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Executive Summary

In GRADuation Pathways with Project GRAD Houston, 20.59 AmeriCorps members will leverage an additional 185 volunteers to provide face-to-face college access and college success guidance and support to students attending 5 high schools and 12 postsecondary institutions in Houston and in 6 other cities in Texas. These communities of origin in Houston, TX are 97% minority and more than 90% low-income. The project will focus on Education--increase enrollment in postsecondary education and improve attainment of postsecondary degrees. At the end of the three year project, 8,100 high school students will have received college access guidance; 1,770 students will enroll in college (an increase of 450); 2,155 college students will have received college success guidance; and 570 new two and four year college graduates and workforce certificate earners (an increase of 120) will be prepared to contribute to the Texas economy and benefit their families and communities. The CNCS investment of \$771,549 will be matched with approximately \$770,478 over the grant period.

Rationale and Approach

GRADuation Pathways

Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams) Houston, or GRAD, supports a quality public education for students in economically disadvantaged communities through intensive college access and success programs promoting student and community engagement. With over 2,070 current and former scholars in college and a history of having sent more than 6,000 low-income, mostly first-generation students to college in the last two decades, GRAD is uniquely positioned to expand its community service impact with AmeriCorps member involvement. Informed by research and deep knowledge of college access and success practices and engaged with an extensive network of community partners, GRADuation Pathways and AmeriCorps will be able to significantly increase the numbers of students prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and to give back to their communities.

NEED. Today, GRAD serves five high schools in the Houston Independent School District: Jefferson Davis, Jack Yates, Phillis Wheatley, John Reagan, and Sam Houston. These high schools were chosen over the past 2 decades both because of highly needy populations and because their campus leadership was eager to embrace an effective scholarship and college access program. Although campus leadership has changed many times in the subsequent years, students continue to face daunting challenges that require community support. Reaching out to 6,000 students with college access support in high school and approximately 1,200 students with active scholarships, limited

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GRAD staff are challenged to address community needs. GRAD serves a 90% low-income and 97% African-American or Hispanic population -- a population which is growing in Texas. Between the 2000 and the 2010 U.S. Census, the under 18 population in Houston grew by 52% among Hispanics and 15% among African-Americans. Such trends are anticipated to continue. In Texas, however, a study tracking the college completion of three cohorts of 8th graders demonstrates that from this 8th grade population, only 11.4% of African-Americans and 11.6% of Hispanics received any kind of postsecondary degree (including a workforce certificate or associate's degree) six years after their expected high school graduation dates ("A New Measure of Educational Success in Texas: Tracking the Success of 8th Graders into and through College," NCHEMS, 2012).

BARRIER 1: lack of knowledge of financial assistance. Students in the communities surrounding the GRAD schools mostly come from low-income families, and many never completed high school, let alone experienced time on a college campus. The 2010 Census data reveal that 20.5 percent of adults in these communities have less than a ninth grade education (compared to 6% nationally); an additional 16% attended high school but failed to graduate. Without either sufficient financial resources (90% of families qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program) or personal experience completing college applications and applying for financial aid, many parents feel ill-equipped to support their children in entering college.

BARRIER 2: postsecondary enrollment. Because only 35% of adults aged 25 and older in these communities have ever enrolled in any postsecondary program (2010 Census), students are growing up in homes without a college-going tradition and without parents who know how to negotiate through the maze of applications and financial aid. This places a further burden on GRAD schools to prepare students not only for academic success in college, but also to successfully navigate the college admissions process. Despite significant increases due to GRAD programs, of the 4,022 students who successfully qualified for the GRAD scholarship in the past 6 years, only 66% enrolled directly in Texas higher education the following school year. Those 1,362 students represent missed opportunities and contribute to needier communities.

BARRIER 3: postsecondary persistence. College success is not a family experience for students in the GRAD communities: only 17.5% of adults have earned an Associate's degree or higher (2010 Census). The majority of GRAD students who enroll in college struggle upon their arrival, leading to low persistence rates. Further, the colleges attracting the most GRAD high school graduates are also some of the state's worst performers in terms of retention and completion rates. According to the 2012 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac, 6-year graduation rates at the most frequented

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institutions reflect a need for additional student support: University of Houston Downtown: 21.5%; Texas Southern University: 14.1%; Houston Community College 28% (for 2 year program); Lamar University: 35%.

AMERICORPS MEMBERS SOLVE COMMUNITY PROBLEMS identified by GRAD staff during a logic model exercise investigating performance gaps and leading to the design of this GRADuation Pathways initiative. Members will be engaged in two strands of service activities identified with each of the two performance goals: increasing college enrollment (ACCESS) and increasing college graduation (SUCCESS). Member activities are measurable, aligned with the community need, impact and research based, meaningful and allowable.

