Executive Summary

Reading Partners proposes to have 35 AmeriCorps members who will manage the day-to-day operations and volunteer recruitment for our one-on-one literacy tutoring program for low-income students at 18 Title I rural and urban elementary schools in the Lowcountry region of South Carolina. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for measurably increasing the literacy skills of at least 700 high-need target students. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 800 volunteers that will be engaged in individualized reading tutoring for low-income students struggling to maintain proficient, grade-level skills.

This program will focus on the CNCS focus area of education. The CNCS investment of $442,225 will be matched with $839,495, $350,000 in public funding and $489,495 in private funding.

Rationale and Approach/Program Design

PROBLEM OR NEED

Nearly 74 percent of fourth-graders who scored below the 25th percentile on the National Assessment of Educational Progress data (NAEP), commonly known as the "Nation's Report Card", are from low-income families (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Put another way, our struggling readers are falling well behind in literacy skill development compared to their grade-level peers nationwide. This trend is particularly true for South Carolina where 83 percent of fourth graders from low-income families are reading below grade-level proficiency. During the 2014-15 school year, South Carolina changed the state assessment to ACT Aspire and the baseline scores for all subjects, including reading, are not encouraging. This assessment measures "proficiency" by rating students as "ready", "close", or "in need of support". An average of 86% of students in schools where Reading Partners serves scored below the "ready" benchmark. In general, the scores were aligned with the poverty index for the school, with a range of 67% to 96% of students falling into the "close" or "in need of support" category for reading. For students who have fallen behind in reading, early intervention is critical not only to their short-term success, but also their long-term academic and personal futures.

The elementary grades are the foundation for later academic success. Youth who struggle to master foundational literacy skills experience an increasing and cumulative academic disadvantage. Mastering key foundational literacy skills typically learned in kindergarten through second-grade is essential for success in school and future career opportunities. Research into literacy acquisition has found that children who do not master literacy skills during the early stages of their cognitive
development grow into increasingly less skilled readers than their peers, a phenomenon known as the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986). After mastering foundational reading skills, third and fourth graders then focus on mastering more complex reading skills, which are indicators of reading proficiency. Fourth grade also marks a crucial transition in a student’s academic career, where children begin to use reading to learn other subjects and so mastery of reading becomes a critical component of their ability to keep up academically. Thus, being below grade-level proficiency in fourth grade is the equivalent of being shut out of content learning in the classroom (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). Students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. For the readers who struggle the most, those who could not master even the basic skills by third grade, the rate is nearly six times greater (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012).

Reading Partners leverages the power of community volunteerism to provide one-on-one reading tutoring to low-income elementary students. We will help kindergarteners through second-graders achieve mastery of foundational reading skills appropriate for their respective grade levels. We will ensure our third- and fourth-grade students are on track to read at grade level or are achieving grade level appropriate standards by the end of their time with Reading Partners. Reading Partners works to ensure that students from low-income families can determine their own future thanks to proficient reading skills.

THEORY OF CHANGE AND LOGIC MODEL

Reading Partners is the only national nonprofit organization with a program model that is a complete package of in-school, one-on-one literacy instruction by volunteers who are trained and supported by AC members. Our theory of change is rooted in evidence-based practice: research demonstrates that volunteer tutors supported by AmeriCorps members are highly effective in measurably improving students’ reading skills (Tepper-Jacob, Armstrong, and Altuna-Willard, 2015). At each of our school sites, Reading Partners transforms a dedicated space into a reading center where volunteer coordinators (VCs) recruit volunteer tutors to serve 30-50 low-income students who are struggling with reading. At each school site, we station 1-3 AC members. A trained site coordinator (SC) and regional site coordinator (RSC) provide in person coaching to volunteers as well as develop tutor training sessions that give tutors best practices. SCs and RSCs have similar responsibilities, but the main difference is that SCs serve at one reading center or school throughout the year, while RSCs rotate between sites to provide additional assistance at large reading centers that have more students
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and volunteers. The newest position added last year is the Literacy Lead (LL), responsible for tutoring target students to reach proficiency.

Ultimately, our model’s success depends on the recruitment and training of community volunteers to provide individualized instruction in local elementary schools to students whose reading skills have fallen below grade level. The following factors set us apart: (1) We emphasize skill mastery and proficiency. Reading Partners has transitioned our student impact goals to reflect a more rigorous focus on skill mastery and achieving reading proficiency standards; (2) We focus on measurable results. We collect student achievement data four times per year, ensuring data-driven reading instruction; (3) We use data-driven instruction on concrete skills. Our curriculum teaches and practices the foundational skills such as alphabet knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonics, and comprehension that students need to be successful readers while being designed for implementation by community volunteers with no prior instructional experience; (4) We partner closely with schools for maximum student support. Because we have a dedicated AC member in the building every day, Reading Partners successfully integrates into the culture and daily routine of our school partners. We solicit principal, teacher, and volunteer feedback twice each year, equipping us with process feedback for quality assurance.

