

# Narratives

## Executive Summary

Porter-Leath proposes to have 24 AmeriCorps members who will provide educational enrichment activities for Porter-Leath Early Childhood students in the agency's Head Start centers in Memphis and Shelby County. At the end of the first program year, the AmeriCorps members will be responsible for increasing Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills assessment scores for 480 students who score significantly below their age range and/or have an established Individual Education Plan. In addition, the AmeriCorps members will leverage over 120 additional volunteers that will be engaged in literacy initiatives throughout the same centers. This program will focus on the CNCS focus areas of education. The CNCS investment of \$322,320 will be matched with \$322,320 in private funding.

## Rationale and Approach/Program Design

### a. Problem/Need

US Census Bureau 2010 records indicate that, in Memphis and Shelby County, there are over 13,086 four-year-olds preparing to enter kindergarten. According to the 2010 Census and attendance data for Memphis City and Shelby County Schools, only about one third of all children eligible for Pre-K are enrolled in a program. During the 2013-14 school year, 4644 children were enrolled in an Early Head Start, Head Start or Pre-K classroom at Porter-Leath. Families served are all low-income, meet the Head Start low-income benchmarks, and have at least one young child, defined as under age 5, in the home. Almost all families, 89%, are single parent households and 85% are African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 5% Caucasian/Other. Based on beginning of the year assessments completed for benchmarking, as well as through the application process, all students have a variety of educational risk factors, including low parental educational attainment and absence of literacy resources in the home that predispose them to early school failure.

According to the 2011 Urban Child Institute study Understanding the Relationship Between Family Income and School Readiness in Memphis, children in poverty are more likely to arrive at kindergarten with significantly lower school readiness. This is a particularly serious issue for the Memphis community, where roughly 6,800 children entering kindergarten each year (close to 80 percent of each kindergarten class) are from low-income families (with incomes eligible for the federal free and reduced price lunch program). Poverty is strongly associated with differences in early vocabulary development, for example. Children who spend their early years in poverty are likely to arrive at kindergarten with vocabularies far smaller than their middle-class peers. As children enter school, early differences in vocabulary grow wider, and lead to measurable gaps in early literacy skills.

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Lower rates of readiness and achievement, in turn, are associated with a greater likelihood of being held back, of being tracked into special education, and of failing out of school. Early childhood development links with later life outcomes and shows that early mastery of the skills associated with kindergarten readiness establish the foundation on which higher-order skills develop. In this way, children who reach school ready to learn are more likely to read comfortably by fourth grade, to advance successfully through middle and high school, graduate on-time, and go to college.

### b. Theory of Change/Logic Model

AmeriCorps members serve in Porter-Leath preschool centers promoting school readiness activities, where over 4,000 students ages 0-5, all low-income and at-risk, are enrolled. Approximately 10% of these children have a documented disability and have an established Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place. Studies show that children in poverty usually have lower exposure to reading, thus resulting in smaller vocabularies and reading skills at an early age and that very rarely do these children catch up. Using the same source, the struggle of impoverished families is a list of issues that are a major challenge to overcome: parents tend to be less educated, spend more time working to provide for their families, have less time to interact with their children on a daily basis, and have fewer resources with which they might stimulate learning for their child. AmeriCorps members will serve 480 children annually, who need individual enrichment as identified by low Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills assessment scores, which is the Head Start standard assessment tool used to evaluate children's school readiness in Shelby County. Porter-Leath Head Start centers are leaders among early childhood learning centers in preparing students for school, but still, some children need extra enrichment to meet development goals. AmeriCorps members at Porter-Leath have shown, through past years performance, that these children too will be ready for school when they transition to kindergarten. The expected outcome of the project is to increase the scores on the Brigance assessments for children in terms of literacy skills, that include domains in phonological awareness, print awareness, early writing and alphabet knowledge. The Brigance assessment identifies learning delays, as well as strengths and weaknesses in language and cognitive skills. Porter-Leath follows a pre, mid and post-test method over the course of the school year. AmeriCorps members will serve children in need of individualized assistance in poor-scoring areas of language and cognitive skills related to literacy. The Members will give priority to children within the center, who have documented disabilities and have an established IEP, to help them achieve milestones. The Members' work is extremely beneficial to the Head Start program as this provides additional individual attention to children in the classroom. For teachers, regularly delivering individualized, one-on-one instruction can be difficult, if not impossible.

