Finally, members take part in a minimum of two national days of service to broaden their service experience and strengthen their connection to the larger service movement.

UTEC actively participates in AmeriCorps community events, including Massachusetts Service Alliance events. YEC has been featured at Opening Day events, in our state intermediary's annual report, and in AmeriCorps, Alumni and VISTA social media. Members are encouraged to connect with members serving at other agencies, including several of UTEC's community partners in Lowell and Lawrence, and to join alumni networks. At the end of each service year, UTEC holds an AmeriCorps graduation ceremony, a ceremonial end to member service and another opportunity for both members and staff to reflect on the service year. Members invite family members and friends, and the AC PM and staff supervisors share a brief reflection about each individual member. Each member also receives a gift that reflects YEC service, usually a framed collage of photos and memorabilia from the service year. In 2013, UTEC began an annual AmeriCorps Alumni Dinner to connect current and past members and support "Life After AmeriCorps" learning. CITIZENSHIP: UTEC's agency culture of reflection and teambuilding provides an ideal backdrop for cultivation of members' commitment to lifelong service. Civic engagement is an agency-wide priority, and this complements AmeriCorps values of national service and community commitment to low-income communities as we work to build engaged citizens -- in both our youth and member populations.

Members in their second year of service can apply to be one of (3) Crew Leaders, based on seniority in the Corps and their leadership qualifications. Crew Leaders' additional responsibilities are to help develop and implement the timeline for Crew projects, facilitate the team-building component of opening circle meetings, organize and implement Corps retreats, and promote esprit de corps among the Corps Members. These additional service activities will be closely monitored and supervised by the Program Manager to ensure member success, to ensure that the Senior Members are supported in

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their efforts.

RECRUITMENT: Recruitment efforts include community-based outreach (local flyering, word of mouth, networking events, and campus engagement with the community college and University in Lowell) and social media promotion designed to reach opportunity youth and other low-income residents of our services area. UTEC's commitment to diversity informs our outreach and recruitment processes, and is reflected in our members: In the current service year, 50% of members identify as people of color, and 11% (2 members) are former youth clients of UTEC. UTEC's recruitment efforts focus on young-adult candidates, including our promotion of service to youth formerly enrolled in UTEC's program, through local college networks, and via social media. However, we welcome members of all ages. Collectively, our AmeriCorps cohort represents a range of "pathways to success" for our youth to consider: some members are recent college graduates, others are current college students, some have not attended or have dropped out of post-secondary education. All are passionate about life in our community, committed to lifelong learning, and acting on their own commitment to civic engagement -- providing real-life examples of "social and economic success" that YEC service helps our opportunity youth attain.

8) COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION - UTEC recognizes the unique nature of member identity and works to cultivate AmeriCorps experiences throughout the service year. Corps teambuilding is built into members' two-week orientation at the beginning of the service year. Members attend the AmeriCorps Opening Day hosted by Mass Service Alliance to increase their connection to the AmeriCorps community. Member trainings and meetings incorporate resources from the state and national programs whenever available. The annual, agency-wide orientation includes a session on AmeriCorps programs, activities, and prohibited activities, to explain how national service operates at UTEC. Members are identified as AmeriCorps members on UTEC's website. The members' relationship to AmeriCorps is acknowledged also in their email signatures and on business cards. Members are always referred to as "Youth Empowerment Corps members" and wear service gear daily with AmeriCorps and MSA logos for both esprit de corps and visibility of national service to our community. Members are clearly identified as such on their UTEC ID badges, which feature AmeriCorps and MSA logos and are a different color from staff IDs.

### Organizational Capability

1) BACKGROUND AND STAFFING - PROGRAM AND GRANT ADMINISTRATION: UTEC is currently in its seventh year of an AmeriCorps State & National program and has hosted VISTA members for the past 3 years. We have developed a staffing and supervision structure that provides

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strong member support and training in youthwork, along with a full-time, knowledgeable Program Manager who is the resident expert for all AmeriCorps regulations and requirements. UTEC has experience managing other federal funding, ranging from the Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Justice to USDA's Community Foods Program. UTEC has administered a number of city and state grants, including CDBG funds for direct services to low-income residents. Through the successful implementation of federal and state awards, UTEC has a proven financial infrastructure to carry on this type of grant. UTEC has the capacity to work on a reimbursement basis, with consistent revenue streams, and carrying funds for 60-90 days of operating costs. UTEC's Controller handles all financial management processing and reporting, with support from a part-time bookkeeper. All drawdowns and grant expenditures will be completed separately from other federal funding by separating each in different contract accounts within our bank and accounting system. The Board holds final approval on UTEC's annual budgets, and the Controller communicates monthly with the Board of Directors in terms of agency financial standing. UTEC manages diversified revenue streams and an operating budget of \$4+ million and a program center of more than 20,000 square feet.