There are several key drivers for strong student outcomes and our AmeriCorps members are an integral component to the success of our logic model. First, we intentionally developed our one-on-one program model to target each student’s unique learning needs. SCs, RSCs, and LLs assess students four times each year using STAR Early Literacy and/or STAR Reading to monitor their progress toward mastery of foundational skills (K-2) or grade-level achievement goals (grades 3 and 4) and to help advise tutors on how to best support their students. Members receive training on how to administer these tools by Reading Partners staff during program orientation and throughout the year. Members not only recruit, train, and support the volunteer tutors, but also produce significant and unique contributions to student learning by developing Individualized Reading Plans (IRPs) for students. IRPs create a roadmap to achievement goals, a critical component of the curriculum.

Our AC members produce significant and unique contributions to the 4th grade reading proficiency problem by complementing in-school reading programs with additional pull-out reading tutors. Our AC members will have the opportunity to act as direct reading tutors, volunteer engagement supports, school liaisons, and evaluation supports. By engaging AmeriCorps members to serve as literacy leads (LLs) in our evidence-based model, we can more effectively reach the students and schools that are most in need of our services, which allows for true school, district, and statewide
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transformation. Reading Partners will use our established urban core model as a base to support expansion into rural communities. Each reading center requires us to raise 60% of funding from private philanthropy. Most rural communities will not have private resources available to support the cost of operating in the local school. We have been successful in extending partnerships and funding relationships from our urban base to support the expansion that we have done thus far into rural communities. Last school year, we established our first rural reading centers on Johns Island, SC in Charleston County and 2 schools in Lake City, SC in Florence County. Both regions have high poverty and low literacy rates and are in rural communities where access to school-based community services are severely limited. During the 2015-16 school year, Reading Partners expanded into 3 additional rural schools on Johns Island and opening its first reading center in Berkeley County at Cainhoy Elementary. Over the next 3 school years, with the support of this state grant, Reading Partners plans to expand into 4 additional rural schools in Berkeley County, where 8 schools are requesting the Reading Partners program.

In a model where we could rely on BOTH community volunteers as well as LLs to provide one-on-one tutoring to students, we would serve more schools where volunteer recruitment has been a challenge and expand to more disenfranchised and rural areas. This model allows us the time to gain traction in the local community with volunteers, while ensuring that students are still served. LLs will meet all CNCS tutoring qualifications. Lastly, no community volunteers will ever be displaced in this model; rather, this is a realization that the need is so significant, we must look to other sources for tutors if we wish to truly transform our communities.

Learning to read takes ample practice, and so we require all students to maintain at least 90% attendance to their regularly scheduled sessions, twice a week for 45 minutes each. When a student misses a session, the member will arrange for a make-up session within one week of the missed date. The student must complete a minimum dosage of 16 hours of tutoring in order for their gains to be reported in the ED5 performance outcome. Finally, we designed the Reading Partners curriculum to be skills-based and user-friendly. Our tutors use our evidence-based curriculum to teach and reinforce discrete alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, phonics, and comprehension skills so that students can master what they struggled to understand the first time. Every lesson is complete with a lesson plan, books calibrated to the lesson's content and level of difficulty, activities, and games. No matter a volunteer's prior experience with education or children, he or she can reinforce a student's skill mastery because our curriculum was specifically designed for use by volunteers. A core responsibility of our AmeriCorps members is to provide quality support to tutors and students
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whenever they encounter a question or problem.

We use multiple proposed outcomes to represent meaningful progress in addressing the significant community need of kindergarten through fourth grade literacy proficiency, helping students master the literacy skills they need for academic success in spite of the individual challenges they face.

Reading Partners’ overarching goal is to help low-income youth at a system-wide level reach proficiency by producing measurable improvement in students' reading skills. To impact change of this magnitude, we differentiate our approach to ensure all students are getting the intervention they need to ultimately be successful. We will help our younger students--those in kindergarten through second-grade--achieve mastery of foundational reading skills appropriate for their grade level. By significantly improving student learning rates for our third- and fourth-grade students--we will put our older students on track to, or reading at grade level by year-end.

Lastly, it should be noted that the 17 current AC slots serving in SC are under National Direct. The 17 National Direct slots serving in SC right now will not be enough to meet the increasing need in our SC communities. Funding through the state commission will help increase the impact Reading Partners SC can have in this state by implementing our rural strategy. As for the 17 ND slots, we will move them to other parts of the country to overall serve more students.

EVIDENCE BASED

Reading Partners meets the strong evidence category as we have demonstrated that our intervention has been tested nationally, regionally, or at the state-level using a well-designed and well implemented QED or RCT. We designed our program model based on research that attests to the success and cost-efficiency of engaging volunteers as tutors. A 2000 study published in the Journal of Educational Psychology found two sessions of one-on-one tutoring per week by a trained, supported, and supervised community volunteer can be an effective and affordable alternative to provide significant help to students at risk for reading failure (Elbaum, Vaughn, and Moody, 2000).