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The project's theory of change is that while there is a literacy problem, it can be effectively corrected through Porter-Leath's proven AmeriCorps intervention program. This is supported by a study of the Minnesota Reading Corps that shows children, paired with an AmeriCorps Member to receive additional individualized one-on-one literacy activities a minimum of weekly, over and above what they receive from the teacher; outperformed their peers on assessments that predict school readiness. Porter-Leath is requesting 24 full-time AmeriCorps members, to be assigned in two person teams to 12 Head Start centers that the agency operates. Each AmeriCorps Member will be assigned 20 children from within the center to work on literacy activities that focus on cognitive skills, reading abilities, and writing abilities. Members will work with their assigned children twice weekly for a minimum of 16 weeks, where during this period, children will receive two Brigance screenings: pre-mid, mid-end. The impact of the AmeriCorps investment will reach children in the center by providing activities that spur lessons to promote literacy school readiness.

Members will be assigned to specific classrooms to work with twenty children selected by the classroom teachers from those with the lowest score of readiness, as well as those children identified with an Individual Education Plan. Each AmeriCorps member will use Brigance assessment results to develop individual lesson plans with the objective of increasing Brigance scores for the students. Members will prepare and lead children in activities that increase their literacy readiness (ED24) through activities that focus in the domains of phonological awareness, print awareness, early writing and alphabet knowledge. By focusing on the individual needs of students, the Brigance scores will increase, resulting in a stronger classroom. Individualized attention for underperforming students will boost their attainment and performance, allowing them to keep up with their peers. By the end of the three year grant cycle, over 1,400 children will have been reached with at least 1,120 children (80%) ready to enter kindergarten. This model has been utilized and is very effective, as evidenced by over 94% of AmeriCorps-partnered students increasing their Brigance scores by an average 15% last year. Porter-Leath AmeriCorps Members will recruit 120 volunteers who will commit to at least 2 hours of service, mostly focused on reading and literacy events in the Early Childhood Program centers. Community volunteers, who are recruited by Members and supported by the Early Childhood Program staff, come from area businesses and civic groups. Volunteers share information about Early Childhood Programs with the community, speak at parent meetings and help with service projects. Management of volunteers is performed by members who identify guidelines for specific activities and convey instructions to volunteers. Upon completion of the volunteer event, volunteer contact information is collected and stored so that they may be called upon again to serve in support of

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member identified community activities. Volunteers are acknowledged during an end of the year ceremony.

### c. Evidence Base

Porter-Leath AmeriCorps completed an outcome based study in May 2015 of the 2014-2015 program year. Child participants are all low income, 89%, are single parent households and 85% are African-American, 10% Hispanic, and 5% Caucasian/Other. Every child received a school readiness E-LAP or LAP-3 (Learning Accomplishment Profile) screening within 45 days of enrollment, as well as at mid-year and end year. E-LAP, LAP-3 and Brigance assessments are observation-based, ongoing assessment instruments. Teachers observe and document individual skill progression overtime based on ongoing observation through formative assessment as well as interim/benchmark assessments throughout the year. Results are summarized at multiple checkpoints during the year (Beginning, Mid-year, Ongoing, and End year for Early Head Start and Beginning, Mid-year and End year for Head Start). Assessment systems track individual children's growth and progress in the foundational process skills and domain specific skills (gross and fine motor, cognition, language, self-help and social-emotional for Early Head Start and physical and language development, academic/cognitive, daily living, social & emotional development for Head Start) needed for school readiness. E-LAP data is collected in a web-based system. Brigance data is collected in ChildPlus.net which is used for Head Start and Early Head Start reporting.

AmeriCorps Members were assigned to 65 students performing at the lowest levels on the assessments. Members completed lesson plans to provide literacy activities in the domains of pre-writing, language and cognitive skills. Classroom teachers approved the lesson plans and provided ongoing support to members. Tracking was done by Porter-Leath's internal Performance and Quality Improvement Department, evaluating and monitoring documentation and assessments to determine accuracy of reported outcomes.