COMMUNITY PLANNING: UTEC was founded in 1999 by young people in Lowell working with City and business leaders to establish a safe place from gang violence. UTEC was then incorporated as an independent nonprofit and is guided by our Board of Directors and leadership staff team. UTEC continues to work closely with the Lowell Police, Lowell Community Health Center's TeenBlock, and other partners to ensure wraparound services and to ensure that the community addresses the entire risk spectrum for youth: at-risk youth, high-risk youth, and the proven-risk youth who UTEC specifically serves with our intensive intervention and comprehensive model.

2) COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY - As a youthwork agency that is active and highly visible in the community, UTEC has a proven personal-accountability culture that extends naturally to ensuring compliance with AmeriCorps guidelines and regulations as well. For Members and their staff supervisors, prohibited activities are explained during orientation and listed in a member handbook distributed during the first week of service. The AC PM ensures that both Members and supervisors understand Prohibited Activities, and that Members cannot participate in Prohibited Activities during service hours and/or while wearing AmeriCorps gear. The AC PM regularly checks in with all Members and supervisors to ensure detection and deterrence.

3) PAST PERFORMANCE - UTEC is constantly working to improve performance. In the last completed service year (13-14), UTEC met and exceeded all targets. YEC members engaged 591 youth

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in positive activities and supported 179 youth in more intensive programming. Of those youth served, 127 made demonstrable progress toward at least one performance measure. As demonstrated by the comparison data in Evidence Base, this 70% success rate for proven-risk opportunity youth is significant -- particularly since it is a one-year measure of UTEC's two- to three-year intervention model.

In 12-13 service year, UTEC aligned its measures more closely with the current national performance measures. UTEC met all targets except for youth obtaining GEDs, where we fell short by one. The target was 15 GEDs and the service year saw 14 youth earn their GEDs. Notably, less than a month after the YEC service year ended, a 15th youth passed the final test.

In 11-12 service year, UTEC met enrollment outputs and achieved some, but not all, proposed short-term outcomes. This was the first full year of data collection and documentation for UTEC's current program model, and some projections were too high. This year provided a data baseline and refinements to program delivery that allowed us to improve over the next two years, as demonstrated by our improved performance.

**ENROLLMENT:** Over the past 3 completed service years (grant years 2011-2013), we have consistently achieved 100% enrollment. **RETENTION:** Over the past 3 years, our retention rate averaged 81%. In recent recruitment cycles, due to the difficult economy, we have found that more candidates were seeking service as a backup plan to traditional employment, including our YEC members recruited from opportunity youth populations. We support Members by enforcing and reiterating policies, offering encouragement and guidance, and monitoring progress towards goals through timesheets, weekly meetings, and evaluations. **COMPLIANCE:** UTEC has successfully managed program and fiscal compliance through 7 years of AmeriCorps programming. We have worked with MSA to address any concerns and to coordinate on any required site visits and audit procedures during past program cycles, including improved procedures for personnel file documentation.

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

**COST-BENEFIT:** AmeriCorps services is a clear blueprint for long term savings for various public costs often associated with opportunity youth. The following are but a sampling of areas where UTEC's model can provide a cost-efficient alternative to public costs incurred: As most aptly stated by Andrew Sum in his 2009 article entitled The Consequences of Dropping Out of High School, "Over their working lives, the average high school dropout will have a negative net fiscal contribution to society of nearly -\$5,200 while the average high school graduate generates a positive lifetime net

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fiscal contribution of \$287,000. The average high school dropout will cost taxpayers over \$292,000 in lower tax revenues, higher cash and in-kind transfer costs, and imposed incarceration costs relative to an average high school graduate." YEC member interventions support opportunity youth's transformation into members of the workforce with reduced public assistance needs and reduced law-enforcement costs incurred. UTEC's Youth Empowerment Corps request represents a cost-effective investment (\$236,255 to yield measurable results for at least 75 youth = \$3,150 CNCS cost per opportunity youth achieving outcomes) that also results in long-term public savings. NON-CNCS RESOURCES: More than 50% of UTEC's annual budget comes from private sources, including foundation, corporate and individual support. With several multi-year commitments for program growth through 2017, we can already secure the full match for proposed grant Year 1 through our Strategic Grant Partners commitment, as well as a significant proportion of grant Year 2. COST PER MSY: This request reflects UTEC's proposed increased living allowance for members while ensuring a slightly lower cost per MSY of \$13,125 compared with current year's \$13,140.

### Evaluation Summary or Plan

As a formula-funded program to date, UTEC has not been required to perform a formal evaluation for its AmeriCorps program.