Over our more than 15 years of operation, our data support the power of trained volunteers in bolstering reading outcomes. A student’s rate of learning refers to the amount of new skill development he/she accomplishes for every month of learning in school. The average student learns at a rate of one month of skill development for every month of instruction (1:1); this is the minimum rate of learning needed to achieve and maintain grade-level literacy benchmarks. According to our baseline assessments of student learning rates prior to enrollment in Reading Partners, the average student typically enters our program acquiring just over half a month’s worth of skill development for
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every month of instruction in school. After joining Reading Partners, our students gain an average of 1.5 months of literacy skill for every month they were in the program, more than doubling their rate of literacy skill development.

To support our growth to national scale, Reading Partners transitioned from a research-validated program to an evidence-based model. MDRC, the nation’s leading education research group, conducted a rigorous randomized control trial of Reading Partners in 19 schools across CA, NY, and the District of Columbia, involving more than 1,200 second- through fifth-graders in the 2012-13 school year. The study, which tracked Reading Partners’ students’ skills compared to a control group, showed extremely promising results, including improved comprehension, reading fluency, and sight-word reading. The effect amounted to one-and-a-half to two additional months of added literacy improvement per student relative to the growth seen in the control group. This impact represents the value-add of Reading Partners, since 65 percent of the students in the control group also received some supplemental reading services. "This study provides some of the strongest evidence to date about the effectiveness of tutoring programs from young struggling readers," said Robin Tepper-Jacob, the principal investigator for the study. "It demonstrates that a well-designed program, staffed largely by volunteers, can make meaningful differences in the lives of students" (Tepper-Jacob, Armstrong, and Altuna-Willard, 2015).

The results show at the highest level of rigor that the Reading Partners program is having a measurable and significant impact on reading achievement across the country and in SC. The scale of this study demonstrates that our program is not only effective, but that it can produce consistent results across large numbers of schools and multiple states. During the time period of the study, Reading Partners successfully improved second- through fifth-grade students' reading comprehension, sight-word efficiency, and fluency by about 0.10 standard deviations. Additionally, the MDRC evaluation of Reading Partners has been accepted and highlighted by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), a federally supported, central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education to improve student outcomes.

Key findings include:
- Reading Partners has a positive and statistically significant impact on three core measures of student reading proficiency--reading comprehension, reading fluency, and sight-word reading.
- Reading Partners is replicated in schools with a high degree of fidelity. No matter in which school Reading Partners is delivered, high quality and well-trained program staff and volunteers consistently
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implement the program model.

- Reading Partners' program is effective for a wide variety of students—including those from different grades or baseline reading achievement levels, male or female students, and for those who are not native English speakers.

- Reading Partners may be particularly effective for our most vulnerable students, moving them out of the lowest-performing literacy quartile through mastery of foundational literacy concepts.

- Reading Partners is an affordable, high-value program for schools. By leveraging community-based and civic resources, we are able to provide a resource-rich program at less than half the cash cost of the total program value.

NOTICE PRIORITY

Reading Partners does not fall into a 2016 priority funding area this year, but is within the Education CNCS focus area by providing support, services, and resources that contribute to improved educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged children. Specifically, our performance measures will include Measures ED1, ED2, and ED5.

MEMBER TRAINING

The main objective of our training plan is to ensure that members thrive throughout their service experience. Member training begins with three weeks of pre-service orientation. Orientation educates members about the history of national service, the conditions of their service, prohibited activities, and signing service agreements. Members serving as SCs, RSCs, and LLs are trained on how to use our curriculum, coach tutors, and interact with school staff. Members serving as VCs receive training in public speaking and professional communication, building relationships with diverse community partners, and assisting volunteers through the life cycle of a tutor.

For the duration of the service term, all members receive weekly personalized coaching from their supervisor, as well as group training opportunities. Supervisors provide on-site support and rely on weekly check-ins to remind members of prohibited activities and to course-correct any aberrant behavior at its outset. We also incorporate poverty training in our program orientation for members. Local poverty experts come to talk to AmeriCorps members about how they can be sensitive to poverty, especially in the classroom. This training includes simulation exercises designed to help participants better understand the decisions low-income families make every day, and the fears and frustrations they feel.
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Volunteers with Reading Partners likewise go through a robust training phase with SCs before beginning tutoring with their student. Training for volunteers includes an online orientation and an in-person introduction to the program. All volunteers must undergo a background check and sign a Volunteer Code of Conduct that outlines allowable and unallowable activities as a tutor.

MEMBER SUPERVISION

Reading Partners integrates multiple levels of support for our AmeriCorps members. After orientation, members serving as SCs, RSCs, and LLs are placed at their service sites to learn about the community they will serve, set up their reading center, and meet with school staff with their supervisor. VCs work with their supervisor to begin connecting with returning volunteers, make introductions to existing community partners, and begin canvassing for new recruitment.

VCs are supervised by a community engagement manager (CEM), while SCs, RSCs, and LLs are supervised by program managers (PMs) and program associates (PAs). In addition to constant contact over email and phone, PMs and PAs visit each SC, RSC, and LL at their school site at least once a week to provide in-person guidance, coaching, and problem-solving support. A program director oversees the comprehensive program operations, including the management of the full program team. Community engagement staff and VCs work together at the regional office or at predetermined and approved locations such as a school site or off-site location.