For center-based activities with Head Start children, the program had a goal of at least 85% improvement in all areas of the LAP-3 assessment. Post scores indicated the following increases from pre/post test scores: Prewriting 97%, Cognitive 98%, and Language 95%. These results compare to those with the children without AmeriCorps support; Prewriting 95%, Cognitive 96% and Language 94%. The children's percentage score increased an average of 16% from the mid year to end year assessment. During the program year, 94% of the children served by Members showed overall improvement of school readiness for their age group, an average of 2% higher than those children without AmeriCorps assignment. It is imperative to note that the children served by AmeriCorps

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members had the lowest scores and as a result of member intervention, were now on pace, if not above, all other students.

Early Head Start and Head Start programs have the greatest opportunity to affect change due to early interventions at the early, formative years of life. The results from services go far beyond having successful transition to kindergarten, the teaching methods used in Early Head Start and Head Start develops children to become lifelong learners, to be socially responsible and to constructively develop the footprint for success later in school.

### e. Member Training

The Head Start program year starts August 1 and ends July 31. The first two weeks are spent in orientation training. The members' initial training consists of classroom instruction, workshops and on the job training to include topics on Porter-Leath policies, AmeriCorps policies and other subjects that enhance their skills as a member such as Head Start 101, citizenship training, ethics, resource management, child abuse/maltreatment identification, time management, child development and conflict resolution, as well as interpersonal communication and CPR. Subjects are covered by guest speakers who are experts in the field. During the pre-service orientation program, members receive and sign an agreement stating they will not engage in the outlined prohibited activities. Using role playing of specific scenarios, members are trained on the prohibited activities and the consequences that occur if policies are violated.

Further monthly training focuses on the professional development of members and include topics such as, developing lesson plans, mentoring, leadership skills, team building, resume writing, interview skills and other topics based on member needs.

During the orientation, the AmeriCorps Coordinator uses the Civics and Citizenship Toolkit, to train members on the concept of citizenship and how to be good stewards of citizenship. To frame the AmeriCorps experience, members are shown the AmeriCorps' Getting Things Done video. Members participate in 'Life after AmeriCorps' upon completion of their service where excerpts from the Corporation's manual, 'Life after AmeriCorps,' are presented. Members also receive information and training to assist them with developing good working relationships with classroom staff and their assigned children.

Members participate in an orientation process at their specific Head Start site that provides classroom specific training. This not only acclimates them to the Head Start, but provides a time for them to build rapport with staff at the center that they will work with throughout the school year. Members participate in additional training with the staff at their respective site, in the form of in-services, staff

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meetings and professional development. These trainings are related to Head Start policies and early childhood specific topics, such as the Brigance assessment tool, working with children with behavioral difficulties, and health and safety policies.

### f. Member Supervision

Member supervision begins with individualized meetings to identify personal goals for the Member, as well as program goals for their service. Once goals are developed, regular bi-weekly individual meetings are conducted throughout the year, by either the Generations Manager or AmeriCorps Coordinator to update goals, discuss the status of individual progress and address any issues that may arise. Members are supervised by the Site Manager and the AmeriCorps Coordinator with additional supervision and mentoring provided by the Generations Manager. The AmeriCorps Member is directly supervised by the site manager while at their volunteer location. Program supervision is a shared responsibility with the direct supervision on site, by the site manager, and off site by the AmeriCorps Coordinator. In order to assure the Site Managers gain skills required to properly supervise members, they are required to participate in annual training that focuses on AmeriCorps policies, as well as reporting requirements and monitoring. Monthly meetings are held with site supervisors to provide updates and reminders of policies and regulations. The Generations Manager and AmeriCorps Coordinator attend training with Volunteer Tennessee to understand AmeriCorps policies and terms and conditions. Program staff attend annual training to keep current on regulations, policies and procedures.

The AmeriCorps Coordinator reviews each document that members are required to submit for compliance, as well as, review, execute and authorize program documents during the training process. The Generations Manager conducts individual meetings with Site Managers, monthly or as needed. The Generations Manager and AmeriCorps Coordinator meet weekly for program updates and to discuss program strengths and opportunities for improvement.