COLLEGE ACCESS activities will be supported by 9 FT Members with one year service terms beginning August 15. There are two components. 1: Members will provide direct college guidance for high school students as part of campus teams which currently include one experienced GRAD staff member, one campus college access coordinator, and on 4 of the 5 campuses, one AdviseTX College Advising Corps member (AdviseTX placement in schools varies year to year and is unknown for future years). Activities include financial aid workshops for students and parents; application, essay, and FAFSA/TASFA assistance; college investigations to promote good matching; career investigations; scholarship applications and essays; college fairs; promoting good GPAs, SAT/ACT, and community service projects. With each GRAD staff attempting to serve 800-2000 students, AmeriCorps Members will ensure increases in the numbers of students who are prepared to enroll in postsecondary education.

2: In addition, these Members will provide direct service to students during summer College Institutes which are university-based experiences that prepare and motivate students to go to college. One to two weeks in length and offered at no cost to the student, College Institutes allow students to see themselves as college students while exploring an array of program themes including advanced mathematics, biology, business, financial literacy, liberal arts, STEM, and the maritime industry. Daily transportation and a student stipend are provided. With approximately 1,200 students participating each summer, having additional staff to ensure student safety, to provide program supervision and promote class management, and to conduct individual college awareness and planning conversations with students dramatically increases the effectiveness of the College Institute experience.

COLLEGE SUCCESS activities consist of three mentoring programs, all currently in operation and yielding significant results, but limited in reach due to lack of staff. Having AmeriCorps service

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members working with GRAD will provide ongoing service for many of the 2000+ students enrolled in colleges (compared to current guidance for 450 students annually). The local college members begin their year of service on August 15, with non-local half and quarter time members serving from August 15-June 15. Service beginning in June takes place within the College Institute program described above. Prior to June, service takes place in member-assigned colleges and universities utilizing these three SUCCESS programs:

1. PG at the U benefits new and continuing GRAD Scholars attending selected local colleges and universities by providing face-to-face guidance. Space is provided by the University of Houston (UH), Texas Southern University (TSU), the University of Houston Downtown (UHD), and Houston Community College (HCC) locations. Currently GRAD's College Success Manager provides service to students in each college only two days each month. She will train and supervise AmeriCorps Members as they provide supportive guidance, establishing regular check-in procedures, connecting students to support services available at each university, and assisting students with balancing the demands of work, college, family, and life challenges. AmeriCorps service Members will be able to provide 4 days per week to each college. PG at the U will expand to include two additional local community colleges and two universities out of town. Member type, format (working on teams or individually at scattered sites), and allocations based on current enrollments are: a) UHD--2 full-time Members serving 286 students; b) HCC--2 full-time Members serving 245 students; c) UH Central--2 full-time Members serving 148 students; d) TSU--1 full-time Member serving 93 students; e) Lone Star and San Jacinto Colleges--1 half-time member serving 64 students.
2. The i-MENTOR for College Success program provides virtual mentoring, matching freshmen GRAD Scholars with volunteer mentors from the business community. Through twice monthly contact, mentors and Scholars exchange thoughts and ideas to support a successful first year in college. Currently GRAD supports 41 mentor matches with students who are mostly attending out-of-town universities. However, there are 54 out-of-town freshmen who receive no direct, ongoing guidance. Member type and allocations based on current enrollments are as follows: a) 1 full-time Member will target the 50+ new freshmen attending out-of-town sites not served by other programs; b) 1 full-time Member will support former scholars who graduated from high school more than 6 years ago, but who have been in school recently.
3. The GRAD Ambassador program identifies successful, junior or senior GRAD Scholars to be College Peer Advisors to entering freshmen at out-of-town universities. Currently Advisors meet once a month with the incoming freshmen and struggling upper classmen to provide a community of

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support and connect students to campus resources. Mr. Fonseca also supports the Ambassador programs currently in operation at the five universities below. Placing Members at these campuses will provide consistent, ongoing support at these out-of-town campuses: a) 4 quarter--time members serving 160 students at UT Austin, Texas A&M, Sam Houston State and Stephen F. Austin Universities; b) 1 half-time Member serving 52 students at Prairie View A&M; c) 1 half-time Member serving 30 students at Lamar University.

EVIDENCE-BASED AND EVIDENCE-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS will result in MEASURABLE COMMUNITY IMPACT because AmeriCorps Members and volunteers will be engaged in the same GRAD activities shown to result in significant increases in college enrollment, persistence and graduation over the past 20 years. GRAD is recognized by the Social Impact Exchange's S&I 100, an index of top non-profits creating social impact, as having effective, high impact interventions serving large numbers of students with demonstrated impact studies. Increasing personnel providing these proven services will result in even more students realizing the benefits of postsecondary education. The GRAD theory of change is that persistent messages of college access and success and targeted pre-college and during-college experiences will result in more underserved, low-income, primarily first generation students entering in and succeeding in college--current bleak statistics reflect the lack of consistent, persistent effort, not the ability of the students or the desires of their parents.

For example, Davis High School where GRAD began, now leads the entire district in having the lowest drop-out rate of all comprehensive high schools, graduation rates have doubled, and college enrollments have increased 425%. Overall at its five partnering schools, GRAD initiatives have helped increase high school graduation rates by 70%, tripled college enrollment, sent 6,003 students to college with scholarships and verified 1,613 college graduates to date.