All managers attend a comprehensive orientation and training in June/July given by the AmeriCorps (AC) Department that outlines all rules and regulations pertaining to CNCS, AC, and specific SC Commission requirements. The training topics include History to CNCS and National Service, Member Handbook and Service Agreement, Prohibited Activities, Timesheets, National Days of Service, Emergency Preparedness, and AC Branding & Identification.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE

The daily responsibilities of the members allow them to experience meaningful service. VCs cultivate in-depth relationships with community partners and witness the impact volunteers have by working with students. SCs, RSCs, and LLs see firsthand the impact of our one-on-one tutoring program as they assess students and report progress. Our formal year-long training schedule allows ongoing opportunities for reflection and exposure to the other national service networks. For example, all service days are required to have a reflection activity for participants. Members outline their hopes and goals in a "Letter to Self" activity at Orientation and then receive the letter at the end of the year.
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for a reflection activity during our Life After AmeriCorps training.

Members stay connected to the broader service network in multiple ways after graduation. Over 85% of members join our alumni network, which connects them with other AmeriCorps and national service participants. Members gain sought-after transferable skills including, project management, building relationships with diverse stakeholders, training and coaching, mechanics of public education, data management and analysis, and community engagement. In the 2014-15 EOY survey, graduating AC members reported the following: 35% return for a second year of service, 19% will be attending graduate school, 21% will be working in the non-profit sector, 16% will be teachers, 4% are joining another National Service program, and 5% are unsure.

We are committed to recruiting members from the communities we serve. This year, 14 out of our 17 members are from SC and over half are from the specific counties we serve. We recruit in our service areas specifically by making AmeriCorps recruitment materials available in sites, advertising open positions in those communities, and partnering with organizations like Teach for America to recruit individuals who are passionate about community service.

COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION

All AmeriCorps members are provided with and wear either an AmeriCorps-branded pin, t-shirt, polo, or jacket daily. To further enhance AmeriCorps branding, Reading Partners has an AmeriCorps Branding and Marketing policy and training given at Orientation, which requires members to always be identified as AmeriCorps members while serving. School staff and volunteers will know that AmeriCorps members are supporting them and their students through consistent talking points, prepared elevator speeches and visual branding. Every reading center displays a prominent "AmeriCorps Serving Here" sign, supported by well identified gear worn by the member. A tutor newsletter also goes out to tutors and school staff that frequently mentions the benefits and accomplishments of AmeriCorps members' service. Reading Partners also has the CNCS and AmeriCorps logos placed on the homepage of our website.

Organizational Capability

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING

Reading Partners is a single 501(c)3 non-profit organization and consists of six national departments. As a single 501(c)3, Reading Partners is able to limit overhead expenses in each service region by centralizing and sharing costs across the organization. Most senior-level managers supervise staff in different regions, providing broad oversight paired with clear avenues for up-and-down
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communication. By taking advantage of technology such as video-conferencing, we have also created regular opportunities for lateral communication between regions and staff positions (e.g., PMs/PAs in all regions participate in a biweekly video conference). Our organizational structure encourages a culture of shared responsibility for our AmeriCorps program because everyone interacts with members.

Reading Partners SC has recently enhanced our regional infrastructure and capacity to support annual program growth. The SC team is staffed with an executive director charged with developing regional growth plans, ensuring financial sustainability, and managing the program director, development director, and community engagement manager. The program director ensures that program managers (PMs) and program associate (PA) implement our program with fidelity, provide professional development to members, and build positive relationships with schools and district partners. The PMs and PA manage SCs, RSCs, and LLs. The community engagement manager manages the VCs and is responsible for the region's long-term partnerships strategy.

The direct administration of the AmeriCorps (AC) program falls under the purview of Reading Partners' AC department. This year, we are managing six AC state commission grants, one National Direct grant, and one national VISTA grant. The AC department enables us to coordinate efforts throughout the organization to train all managers and department leaders on AC and to familiarize them with compliance regulations. Kristarae Flores, Director of AmeriCorps Programs, has lead the department since its inception in 2010. She oversees national grant management regulations, member support structures, and AmeriCorps growth strategy. To assist with member support and SC Commission grant compliance monitoring, we employ an AC Program Manager. Nicole Vera will oversee the SC Commission grant and is an AC alumna. She has been managing the AmeriCorps grants since 2011.