The AmeriCorps Coordinator supports and monitors progress toward program goals during monthly member individual consultations. During these meetings, the coordinator reviews member hours and assists them with time management techniques.

### g. Member Experience

AmeriCorps members receive a bi-monthly living allowance (\$12,530 annually), an educational award upon successful completion of the year and, most important, training and experience that will guide them throughout their personal and professional careers. Program staff provide resources to the members on schools they may attend and offers flexible schedules to assist members in achieving

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educational goals. Each member sets goals for their own professional development, outlines steps for achievement and documents progress toward achievement. In this way, members become more proficient at setting and working toward realistic personal goals. Members complete a mid-year and end of term reflection on their service. During this reflection, members have the opportunity to highlight their achievements.

Members are presented with opportunities to continue volunteer service through other community channels. AmeriCorps members will gain skills and experience during their time at Porter-Leath in the classroom, but also in professional areas of performance improvement and evaluation and assessment, skills that are transferable to any profession.

Members frequently interact with the agency's 600+ staff from multiple departments and interact with parents and community stakeholders during events. They are able to easily see the Porter-Leath staff commitment to productive service on a daily basis. Several former members are now paid staff with the agency in various roles and several former service recipients have joined the agency as AmeriCorps members. By becoming members, these men and women gain job experience and learn valuable work skills. By engaging in activities and interacting with people who are going to college or working in vocations not known to them before, these individuals are encouraged to attempt new projects. They have frequent access to meaningful service opportunities, including opportunities with AmeriCorps member groups outside of Porter-Leath. Members participate in days of service with other site's members. For example, several members from various sites participated in a day of service on MLK Day 2015 at an area school, providing much needed painting and other light maintenance. In order to recruit members from the communities the AmeriCorps members will serve, Porter-Leath utilizes the Internet, My AmeriCorps portal, word of mouth, community newsletters such as the Cooper Young newsletter, university newspapers such as the University of Memphis Daily Helmsman, and current participants in Head Start and other Porter-Leath programs, all of whom are low-income. Porter-Leath will leverage its existing relationship with the University of Memphis and its College of Education to recruit up to 15 members from the University who are either in undergraduate or graduate students in Early Childhood. These students will be able to earn externship hours for their AmeriCorps service as it is direct education experience for them. In addition to this partnership, flyers are distributed throughout the community and at schools and colleges like Southwest Tennessee Community College. Program staff attends health fairs and network with members of local community agencies to recruit and screen members. The agency is located in the service community and regularly recruits residents from nearby ZIP codes. Porter-Leath strives to recruit diverse

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individuals with a strong sense of commitment and desire to improve their community. Porter-Leath is committed to recruiting members with disabilities. Contacts are facilitated via disability offices at the University of Memphis and The University of Tennessee Boling Center (a university center for excellence in developmental disabilities). Accommodations for members with disabilities are made upon request utilizing the previously mentioned agencies when appropriate. Porter-Leath also recruits Baby Boomers and veterans as members.

### **h. Commitment to AmeriCorps Identification**

The program's past experience has allowed the agency to develop a strong AmeriCorps program component that is now leading the way in the Memphis community. Members will receive training not only on the AmeriCorps history, but on all areas of the National Service network. Porter-Leath Generations, houses Senior Corps' programs as well as the AmeriCorps program, giving the Members opportunities to see other National Service volunteers. Foster Grandparents volunteer alongside Members at the Head Start centers. Porter-Leath is well-versed in the usage of the AmeriCorps name on all materials and literature. Partnering agencies will display the logo as well in their centers and on collateral materials. Porter-Leath routinely highlights the AmeriCorps program in the news, press releases and at community events. Agency staff and board members promote AmeriCorps publicly in the community at speaking engagements, events and within their businesses, educating individuals on what AmeriCorps is and how they help better the community. AmeriCorps members are clearly identified at all times by ensuring that all members are in attire that prominently displays the AmeriCorps logo.