Program integrity and quality of service will be maintained and enhanced through systematic training and coaching and through thoughtful member placement. College access Members will be paired with GRAD staff at each partnering high school, and college success Members and volunteers will be guided directly by college success staff who have been leading those program initiatives. The AmeriCorps investment is expected to yield a 34% or 450 student increase in college enrollment and a 25% or 120 student increase in timely college graduations over three years. This added value contributes to changing the trajectories of the low income communities through career advancement, which improves the health and economic outlook of the participating students and their current and future families.

One research based initiative in which 23 Members will be engaged during the summer is GRAD

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College Institutes. These university-based, academic focused programs allow high school students to "see themselves as college students" while exploring careers and associated academic pathways. A 2011 study found that for students with high school GPAs between 2.0 and 3.5, attending even one College Institute increased the likelihood of future college enrollment by the same percentage as increasing their high school GPA by 1.5 points. Attending two institutes places a student with a 2.0 GPA on the same college enrollment trajectory as at student with a 4.0 GPA. Members will provide college access guidance and support with applications, financial aid and college transition, and career connections. AmeriCorps Members will nearly triple the staff providing this guidance and supporting College Institutes, leading to the expectation that an additional 450 students will enroll in college over the grant period.

Another research based initiative in which 16 Members will be engaged is the college success programming. When matched with a control group of non-participants, freshmen GRAD Scholars who participated in one of the three success initiatives increased persistence to their sophomore year by 30% overall. However, limited GRAD staff are only able to provide direct, if sporadic support to approximately 40% of college students. Member and volunteer service will ensure that nearly all GRAD scholars will receive valuable college success guidance, leading to an expected 25% increase in postsecondary certification and degrees.

Increased college enrollments, semester to semester college persistence, and postsecondary success will be measured utilizing data from the National Student Clearinghouse enhanced with FERPA releases that allow access to student-level data. Program targets were reached by comparing current baseline program results and current staffing levels to estimates of increased productivity due to AmeriCorps member and volunteer service.

MEMBER RECRUITMENT is a process requiring continual investment in building relationships, frequent presentations, creative networking, and involvement of current members. GRAD will create job descriptions that reference these characteristics: desire to serve the communities identified, showing initiative, professionalism, emergent leadership skills, relationship-building communication skills, time management skills, and ability to respond to constructive coaching. All corps members must meet basic eligibility requirements (age, work status) and must agree to and pass the required criminal history check. In addition, College Access members must have an Associates or Bachelor's degree, and College Success members must have either a degree or at least a 3.0 GPA and have completed at least two years of college. Recruitment will take place immediately upon notification of grant award by designating the program as an AmeriCorps program and posting the AmeriCorps

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member positions including minimum qualifications and benefits, specific job descriptions, length of service requirements, Segal AmeriCorps Education Award information. These strategies will be used: 1) email blast to current GRAD scholars and to known recent 2 and 4 year graduates; 2) work with GRAD Student Alumni president and board members to notify their networks; 3) work within the GRAD community advisory program which has connections with health and human service providers in the target communities; 4) notify network of community organizations that support GRAD such as Houston A+Challenge and Parents for Public Schools; 5) conversations with and postings at community college and university career offices and websites at each of the targeted universities in 9 cities in Texas; 6) posting on college access members' websites, such as NCAN and TACAC; 7) email blast to Houston Area Recruiters' Network; 8) press-release of GRAD's AmeriCorps Initiative; 9) staff an information table at career fairs; 10) take the opportunity to speak at community events about the AmeriCorps program and the need for dedicated members; and 11) posting on CNCS's on-line recruiting system. A diverse member corps is virtually assured due to preference in recruiting and hiring given to current and former students in the GRAD scholar network who grew up in these same predominantly low-income, minority communities and are visual proof that Graduation Really Achieves Dreams. GRAD has a 20 year history of creating an inclusive environment by reaching out to its scholars for volunteer and part-time work as well as positions on staff. Currently, $\frac{3}{4}$ of GRAD staff are African American or Hispanic and many are the first in their families to graduate from college. GRADuation Pathways will make accommodation for members with disabilities and will hire without regard to the need to provide accommodation.

MEMBER TRAINING will be provided by the Project Director and the Director of College Access with an orientation to AmeriCorps, national service, member agreement/benefits/expectations and will expand to include GRAD's history/mission/ goals/theories of change as well as an orientation to the service community characteristics. Site visits at local sites will follow guided by program supervisors (the College Success Manager for the universities and the Director of College Access for the high schools) and will include staff and networking introductions, campus logistics, policies and procedures, plus work space and communication accommodations. Out-of-town site training and support will be provided by Mr. Fonseca (their supervisor) as soon as possible in late August and early September and will include the same orientation components. Community disaster training will be provided by the American Red Cross Greater Houston Chapter and will include such topics as "Community Disaster Education Classes," "Hurricane Recovery," "Disaster Action Team Workshop," and "Bulk Distributions Operations."