The Reading Partners model is built around strong community engagement and we have created partnerships with key community leaders, organizations and companies to support the program. The Charleston Regional Board consists of 8 members and is responsible for working with the executive director and staff to connect our program to the community through partnership development, local fundraising, strategic growth planning, and brand awareness. As a community-driven program, partnerships with other organizations are crucial to recruiting the volume of volunteers we need to meet the demand for tutoring at our schools. Our partners include government departments such as the City of Charleston, City of North Charleston, North Charleston Police Department, Charleston County Government; education institutions including Porter Gaud, College of Charleston, Charleston
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Southern University, Charleston County School District; faith based organizations like Westminster Presbyterian Church, Grace Episcopal Church, United Methodist Church; civic organizations like the Kiwanis; and organizations and companies like Foster Grandparents program, Junior League, Boeing, BenefitFocus, and First Citizens.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Reading Partners holds itself accountable to compliance regulations on several different levels. To prevent and detect compliance issues in grants management, Reading Partners adheres to a Federal Grants Manual. The manual outlines policies and procedures for all major federal grant regulations and deadlines, including CNCS, AC, and the SC Commission. We ensure accurate billing to grants by training staff on their time allocations on different federal grants prior to the start of the program year. This is also an occasion to train staff on prohibited versus acceptable activities under AC. All staff then use ADP time and attendance system throughout the year to record and monitor their actual time spent on each grant. The accounting, development, and AmeriCorps departments also meet on a monthly basis to discuss each grant's fiscal progress, to plan for upcoming program or fiscal deadlines for any grant, and to announce and review updates of new CNCS regulations.

In regards to member management, Reading Partners holds itself accountable to instances of risk by conducting multiple internal audits each year of member files, hours, health benefits, and payroll. For instance, the AmeriCorps Program Director conducts a quarterly audit of member files for all AC grants to ensure that member files are complete and updated. The AmeriCorps Director and Program Manager meet on a quarterly basis to analyze and audit member hours and timesheets for accuracy, and to determine if members are on track to meet their 1,700 hour commitment. If members are behind hours, they may support VCs and participate in the activities outlined in the VC position description. Likewise, VCs may support "programmatic needs" only as outlined in the SC and RSC position description if they are in need of fulfilling additional hours. Members may also attend the Annual Spelling Bee fundraising event in their local region, but may only manage the info booth and mock reading centers as these activities inform attendees about the Reading Partners and AC program. The may not seek donations per CNCS regulations.

To hold members accountable to compliance regulations, Reading Partners relies on ample training and signed service agreements. We reiterate prohibited activities during timesheet training, and members submit bi-monthly timesheets that require manager review and approval. Finally, we remind members and supervisors of prohibited activities by a revolving section highlighting
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inadmissible activities in our monthly AC newsletter. If there is any uncertainty about an activity or Reading Partners' general compliance, the AC Program Manager will immediately seek advice and guidance from our AC Program Officer.

Reading Partners also educates our school and volunteer stakeholders about the importance of compliance with AC regulations. During the school selection and MOU-signing process, Reading Partners explicitly outlines to principals the expectations of having members serve in their building, as well as our expectations for immediate reporting of any suspected violations of acceptable member conduct. To confirm, our school partners are not subgrantees; we maintain full authority over member activities and conduct. Tutors receive similar explication of prohibited activities during their initial training, and when they sign our Tutor Code of Conduct, their signature indicates their understanding of allowable and prohibited activities.

In the event of a violation, Reading Partners has a Prohibited Activities Policy that outlines the action steps needed if a prohibited activity has occurred. The Director of AmeriCorps must be notified right away so that she may notify our SC Commission Program Officer. The policy also describes the consequences of violations, thus ensuring our team and sites understand the seriousness of these activities.

Activities outlined in all of the member position descriptions are activities that only members provide, not RP staff. Additionally, LLs are not displacing any volunteer tutors as volunteers will never be turned away from tutoring. LLs are also not duplicating volunteers. Unlike volunteers, LLs give assessments, create IRPs, and have other skill sets that are specific to this service position and require advanced training.

Budget/Cost Effectiveness

COST EFFECTIVENESS

Reading Partners' AmeriCorps SC total budget for this program is $1,281,720. Reading Partners is requesting a cost per MSY of $12,635. According to a cost model study of our program conducted by MDRC, Reading Partners is a high-value investment for schools. By leveraging community-based resources and volunteer time, we are able to act as a resource multiplier. Because we mobilize community volunteers, we are able to serve more students in any given school than traditional one-on-one literacy instruction interventions. One site coordinator is able to effectively and consistently provide support for dozens of volunteers, allowing 30-50 students to be served at each school. Additionally, the cost for schools to participate in Reading Partners' program is relatively low compared to other similar programs, with schools contributing only about 20 percent of the total cash
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cost. Consequently, Reading Partners is a financially viable option even in communities with limited resources for supplemental programs. For every dollar invested in Reading Partners, we more than double the resources available to students; our students receive the benefits of of $3,610 in services for only $1,700 in cash costs. We use this investment to provide statistically-significant outcomes for thousands of students across the country annually, an achievement that few other literacy programs can claim. We are continuing to scale to serve more students reading behind grade level and are shifting our focus to move beyond individual student impact to district-wide impact.

To manage and operate an AmeriCorps program beyond a SC Commission fixed amount grant, Reading Partners will raise additional revenue and match $839,495 through fee-for-service contributions from our school partners and from private philanthropy coming from foundation, corporate, and individual donors.