However, UTEC has a strong agency-wide commitment to performance measurement and performance management. Our internal Evaluation Department supports program evaluation and youth data assessment, including many of the data points cited herein. In UTEC's FY15, the Evaluation and leadership staff are looking at questions such as: "Does more time spent at UTEC in optional activities correlate with greater gains in education, employment, and recidivism?" and "What duration, intensity, and breadth of services correlate with success?" As these questions are refined at the agency level, we will explore ways to extrapolate more specific questions about AmeriCorps members' activities and their specific services as they correlate with youth success in the overall program.

As described earlier, UTEC has already used process evaluation and observations to adjust the member recruitment and interviewing process, with the goal of improved retention. This is an ongoing process and one that can be documented in the 2015-16 recruitment cycle for reporting to CNCS.

Our commitment to professional development for all youthworkers also guides our evaluation of

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personnel performance and satisfaction. UTEC conducts an AmeriCorps member survey to collect feedback about member experience. Originally an annual, end-of-service tool, the survey is now issued twice per service year as detailed above. In the 2015-16 service year, we will formalize this data collection further for AmeriCorps program evaluation purposes, and specifically to assess (1) Member satisfaction with their service, and (2) Member perception of their service year's contribution to their professional development and career planning.

### Amendment Justification

n/a

### Clarification Summary

#### A. Programmatic clarification items

1. Please explain the nature and extent of drop-in activities that members would be responsible for helping to manage and how this relates to job readiness.

Drop-in activities comprise an average eight hours per week of UTEC's program schedule, when the program center is open for sports, breakdancing, pool and other casual activities. Drop-in activities are included in members' position descriptions. These activities do not directly develop job readiness but serve two important functions: (1) recruitment avenue for proven-risk youth who may subsequently enroll in the job readiness programming and (2) positive engagement of enrolled youth during "after work" hours to increase their positive peer and adult relationships and prevent risky or unsafe behavior. (In 2014, at least 13 youth who enrolled in Workforce had previously attended drop-in activities, and 82% of Workforce youth were not arrested while enrolled at UTEC.)

Enrichment members plan and support drop-in center activities and work with youth to create additional Enrichment activities and special events, ranging from the UTEC Spring Formal to holiday meals and other celebrations for "the UTEC family." These activities support retention, positive behavior, and offer opportunities for youth leadership as members of the planning team.

2. Please further explain the training and qualifying of members to be tutors according to CNCS's definition of a "tutor". Please see CFR 2522.940.

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Members who serve as tutors and classroom mentors all have a high school diploma or equivalent. Most education members are also college graduates, though this is not required by UTEC.

At UTEC, tutoring is not a freestanding program but is tied directly to our HiSET instruction classes, which are aligned with and supported in part by the Lowell Adult Education Center, a program of Lowell Public Schools. This relationship ensures that the "tutoring curriculum and pre-service and in-service training content are high-quality and research-based, consistent with the instructional program of the local educational agency and with State academic content standards."

Members who tutor are supervised by our HiSET instructor, a licensed teacher and AmeriCorps alumnus with experience in tutoring, curriculum development, and classroom instruction. In addition to overall orientation and BEST youthworker certification (a 32-hour course in youthwork and positive youth development through Health Resources in Action), members who will tutor complete at least 8 hours of specialized, additional training with the HiSET instructor before tutoring youth. Members have weekly meetings about curriculum planning with HiSET instructor. UTEC is also able to access additional trainings through Lowell Adult Education Center as a result of this partnership. Like all UTEC programs, the HiSET program has specific measures for progress and outcomes, including attendance data, a daily classroom "productivity" score based on instructor observation, and scores on pre-tests, as well as actual HiSET component test scores and HiSET credential received.

### C. Performance Measure Clarification

1a. Please clearly describe how improvement is defined regarding workforce skills. The improvement identified as "1 workforce level" has not been explained in the narrative.

UTEC youth may progress through five levels of Workforce programming in our model: (1) Transformational Beginnings, (2) Crew, (3) Advanced Crew, (4) Skill, and (5) Advanced Skill, as summarized in the PM module.

All youth begin in Transformational Beginnings (TB). Movement to each next level has specific criteria:

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- 1) TB completion: 15 consecutive days of attendance and Workforce performance review score of 10.
- 2) Crew completion: Minimum of 10 weeks required, with performance review score of 20.
- 3) Advanced Crew completion: Minimum of 10 weeks required, with performance review score of 24.
- 4) Skill completion: Minimum of 8 weeks required, with performance review score of 30.
- 5) Advanced Skill completion: Minimum of 8 weeks required, with performance review score of 56.

\*UTEC tracks additional requirements for unexcused absences and tardiness that are not detailed here.