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Initial and follow-up member training sessions which build both high school and college serving member skills include: guidelines for acceptable and prohibited activities; program design and deliverables; college access and success guidance practices and procedures; effective mentoring and coaching methods; nonacademic skills that promote success (time management, advocacy, problem solving, etc.); shadowing practicing GRAD coaches; documenting service hours and activities; methods for locating campus resources and support systems; and methods for becoming more engaged on campus. Training will be followed by demonstrations, coaching and opportunities to share challenges and strategies with other team members and supervisors. The training timeline is expected to include 5 days of intensive all-day preparation prior to transitioning to half-time at sites for another week. Full-time members will spend at least 3 hours every two weeks in follow-up trainings, debriefing with supervisors or sharing with the team. Out-of-town members will come to GRAD offices for training at least three times and supervisors will visit non-local sites at least three times during the year. In addition, every two weeks, GRAD will utilize the "Go To Meeting, Training Format" program to include members at the 6 out-of-town locations to maintain esprit de corps and provide program information. Supervisors will be able to monitor all individual member activities and ensure that members are performing well and not engaging in prohibited activities through bi-weekly submission of Activity Logs, site observations, and the GRAD online time and effort documentation system which is completed daily by members and GRAD grant personnel.

MEMBER SUPERVISION and program monitoring is interwoven within the training/service plan described above. To ensure that GRAD staff are fully informed about unique AmeriCorps expectations and prepared for challenges, the Project Director, Evaluator, 3 Supervisors and CFO will attend the 2-day OneStar new program training in April prior to the grant award. With ongoing support from the two OneStar program officers assigned to GRAD, key GRAD staff will be prepared to work on job descriptions, calendaring of job duties, and member training together. The Project Director will ensure ongoing connection for GRAD staff with OneStar and CNCS through monthly grant management meetings and will include rotating staff attendance at CNCS and commission trainings. The Project Director, Supervisors, and Members will utilize a grant Compliance and Accountability checklist (described in the following Organizational Capacity section) to ensure that multiple eyes and several layers of the GRAD organization and the Members themselves are focused on service deliverables, accountability, and community impact. The Project Director and supervisors will establish written disciplinary policies which will be included in member agreements and explained in orientation training. All members will have written mid-term and end of service evaluations designed to foster

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member development, building their skills and providing additional benefit from their year of service. Training, debriefing, coaching, team networking and support, and activity documentation through the GRAD online time and effort documentation system provide ongoing, seamless opportunities for supervisors to both monitor and support member service. The Director of College Access will supervise 9 College Access Members at the 5 high schools during Fall and Spring semesters and will supervise all Members providing service during the summer College Institutes. With 14 years of college access experience, he currently supervises GRAD staff providing high school college access activities and is uniquely suited to train, coach and support quality program implementation. College Success Members will be supervised by the College Success Manager and the College Success Coordinator who have a combined 31 years of experience serving higher education success.

MEMBER EXPERIENCES are designed to impact AmeriCorps members as much as the students and communities they serve and will launch corps members into a lifetime of service. Specific experiences which ensure powerful community impact, lifelong civic participation, and connection with other national service participants include: training and support in providing evidence-based practices which have proven to increase the numbers of college enrollees and graduates in the target communities; opportunities to connect with multiple community service organizations which currently collaborate with GRAD; opportunities to build the volunteer and alumni sectors of GRAD and to become personally acquainted with their powerful stories of success; collaboration for training and service learning days (such as National Youth Service Day and MLK Day) with the AmeriCorps members at Harris County Department of Education; participation in the AmeriCorps Texas Leadership Council as well as swearing in and graduation ceremonies and joining AmeriCorps alumni groups.

GRAD Members will wear service gear, describe their positions, and utilize business cards identifying themselves as AmeriCorps and GRAD so that students, university staff, partners and all community members attribute their service to CNCS and connect them with GRAD's history. The GRAD AmeriCorps members will participate in formal and informal reflection activities designed to enhance member experiences and connect members with each other and the AmeriCorps identity such as weekly opportunities to share challenges and strategies with other team members and member-led fishbowl reflection sessions. Members will also complete reflection journals bi-weekly, clarifying new learning and embedding new skills.

VOLUNTEER GENERATION will occur within the college success service component and allow GRADuation Pathway to establish additional mentors to be paired with college students, increasing

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the likelihood that targets will be met. With the assistance of their supervisor, the two Members serving in the iMentor component will recruit 10-20 additional iMentors each year from the corporate community and from the GRAD alumni group. The volunteer iMentors will be monitored by the recruiting Member, who will ensure frequency of contact (using bi-weekly reminders to contact mentees and periodic checks with mentees themselves) and ensure prohibited activities do not occur (by monthly e-mail check in with volunteer mentors). The Members serving within the GRAD Ambassador program at 6 universities will recruit 35 successful juniors and seniors to join them in mentoring incoming freshmen and other struggling students. The Members will create official student groups on campus and lead the volunteers in providing high quality group activities to promote engagement and success, including social events (such as canoeing and bowling) and college knowledge workshops (such as managing the advisor relationship and financial aid planning). Members will be coached to train and re-train volunteers about prohibited activities and to be watchful that volunteers adhere to CNCS procedures for service documentation and allowable community service activities.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT TO AMERICORPS IDENTIFICATION will be visually evident due to appropriate branding of all online and hand-delivered materials including application forms, position postings, recruiting items, orientation and training documents, signs, banners, press releases and publications related to the AmeriCorps program. Websites and social media (Facebook and Twitter feeds) will include GRAD and national service branding, making the collaboration and service model clear to staff, stakeholders, service sites, partners and the general public.