Reading Partners recognizes that a diversified revenue portfolio is critical to securing our current operational stability, as well as our long-term sustainability. In fiscal year 2016, we anticipate our national revenue to be CNCS (11%), earned income (16%), other government sources (4%), and private philanthropy (69%) to support our operations. Reading Partners' earned income takes the form of fee-for-service contributions from our school partners.

Reading Partners requires partner schools and districts to invest in our programming efforts through fee-for-service. Next year's projected fee-for-service revenue in SC is $350,000 and guarantees a diverse portfolio of private and public investors. Fee-for-service not only allows Reading Partners to better leverage philanthropic dollars to serve more schools but also encourages schools to be more invested in the success of the program at their schools. In the Charleston region, Reading Partners is the only service provider approved as a Tier 2 Literacy Intervention by the school districts we serve. Therefore, Reading Partners is a primary children's literacy provider for school-based collaborations, including: Charleston County School District’s Primary Grade Academies, Trident United Way's Links to Success Collaborative, Charleston Promise Neighborhood, and Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative.

Reading Partners also has the support of the following funders, in addition to numerous individual and corporate donors: The Duke Endowment, Coastal Community Foundation, Trident United Way, The Boeing Company, The Employees Community Fund of Boeing South Carolina, Lake City Partnership Council, Charleston Promise Neighborhood, The Kohlheim Family Foundation, Star Family Foundation, and TD Bank.
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BUDGET ADEQUACY

Reading Partners SC budgeted for the following allowable, reasonable, and allocable expenses: 1: Personnel Salary and Benefits ($348,117); 2: Staff Travel to required SC Commission and Reading Partners events and trainings ($1800) with (Member Travel to required staff meetings and trainings paid for outside of AC grant); 3: Supplies - Member Gear ($1400); 5: Staff Training and Professional Development ($500); 6: Member Training and Professional Development ($600); 7. Fingerprinting Costs for all staff, members, and volunteers ($740); 8: Member living allowance, FICA, Worker’s Compensation, and Health, Vision and Dental coverage ($764,297); 11. CNCS and Indirect Costs per SC Commission NOFO guidance ($164,266). Together, these expenses total to $1,281,720.

Reading Partners is a cost-effective model for improving elementary literacy, and our most significant expense is personnel. In 2016-17, 86 percent of the SC budget will go toward personnel. Reading Partners elects to invest so heavily in personnel because our success in increasing student achievement depends upon our consistently providing thoughtful, data-driven, and individualized coaching support to AmeriCorps members and tutors alike. We limit our program managers to a maximum of six schools to supervise. Similarly, our program requires a low member-to-tutor ratio to ensure that tutors feel confident using the curriculum materials, can manage challenging student behavior when it arises, and are coached in supplemental strategies specific to their student. Finally, other general administrative costs such as accounting, human resources, and IT are shared by the organization as a whole, with each region covering a proportional fraction of the expenses. This arrangement enables us to keep operating expenses low in each region. While personnel may be our most major cost, the present and future benefit that we accord to low-income children merits the expense.

Given our past experience with designing AmeriCorps program budgets, we are confident that our budget is fully compliant and adequate to support our program design and objectives. With so many stakeholders - schools, volunteers, and various private and nonprofit institutions - involved in funding our program, we are confident in our ability to compensate for any unexpected fluctuations in funding. We have been able to fully fund our SC program since receiving our first National Direct grant in SC in 2013. Donors and sources of match listed in the Cost Effectiveness section have us on track to supporting the 2016-17 program.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

N/A
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Amendment Justification

N/A

Clarification Summary

CLARIFICATIONS FOR YEAR ONE -

A. General clarification items: Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled Clarification Summary unless otherwise indicated.

1. If the application is being considered for an amount different than the original request (funding, MSY, and/or slots), please revise the Executive Summary, budget, and performance measures as necessary to reflect the amount for which the application is under consideration.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners will be maintain its request for a grant in the amount of $442,225.00, 35 Member Service Years (MSYs), 35 slots, at $12,635 cost per MSY.

B. Programmatic clarification items: Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled Clarification Summary unless otherwise indicated.

1. Applicants must ensure that AmeriCorps members and volunteer tutors possess a high school diploma or its equivalent, or a higher degree and successful completion of pre-and inservice specialized training. 45 CFR § 2522.94 outlines the requirements for qualifications to serve as a tutor. Please precisely detail the program’s plan to meet these requirements and ensure the selection of qualified tutors.

RESPONSE: Volunteers and AmeriCorps members will meet the basic CNCS tutoring qualification of having a high school diploma or its equivalent, or a higher degree and successful completion of pre- and in-service specialized training. Additionally, we will meet the basic CNCS tutoring qualification of outlining appropriate criteria for selecting and qualifying tutors, training tutors to use the research-based tutoring curriculum and pre-service and in-service training content are high-quality and research-based, and provide volunteer tutors with appropriate support and coaching.
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2. On page 12 of the application, Foster Grandparents are identified as a partner. Please describe how the program will ensure that individuals affiliated with this organization are not double counted as program tutors.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners partners with the Foster Grandparents program and keeps track of attendance of our tutors, so we are able to ensure that FGP attendance is tracked separately. Reading Partners has an average of 6-9 Foster Grandparents per year. Public transportation is an issue in Charleston for many of our Foster Grandparents so they are unable to volunteer at many of our sites given their proximity to bus stops (or lack thereof). In areas, where it is convenient we maximize our Foster Grandparents partnership and track their participation easily.