1b. Also please explain the nature of the instrument that measures workforce improvement.

The Workforce performance review tool measures both soft skill and hard skill progress and, like the Workforce levels, is tiered. Each skill area outlined below is scored on a numerical scale of 1-5, with the total being the summary "performance review score."

Transformational Beginnings performance review has five soft skill areas -- Positive Communication with Peers, Positive Communication with Staff, Open to Feedback, Stays on Task, Follows Directions.

Crew and Advanced Crew add 3 hard skill areas -- Quality of Work, Product Knowledge, Equipment Knowledge.

Skill and Advanced Skill reviews add four soft skill areas -- Takes Initiative, Assumes Leadership Roles, Role Models Effectively, and Community Involvement -- and three hard skill areas: Ability to Work Independently without Instruction, Ability to Assist in Administrative Management of the Business, and Demonstrates Problem Solving Skills.

1c. And lastly, specify how much gain in performance review score is sufficient to be counted in Outcome 19054.

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An increased performance review score of five (5) or more within the same level will be counted in the Outcome, or any increase in Workforce level as detailed above.

2. The performance measure selection rules require both ED1 and ED2. Please add ED1 to the GED performance measure.

As in the narrative, UTEC expects to serve 50 youth in the HiSET education program. An error in the PM module entry showed the 50 youth as the ED2 completing number, while ED1 was not included.

We have corrected the PM module data to reflect ED1: 50 youth enrolled in the education program and ED2: 22 youth completing the education program (with a minimum of 10 hours of preparation).

3. Please specify how much time is required in order to count as having completed the activity. Only individuals who meet this threshold may be counted in ED26.

The target for ED2 defined as youth who complete 10 hours of HiSET preparation. (Levels of need vary widely among UTEC youth, so some youth will require many more hours of instruction and tutoring before attaining their HiSET credential for measurement in ED26.)

4. Please detail the job readiness skills that will be attained and through which ongoing work activity relating to performance measure output O2.

Job readiness skills are defined through the performance review skill areas detailed above. Concrete examples of hard and soft skills include the following.

Workforce program soft skill expectations for all youth include:

- \* Wear their uniform professionally at all times (tucked in, clean, and not sagging);
- \* Arrive at UTEC on-time everyday unless the youth's supervisor has approved their absence or tardiness in advance;
- \* Be on-time following breaks and for additional required activities (HiSET classes and workshops);
- \* Get approval from the Program Manager or HiSET instructor for time-off, which involves youth

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submitting a form requesting time off at least 2 days beforehand; and

\* Exhibit professional behavior, including refraining from inappropriate language, yelling, arguing, horse playing, fighting, stealing, etc.

Performance review scores reflect both these expectations and crew-specific hard skills:

\* Mattress Recycling teaches youth basic work habits and safety skills. Youth also learn some tool skills and basic equipment operations for the baler and forklift.

\* Culinary: Café, Catering, and Retail Food Production teach youth the skills necessary for successful employment in a culinary position after UTEC graduation. Through the café enterprise, youth learn additional skills such as vendor relations, inventory management, financial management, and marketing while working in a real-world café environment.

\* Furniture Design teaches youth how to make unique furniture that is UTEC-inspired. Through this enterprise, youth develop basic drawing, modeling, and construction skills, as well as custom work using re-purposed materials.

### D. Strategic Engagement Slots

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

UTEC does not target a percentage of slots to members with disabilities but welcomes applicants of all abilities. We work with Student Disability Services at UMass Lowell and LifeLinks, Inc. (a nonprofit that serves individuals with developmental disabilities in the greater Lowell area) to ensure our candidate pool includes individuals with disabilities.

2. If you would like to request additional MSYs to be filled by AmeriCorps members with disabilities, please describe your intent as requested above.

UTEC does not request additional MSYs under this opportunity.

### E. Disaster Preparedness

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In the event of natural disaster or emergency situation, members may be called upon to assist with the response. If the response is required, the hours contributed by the members would count toward their service commitment.

### F. Budget Revisions for 3% Reduction

UTEC has modified the budget based on the 3% reduction request. Changes from the original request are reflected in the budget section and summarized here:

#### SECTION I. Program Operating Costs

C: Travel - Grantee share removed

E: Supplies - Grantee share removed in 2 lines: Office Supplies; Corps Project Supplies

I: Other Operating Costs - Grantee share removed for Recruitment Ads

#### Section II. Member Costs

Revised to reduce the CNCS request to \$137,266 and increase the Grantee share to \$121,934

#### Section III. Admin/Indirect Costs - adjusted to reflect new totals

Match - adjusted to reflect new grantee share/match

The requested Cost per MSY is now \$12,732.

### Continuation Changes

n/a

### Grant Characteristics