Organizational Capability

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND AND STAFFING. The mission of Project GRAD is to support a quality public education for children in economically disadvantaged communities so that high school and college graduation rates increase. GRAD's goals are to see at least 80% of entering ninth graders graduate from high school, at least 60% of those graduates attend college with the GRAD scholarship, and at least 50% of enrollees graduate from college. GRAD began in 1989 as a scholarship program offered to every 9th grader in Jefferson Davis High School just north of downtown -- a school once labeled a "dropout factory" by the Department of Education. However, it soon became clear that paying for college was only one component of a much larger, more systemic issue: the students did not have access to the resources and support necessary to be academically and socially ready for college, and subsequently to succeed once they arrived; even more distressing, they did not believe they could. Therefore, in 1994, the GRAD model evolved through working in tandem with school and

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community leaders. Through partnership with the school district, local schools, and the community, sustainable systems of support were implemented which would change the college-going expectations and realities of these communities. Now 18 years later four additional high schools, their students and families, and an expanded college success network comprise the GRAD community.

GRAD's program design is unique. Most programs focus either on getting high school students ready for and enrolled in college (access) or on increasing college student persistence and graduation (success)--but not both. The few programs which do span the secondary/ postsecondary worlds work with small numbers of self-identified, highly motivated students with parents who are equally committed. GRAD begins working with all incoming 9th graders to build a culture of college-going on the campus and to foster that elusive belief that each one can earn a postsecondary certificate or degree. Far from focusing on the top 10%, GRAD's scholars reach down into the 50th percentile of the graduating classes, working with large numbers of the very students currently underrepresented in higher education and in the trained workforce.

The GRAD management structure, program experience and staffing align well with the AmeriCorps program expectations. The Executive Director, Ann Stiles, Ed.D., works closely with the Board of Directors and Chairperson to establish sound policy direction and to network in the fundraising community. If granted, the Board will be notified at the upcoming meeting and will be provided regular progress reports on the increased service and outcomes. Board members will also be invited to AmeriCorps recognition events. Reporting to the Executive Director are the Director of College Success (who is the Project Director), the Evaluator, and the Director of College Access. The Director of College Access (David Johnston) will supervise and train the high school based corps members. He currently leads a team of 6 staff who are responsible for increasing the numbers of students who enroll in college, ready to succeed. The Director of College Success (Melissa Martinez) will serve as Project Director and currently oversees the two supervisors responsible for increasing the numbers of students who graduate from college, the College Success Manager (Trina Wright) and the College Success Coordinator (Ramiro Fonseca). Both provide direct services to students participating in the three college success programs. Also reporting to the Executive Director is the program evaluator, the Senior Director of Grant Management and Program Evaluation (Laurie Ballering, Ed.D.) who will support grant management and compliance, complete required progress reports and annual reports, and provide annual and grant period community impact evaluations. Dr. Ballering provides annual and final grant reports on federal, local and foundation grants for GRAD.

Over the past 13 years, Drs. Stiles and Ballering, GRAD staff and the Chief Financial Officer have

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worked together to successfully manage program, budget and evaluation data for \$52 million in federal grants (Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination and GEAR UP as the key operational partner with Houston ISD as the fiscal agent). The GRAD motto "Whatever it Takes" is evident in successful execution of complex programs with relatively few, but dedicated, staff through development of strong community collaborations and innovative data collection, time tracking, and data analysis systems. The Project Director will be Melissa Martinez whose Bachelors degree is in Psychology and who has 13 years experience working with higher education success programs, leading teams, and for the past 4 years at GRAD has managed millions of dollars in scholarship funds, gathered grant data for reporting, and worked closely with grant evaluators to analyze data to improve program service. Mr. Johnston, whose Masters degree is in Creative Writing, will directly manage Member training, support and supervision for college access. He is a respected leader in the college access field with 13 years of experience in developing and implementing effective programs that ensure at-risk, minority students participate in post-secondary education. Mrs. Trina Harmon-Wright (Masters degree in Social Work) and Ramiro Fonseca (Masters degree in Organizational Leadership), who will directly manage Member training, support and supervision for the college success components, have a combined 31 years experience working directly with college students to address persistence barriers and to promote graduation. Critical financial, program and technical support for GRAD staff will be addressed with the attendance of all mentioned key staff at OneStar's April 2012 training for new programs, with the pre-grant and during-grant support of two OneStar program officers, and with ongoing commission trainings. Ms. Martinez, Mr. Johnston, Mrs. Wright and Mr. Fonseca will jointly provide programmatic orientation, training and technical assistance to additional GRAD staff as needed to ensure a successful AmeriCorps experience for Members, volunteers, students and their families.