3. Funding is extremely competitive and limited this year. Having a low Cost Per Member Service year (MSY) is a competitive advantage. Applicants submitting with a low cost per MSY will receive higher priority for funding. Please consider decreasing the applications proposed cost per MSY by revising the CNCS share of the program budget, or provide a compelling explanation for why the cost/MSY cannot be decreased. CNCS will review both the individual program cost per MSY and the aggregate cost per MSY after the clarification period and may elect to make further decreases in cost per MSY and/or may be only able to partially fund applicants.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners took this into consideration and has lowered our MSY from the previous grant cycle.

C. Budget clarification items: Please respond in the 'Budget Narrative' section of the application unless otherwise indicated.

1. As of 3/29/16, subgrantee is delinquent on its cost share payment. The cost share must be paid or justification provided to your CNCS Grants Officer, or no awards will be processed.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners is currently resolving this issue - payment will be made immediately.

2. As of 3/29/16, grant number (11VSPCA016) has a past due collection action with CNCS. The collection must be paid or justification provided to your CNCS grants officer, or no awards will be
RESPONSE: Reading Partners is currently resolving this issue - payment will be made immediately.

D. Performance Measure clarification items: Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants unless otherwise indicated:

1. ED1, ED2, ED5: In the Described Instrument section of the measure, please describe how the individuals counted under this measure meet the definition of "economically disadvantaged" as specified in the National Performance Measure Instructions for this particular measure.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners ensures that the largest percentage of students at our partner schools come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds as defined by CNCS as Eligible for free (at or below 130% of poverty) or reduced (between 130% to 185% of poverty) lunch; may or may not actually be accessing free/reduced lunch. Our selected school partners typically have a 70% - 90% positive eligibility rate.

Where allowed by partner schools and districts, Reading Partners collects information about individual student eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch at their schools. During the 2014-15 school year, 95% of students served by Reading Partners for whom eligibility data were available were eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch.

2. ED1, ED2, ED5: In the Described Instruments section of the measure, please describe how the program will ensure that individuals are not double-counted under this measure.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners uses an attendance log that is transferred into our Salesforce database. The number of sessions that each enrolled student attends is also entered into Salesforce under that students record. Because each unique record contains information for that one student, duplication is not possible. This is one of the key responsibilities of the Site and Regional Site Coordinators.

3. Outcome ED5 describes measurement of improvement of students in grades 3 and 4. Please provide what measurement constitutes improvement for K-2 students and is aligned with the output; clearly
Narratives

identifying what is counted and reflects a change in knowledge, attitude, behavior, or condition; with the same unit of measure as the output; counting individual level gains, not average gains for the population served; measuring meaningful/significant changes that are aligned with the Theory of Change; and can be measured during a single grant year.

RESPONSE: K-2 students need to master the foundational literacy skills allowing them to develop into skilled readers. STAR Early Literacy measures K-2 student growth in literacy skill subdomains including alphabetic principle, concept of word, phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary. While in Reading Partners we expect that our students will achieve mastery of grade-appropriate literacy skills:

Kindergarten: Concept of Word and Visual Discrimination.
1st Grade: Concept of Word, Visual Discrimination, and Alphabetic Principle.
2nd Grade: Concept of Word, Visual Discrimination, Alphabetic Principle, Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, and vocabulary.

The mastery of each of these skills is measured through the STAR EL assessment tool outlined in the instrument description text box.

Reading Partners outcome statement is: 60% high-need target students receiving at least 16 hours of tutoring will achieve grade appropriate literacy growth in the following two categories: K-2nd graders will achieve appropriate skill set mastery and 3rd-4th graders will gain at least 1 month of skills for every month enrolled in the program.

4. It is unclear that the initial assessment will take place before the start of the intervention. In the Described Instrument section of the measure, please describe the timing of the pre- and post-assessments and ensure that the timeline meets any applicable requirements specified in the National Performance Measure Instructions. Please also ensure that the same instrument is used for both the pre- and post-assessments, and that the pre-assessment data can be matched with the post-assessment data for each individual assessed.

RESPONSE: Additional language has been added to ED 5 to provide further clarification.
Prior to entry into the program, each student receives an assessment to determine appropriate placement within our tiered curriculum. This data is also recorded in Salesforce. We continue to monitor progress throughout the year and adjust tutoring sessions based on each student's progress.

Reading Partners conducts 1 mid-year assessment of all students to monitor their growth and course-correct the individualized reading plan as necessary. Tutoring continues throughout the spring and then concludes in late May to early June with end-of-year reading assessments for students and final program surveys for tutors, teachers, and staff.