AmeriCorps members are given several items to promote their identity as AmeriCorps members including AmeriCorps polos, cups, pins and other items. Members are given a list of benchmarks for their hours, after each benchmark is reached, members receive a recognition item from the program such as an AmeriCorps lapel pin or AmeriCorps jacket. AmeriCorps members are spotlighted in the agency's communications and at annual agency events. AmeriCorps members at Porter-Leath have an excellent historical sense of identity given the program's work with infant mortality in the community. Current members are often treated to presentations from past members who are now on staff at Porter-Leath or in other roles, to foster their sense of what it truly means to be an AmeriCorps member.

## **Organizational Capability**

### **a. Organizational Background and Staffing**

Porter-Leath is a private, non-profit children's agency designed to meet the needs of at-risk children

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and families. Originally established in 1850 as an orphanage, it has evolved into a comprehensive service agency focusing on early childhood education and social services. The agency's mission is empowering children and families to achieve a healthy, optimal and independent lifestyle.

Porter-Leath is governed by a 22-person Board of Directors, comprised of volunteers from various backgrounds and their expertise is utilized to plan strategically, provide fiscal oversight, network with people of influence in the community and create opportunities to bring funding to the agency. Board member backgrounds range from retired persons to home-makers to corporate attorneys. Members serve a one- year introductory period and then can serve up to two three-year terms. The current Board Chair is Mary Seratt; she has extensive experience in the early childhood literacy in her role as director of children and youth services for the Memphis Public Library, as well as a consultant and instructor for early childhood education programs across Tennessee. Porter-Leath staff participates in the activities of many organizations including United Way, Tennessee Conference on Social Welfare, Leadership Memphis and ongoing conferences, trainings and summits. Porter-Leath staff serves in leadership positions and delivers trainings for various organizations.

Porter-Leath's 160 year history cements the agency's reputation as efficient and effective by being well-established and known for positive outcomes in the community. Porter-Leath was recognized as the Top Midsize Workplace by The Commercial Appeal and by WorkPlace Dynamics, which surveyed over 700 similarly sized companies across Memphis. The agency is one of only 28 Tennessee nonprofits accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA), is a previous recipient of the Pyramid of Excellence Award through the Greater Memphis Association for Quality and Porter-Leath Head Start centers are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which is the highest childcare accreditation in the industry. The Agency is the 2010 recipient of the Wanzer Award for Excellence from the United Way of the Mid-South, which highlights the agency as having the highest level of accountability, sustainability and successful, measurable outcomes. As an organization, Porter-Leath is led by the Leadership Council as defined and Board of Directors. The volunteer Porter-Leath Board of Trustees oversees all assets of the agency.

The agency has provided contract Foster Care and Adoption Services with the State of Tennessee since 1983, the Foster Grandparent Program since 1985, the AmeriCorps program since 1995 and Early Head Start grant since 1998. The Child and Adult Food Care Program (CACFP) operates according to the USDA guidelines and has been in operation since 1985. Porter-Leath has successfully provided home visitation services since 1996. Less than 5% of funding comes from the Corporation.

The agency is overseen by Sean Lee, President. Mr. Lee has a Bachelor's degree in Business and 14

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years of management experience. Mrs. Judy Rautine is the Manager of the Generations program. She has 25 years of experience working in volunteer management with 17 years working in SeniorCorps programs. She has successfully managed the SeniorCorps' Foster Grandparent and RSVP volunteer programs for several years. In that time, she has improved processes, provided consistency and supported the program. Mrs. Regina Lucas, Director of Human Resources, has over 20 years of experience and provides direction and oversight in all HR areas such as hiring, background checks, performance issues and appraisals. Ms. Toni Edmond, Director of Performance and Quality Improvement (PQI), provides direction and support in the areas of program evaluations, ongoing measuring and monitoring of programs and adherence to accreditation/regulatory standards. Ms. Edmond has 10 years of experience and will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the Generations program. Mr. Jim Henderson, CPA, VP of Finance, has over 30 years of experience in finance. Mr. Henderson provides oversight and support in the area of accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll, budgeting and audits.