SUSTAINABILITY requires systemic commitment and flexibility. GRAD community stakeholders are the students served in high school and college, alumni, and their families. Each stakeholder group meets at least semi-annually with GRAD staff to provide ongoing program feedback, for initiative training, or for volunteer projects. These stakeholders have requested "more boots on the ground" to increase GRAD support at both the high schools and the colleges and will be directly involved with AmeriCorps Members to address program goals. Member support will promote more direct contact with stakeholders and build the relationships critical for sustainability--as GRAD scholars become alumni who give back to their community. Both the Alumni group and the current GRAD Ambassadors provided input into this application. Community partners who also provided input

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include the five high schools; local postsecondary institutions that serve the majority of GRAD scholars: the University of Houston Downtown (UHD), Houston Community College (HCC), the University of Houston (UH), Texas Southern University; local institutions that support summer College Institute experiences for students: Rice University, the University of St. Thomas, UT Health Science Center, UHD, UH and HCC. GRAD created a Higher Ed Advisory Committee two years ago which has agreed to securing administrative support for the off-site service offices.

Funding for additional resources required to support AmeriCorps Members comes from three sources: 1) Continued cash support from our partnering high schools and in-kind support from our partnering colleges and universities, 2) multi-year awards such as the 2012 Neighborhood Builder award from the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, and 3) multi-year grants from corporate competitions targeting high school success (such as the AT&T Aspire grant).

For the past 20 years, GRAD has been successful combining federal, state, and local government funding with private individual, foundation and corporate funding. Long-term sustainability is predicted due to many years of program service to thousands of students in communities which are now seeing children of former scholars benefiting from GRAD services. Even in challenging budget times, the partnering high schools continue to finance GRAD.

The strength of the GRAD relationships with area universities predicts ongoing in-kind support and continued program activities beyond the grant period. This relationship stems from two sources: 1) the twenty year history of scholarship awards and more recent direct support for student persistence and college graduation and 2) from the annual College Institutes which require thoughtful participation and collaboration and which meet shared goals. Such a positive working experience facilitates the moment when the students, after completing their College Institutes and graduating from high school, finally arrive at the college to share in the academic life of the institution. The relationship built by the College Institute collaboration lays the foundation for a mutual investment in the success of the student, and subsequently for GRAD to continue working with the university partner to support the student. College Institute participation at two Institutes is required to earn the GRAD Scholarship and the programs receive generous and consistent funding from corporate and foundation partners. GRAD therefore anticipates continued support from our university partners to work with GRAD Scholars attending their universities. These diversified funding sources and new grant opportunities ensure sustainability and predict an enduring relationship with AmeriCorps. COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY systems are integral to GRAD's successful administration and have been developed to manage previous multi-million dollar federal grants. The Project Director

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and Program Evaluator will work collaboratively to ensure that grant compliance and accountability systems are in place and operating as designed with support from OneStar. In addition to basic organizational risk management policies (such as nondiscriminatory hiring, written personnel handbook, detailed job descriptions, performance appraisals and Board of Directors oversight and annual review), GRAD has developed specific grant compliance practices designed to ensure AmeriCorps rules and regulations are followed and to prevent and detect noncompliance: 1) all grant related personnel complete a supervisor-monitored, contemporaneous online time and effort report that documents hours of effort as well as types of activities; 2) grant expenditures are approved by the Project Director and the CFO who maintain contemporaneous spending reports and compare those to approved budgets; 3) supervision of staff at multiple sites is managed through systematic monitoring, including direct observation (bi-weekly for local programs and three times a year for out-of-town sites at minimum), coaching, rotating training sites, online interactive webinars, and ongoing service data analysis; 4) Member reflection journals (completed bi-weekly) provide an opportunity for supervisory monitoring as well as clarifying new learning and embedding new skills for Members; 5) monthly communication (at minimum) with the OneStar support team; and 6) attendance on commission and other pertinent webinars. Multiple "eyes" will create redundancies that support effective implementation, catch risk or noncompliance as soon as possible, and increase program outcomes. Like CNCS, GRAD has an organizational culture that promotes civil rights and non-harassment. Integral to the mission of promoting college graduation for underrepresented populations is the belief that all persons will be treated with dignity and respect, from stakeholders to partners to staff and volunteers. AmeriCorps Members will be expected to both comply with that culture and to report any discriminatory situations with no fear of retaliation.

AmeriCorps prohibited activities will be shared, not only with the Members, but with site personnel such as building principals, university guidance centers, and volunteers. Service site locations will enter into service agreements which specify member and volunteer contributions, site support, prohibited activities, and data reporting requirements. Prohibited activity infractions will be investigated immediately and reported to OneStar for advice on appropriate action.

The Program Evaluator will provide ongoing, iterative, and responsive research that enhances grant performance and allows timely solutions for missed opportunities or compliance issues. She will collect and analyze service data, interview samples of Members, volunteers, stakeholders, and site staff, and provide CNCS and OneStar all necessary reports.

The Project Director and Program Evaluator will create Grant Practice Checklists to be completed by

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all grant personnel (GRAD and AmeriCorps) on a monthly basis. The checklist will serve multiple functions: 1) provide Member and Supervisor feedback on perceived progress towards grant goals; 2) provide a formal vehicle for making suggestions to improve service to stakeholders or volunteers; and 3) provide frequent reminders of specific prohibited activities as well as expected performance and cultural values. Evaluations for AmeriCorps Members will be developed with support from OneStar staff to reflect program objectives, the job description and national service values.