STAR Early Literacy (for K-2) and STAR Reading (for grades 3 and up). Students take these tests on a computer, and the online testing system adapts the item difficulty to the students' independent level, drawing from thousands of items in its test bank to give detailed and robust information about student reading ability. STAR Early Literacy and STAR Reading have been widely used in districts in states across the country for the last decade, including MD, CO, TX, DC, NY, and CA in order to monitor student progress and to modify instruction. This assessment aligns with Common Core State Standards and thus accurately measures students' reading proficiency. Frequency: 1x in beginning (pre-assessment), 1x MOY, 1x EOY

5. ED1, ED2, ED5: Please provide a justification for the size of the target set for this output/outcome, explaining clearly how the target is ambitious but realistic for the proposed intervention and appropriately reflects the amount of MSY dedicated to the intervention.

RESPONSE: ED 1 (700) students - this number is based on the number of schools that is in the Reading Partners portfolio multiplied the average amount of students we enroll per school.

ED 2 - is established by taking 70% of ED 1. Reading Partners has identified a trend that 70% of students enrolled in the program receive at least 16 hours of tutoring (minimum dosage). (490 students)

ED 5- With a more rigorous assessment tool in place this year, Reading Partners is expecting to see at least 60% of our K-4 students meet the student outcomes described in the instrument description box.
Narratives

in ED5. (294 students)

60% (294) high-need target students receiving at least 16 hours of tutoring will achieve grade appropriate literacy growth in the following two categories: K-2nd graders will achieve appropriate skill set mastery and 3rd-4th graders will gain at least 1 month of skills for every month enrolled in the program.

E. Evaluation clarification items: Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled 'Clarification Summary' unless otherwise indicated.

None

F. MSY with No Program Funds Attached clarification items: Please respond in the eGrants narrative field labeled 'Clarification Summary' unless otherwise indicated.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners will not be requesting any MSY with No Program Funds Attached

CLARIFICATIONS FOR ROUND TWO -

Please make the following changes directly in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants. If the Described Instrument section reaches a text box limit, the applicant may place additional information in the Described Intervention section.

We are unable to update the Performance Measures due to character limitations. Responses to clarification items have been sent directly to PO also.

1. The following clarification item was addressed in the clarification section, but not in the Performance Measures screens as requested. Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants. Outcome ED5: In the Described Instrument section of the measure, please describe how the individuals counted under this measure meet the definition of "economically disadvantaged" as specified in the National Performance Measure Instructions for this particular measure.
Narratives

RESPONSE: Reading Partners ensures that the largest percentage of students at our partner schools come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds as defined by CNCS as “Eligible for free (at or below 130% of poverty) or reduced (between 130% to 185% of poverty) lunch; may or may not actually be accessing free/reduced lunch.” Our selected school partners typically have a 70% - 90% positive eligibility rate.

2. The following clarification item was addressed in the clarification section, but not in the Performance Measures screens as requested. Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants. Outputs ED1; ED2: In the Described Instruments section of the measure, please describe how the program will ensure that individuals are not double-counted under this measure.

RESPONSE: Reading Partners uses an attendance log that is transferred into our Salesforce database. The number of sessions that each enrolled student attends is also entered into Salesforce under that student’s record. Because each unique record contains information for that one student, duplication is not possible. This is one of the key responsibilities of the Site and Regional Site Coordinators.

3. ED5: ED5 necessitates use of a pre- and post-test. Please update ED5 to clarify that only the results of the pre- and post-test will be used to determine improvement for purposes of the performance measure, not the mid-year test. Please also clearly the indicate at what point in the school year the pre-test will be distributed.

Reading Partners confirms that student performance will be reported based upon literacy assessment data collected at enrollment and at the end of the school year, not based on mid-year data. Students are enrolled into Reading Partners’ program on a rolling basis throughout the school year. Each student is assessed at program entry and this assessment serves as the student’s pre-test.

5. The following clarification item was addressed in the clarification section, but not in the Performance Measures screens as requested. Please make the following changes in the Performance Measures screens in eGrants. ED1, ED2, ED5: Please provide a justification for the size of the target
Narratives

set for this output/outcome, explaining clearly how the target is ambitious but realistic for the proposed intervention and appropriately reflects the amount of MSY dedicated to the intervention.

RESPONSE: ED 1 (700 students) - this number is based on the number of schools that is in the Reading Partners portfolio * the average amount of students we enroll per school.

ED 2 - is established by taking 70% of ED 1. Reading Partners has identified a trend that 70% of students enrolled in the program receive at least 16 hours of tutoring (minimum dosage). (490 students)

ED 5- With a more rigorous assessment tool in place this year, Reading Partners is expecting to see at least 60% of our K-4 students meet the student outcomes described in the instrument description box in ED5. (294 students)

60% (336) high-need target students receiving at least 16 hours of tutoring will achieve grade appropriate literacy growth in the following two categories: K-2nd graders will achieve appropriate skill set mastery and 3rd-4th graders will gain at least 1 month of skills for every month enrolled in the program.

These numbers reflect the amount of MSY that are able to recruit and engage volunteers to perform the interventions.

Continuation Changes

N/A

Grant Characteristics