Cost Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy

COST EFFECTIVENESS is established by examining the value of expected outcomes for individuals and society compared to the cost of programming, and by inference, the associated negatives for the failure to provide pathways to college graduation for underserved students. The Alliance for Excellent Education (in their November, 2012 "Inseparable Imperatives: Equity in Education and the Future of the American Economy") makes moral and economic arguments for providing quality education to all children regardless of skin color or socioeconomic status. Actually the Alliance warns that the American economy REQUIRES improved outcomes: "in an information-age economy dependent upon consumer activity, any successful economic strategy must eliminate the gaps in education attainment and achievement and enable the fastest-growing populations to reach their full potential as wage earners, consumers, and citizens." Likewise the College Board Advocacy and Policy Center's "Education Pays2010: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society" warns that current "uneven rates of participation in higher education across different segments of U.S. society should be a matter of urgent concern...at the federal, state and local levels." Data from these sources and from a 2006 publication by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Measuring the Effects of Education on Health and Civic Engagement" provide the calculations for this cost effectiveness analysis.

These publications document overwhelming evidence that higher education improves lives, having an effect not only on job skills but also on attitudes and behavior patterns, which leads to taking more responsibility for health, for others in society, and for improving prospects for future generations. Reliable quantitative measures for much of the research-based effects of higher education are not yet available, and this analysis utilized the most conservative allocations. For example, college graduates were two to three times less likely to be unemployed during the recent recession and are three times more likely to read daily to their young children who in turn have higher cognitive skills and are more likely to go to college themselves. Therefore, this cost effectiveness calculation should be viewed as a minimum estimation of the return on grant investment.

Narratives

During the three year grant period, GRADuation Pathways will result in at least 450 additional students entering college and 120 additional postsecondary certificate, associates or bachelor degrees (these numbers are in excess of the current GRAD averages calculated by projecting the past 5 year average baselines over a 3-year period: 1320 students entering college and 471 verifiable college graduates). Over 40 years, these 570 individuals will earn an additional \$211M with an associated increase in federal taxes collected of \$57M. Social benefit (in the form of less welfare and fewer incarcerations) is estimated at \$34M. Combined with \$31.5M in health effects and \$128M in volunteer service, these basic benefits to the individual and to society are valued at nearly \$463 million in today's dollars. The return on investment for every CNCS dollar contributed to GRADuation Pathways is \$600 over 40 years or \$15 annually. In addition, by the mid-point in these 570 careers, America's GDP will have increased by \$548.8M. The cost of failure to increase educational outcomes or to reduce the inequity for underserved populations reverberates through these communities in more hopelessness, more crime, more illness, more poverty, and continued lost potential.

The CNCS cost per Member Service Year (MSY) is \$12,510, which is below the maximum allowable cost of \$13,300 and which represents \$3M of benefit for each MSY invested. With 20.56 MSYs each budget period and \$256,826 in program match, GRADuation Pathways presents a dollar-for-dollar match program that doubles the service hours currently provided by GRAD to underrepresented high school and college students.

Cost effectiveness can also be determined by comparing comparable programs. Although no programs are identical in scope and mission, Bottom Line, a college access and success program for low-income first-generation students based in the northeast, is comparable in size and mission, also beginning 20 years ago. In 2012, Bottom Line served 784 seniors in high school and 1075 college students with a total program cost of \$2,313,561, or \$1,245 per student. GRAD served 2,501 freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors in high school and 1249 college students with a total program cost of \$2,578,987, or \$688 per student. GRAD is 81% more cost efficient than Bottom Line. Results matter, too. Bottom Line reports 730 graduates from 1997 through 2012. GRAD reports 1483 for the same period or more than double the results from a comparable program.

GRAD funding comes from these sources: 1) scholarship trusts, 2) continued financial support from our partnering high schools and in-kind support from our partnering colleges and universities, 3) ongoing annual foundation, corporate and individual gifts, 4) grants, and 5) awards such the 2012 Neighborhood Builder award by the Bank of America Charitable Foundation. The 2012-2013 operating budget for GRAD is \$4.5 million, making the \$514,040 GRADuation Pathways initiative

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11% of the total budget. Non-CNCS sources account for 50% of the funding or \$256,826 for Budget Period One. Already committed match funding comes from two secured multi-year grants from corporate foundations: 1) AT&T Foundation's Aspire grant, of which \$110,626 is match, and 2) the Neighborhood Builder Award from Bank of America Charitable Foundation, of which \$52,900 is dedicated to match. GRAD will allocate an anticipated \$93,300 in match funding from GRAD partnering high schools (who typically contribute at least \$200,000 each year). Garnering the anticipated match will be facilitated by CNCS approval because the schools and contributing corporations will be encouraged to know that AmeriCorps member and volunteer service will more than double direct service hours supporting college access and college success.

Unlike many college access and success programs, GRAD serves all the students in partnering urban, high need high schools, providing scholarships to nearly 50% of graduating seniors and college success support to every enrolled student. These are not students in boutique programs or charter schools which require intensive parental commitment. These are students who live on the edges of poverty and all too often, on the edge of society--with parents in jail or unavailable, raised by grandparents or by parents struggling with addiction, responsible for caring for younger siblings while their parents work two jobs each, working 40 hours a week while still in high school and sacrificing their own academic potential because their father hasn't had a job in two years. Despite the enormity of need and few staff, GRAD has over the years seen an average 70% increase in on-time high school graduation, tripled college enrollment (sent 6,003 to college with scholarships) and verified 1,613 college graduates to date.

The addition of 25 member slots (20.56 MSYs) with 23 operating at 17 member service sites, 4 short-term program sites, and 2 at the operating site (GRAD), allows intensive, effective support for 2,700 high school students and at least 1,200 college students each year. While GRAD has experienced notable success, the needs of these underserved communities far exceed current staffing capacity. Because the college access and success infrastructure is well in place at GRAD, the AmeriCorps service model is the most cost effective expansion choice.

BUDGET ADEQUACY is evident in its clarity, reasonableness and alignment with program design and community impact. The format and spirit of the AmeriCorps experience aligns closely with the GRAD organizational culture of giving back to the community, of doing "Whatever it Takes," and of supporting postsecondary and post-bachelor educational aspirations through the Segal AmeriCorps Education Awards. Because this GRADuation Pathways initiative enhances current research-based program components provided by highly qualified and effective GRAD staff, community impact is

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virtually guaranteed with this dollar-for-dollar matched proposal.

Member Service Year allocations have been planned to support service gaps revealed because it appears that limited personnel have maxed out gains in college enrollment and college success.

Without additional staff to provide intensive guidance, these underserved communities will continue to be underrepresented in college enrollment, persistence and graduation. The addition of 9 full-time members to support high school students and 9 full-time, 3 half-time, and 4 quarter-time members to support college students will fully staff program components and will result in 25 more community service minded citizens each year. The 185 volunteers expected to participate over the grant period not only enhance program and cost effectiveness but also receive the benefits of knowing they are doing important work for the future strength and economic viability of these communities.

The CNCS budget share pays for: 1) all living allowance and FICA costs for the half-time and quarter-time members; 2) 70% of the living allowance and benefit costs (including health care) for the full-time members; 3) 56% of staff travel to required corporate and commission sponsored trainings (calculated to send 2 staff to each of 2 national training events and 4 staff to each of 2 state trainings); 4) 82% of the mileage for out-of-town members' travel to Houston for meetings (calculated for 3 roundtrips x \$.55/mile); 5) required leadership council member attendance for two at two commission sponsored events in Austin; 6) CNCS logo shirts (2 each) for members; 7) all required criminal background checks for members and staff; and 8) the required 5% indirect cost allocation to CNCS and the state commission. These costs result in a Member Service Year cost of \$12,510.

The GRAD budget share pays for: 1) appropriate percentages of the Project Director's and the 3 supervisors' salaries and benefits; 2) 44% of staff travel to required corporate and commission sponsored trainings; 3) all staff travel to and from member service sites (calculated for at least 3 roundtrip visits to each of the 6 out-of-town universities, but additional trips will occur as needed for supervision, training, or program monitoring); 4) 20% of member travel from member sites to training sites and GRAD (also calculated for at least 3 roundtrips with more added as indicated); 5) Including two additional members in the AmeriCorps Texas Leadership Council trips; 6) all staff and member training costs (primarily in-house trainings with in-kind and collaborative trainings coordinated with OneStar, the American Red Cross, and local AmeriCorps programs already working with GRAD); 7) all member and volunteer office supplies (such as copies, jump drives, student folders, pens, brochures, etc.); 8) evaluation costs which include preparation of bi-annual progress reports and an internal evaluation report; 9) cell phone stipends to compensate for phone, text and data transmissions (at least \$30 each month for each of the 25 members); 10) parking costs for five

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members at 3 local universities (calculated at \$3 daily rates); 11) annual fee for the GoToTraining package which allows cost effective, ongoing, online interactive webinars with college success members and volunteers operating out of the local area; 12) 30% of the living allowance and benefit costs (including health care) for the full-time members; and 13) all GRAD indirect costs which include payroll and HR services, IT, other administrative assistant support, and preparation of the semi-annual and conclusion of the budget period Federal Financial Reports and the monthly expense reports required by OneStar.

Two known program requirements are not listed in the budget. One is space at universities for members to meet with students and conduct workshops. GRAD has been able to arrange for one-on-one meeting space within guidance programs and to arrange for group meeting space by creating official student groups at each university. Another program cost is not an allowable federal expense, and thus is not listed as a GRAD match expense: snacks for meetings and costs for social gatherings like bowling, etc.

The GRADuation Pathways initiative "completes" the Project GRAD program design by providing sufficient numbers of well trained and supervised community service members and volunteers as college access and success guidance practitioners. The budget is reasonable, allowable, cost effective, invests in a dollar-for-dollar match, and supports ambitious targets that change each communities' educational and economic future.

Evaluation Summary or Plan

NA

Amendment Justification

NA

Clarification Summary

NA

Continuation Changes

NA