As Program Manager, Mrs. Rautine has the following day-to-day responsibilities for the program: ensuring smooth delivery of all program models, maintaining documentation necessary for verification of process toward program objectives, recruiting, training and supervising members, monitoring member hours and ensuring accurate record keeping, coordinating community service activities for staff, members and families, accessing program needs and ensuring the integrity of the program evaluation measures. The Manager monitors the Members and the program for compliance, including that the program does not violate non-duplication, non-displacement and non-supplementation requirements, as well as to ensure volunteers are not engaged in prohibited/unallowable activities like fundraising.

The AmeriCorps Coordinator, Emmabeth Weaver is responsible for monitoring members in the preparation and delivery of the education curricula, preparing curriculum materials, processing member timesheets, monitoring center activities, conducting face-to-face and phone observations, reviewing files for accuracy and quality improvement purposes and assisting in linking members with needed referrals.

Technical assistance is provided by the Porter-Leath support staff in IT, maintenance, finance and HR. With this support network, training and skills development for AmeriCorps members is readily available and encouraged. As mentioned previously, Porter-Leath has an internal Performance and Quality Improvement department that handles all internal evaluations and works with all external evaluators and auditors. This department is responsible for dozens of external evaluations each year,

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along with several multi-year audits and evaluations like the Council on Accreditation (COA). Porter-Leath has administered AmeriCorps and SeniorCorps funding for decades and over 80% of the agency's \$30M+ budget is federally funded, so Porter-Leath is quite capable of continuing to be a partner. Porter-Leath has an excellent record of compliance with all federal grants, receiving finding free audits and compliance monitoring for many years.

All staff and Board members are supportive of the program through direct service, evaluation and marketing. Through the annual and long-term strategic planning process, Porter-Leath assesses its organizational capacity and develops plans and action steps to ensure that the agency can grow and thrive. All national service programs, including AmeriCorps are part of this process. Members are asked to complete a yearly evaluation of the program and meet one-on-one with the Generations Manager. They are asked questions about the agency, mission and the support they can receive and are asked to provide recommendations about how the program can grow. The results are integrated into the annual and long-term goals for sustainability of the agency and program. Porter-Leath is consistently recognized by local organizations such as United Way and the Alliance for Nonprofit Excellence for its ability to set and achieve goals.

Match funding for the AmeriCorps program is secured through the agency's annual United Way funding. Additionally, the Porter-Leath development team raises around \$1M each year in private support for all of the agency's programs. The AmeriCorps program at Porter-Leath is a microcosm of long-term sustainability. While the program has operated for over ten years, 2008 brought several financial challenges due to a variety of funding cuts. Porter-Leath employees met the challenge head-on by accepting a 5% compensation reduction that kept the program going without a lapse in service. Thanks to new long-term funding, this program is supported for the future from multiple income streams. The impact of the program will continue long past the grant funding as children will have the skills needed to enter kindergarten ready to learn. These skills will remain with them throughout their academic careers. Given that these children will be in school for at least twelve years, the three years of grant funding will provide the foundation for a longstanding return. The agency has many community partners/stakeholders from corporations, individuals and foundations. Several to note are AutoZone, United Way and two anonymous individuals who donate over \$25,000 annually. Stakeholders, including AmeriCorps members, participate in the agency's annual board and staff retreat that develops strategic plans and explores new business opportunities.

The Program has engaged members of the board to assist with member recruitment and development. Service location partners include the agency preschool centers, the Shelby County

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Schools and the Achievement Schools through their early childhood programs. The AmeriCorps management team works closely with the Early Childhood management team to plan and implement the program within the agency. The Education team provides suggestions and support to the program to maintain successful outcomes.

Head Start and Early Head Start has been at the forefront of the agency's mission since Porter-Leath realigned its mission to better fit with the need for early childhood services in Shelby County. Porter-Leath Head Start centers are the envy of other operators in the area and are poised to lead the way. Porter-Leath Preschool is highly successful, expanding from 900 students to 4500 in a 33-day period in Summer 2014 by becoming the sole grantee for Early Head Start and the sole contract for Head Start in Shelby County, and currently serves over 5,800 students. The goal for this preschool is to ready these children for school, beginning from Day 1 of Kindergarten, complete with socialization training. In just one year, Porter-Leath has increased Kindergarten readiness from 31% to over 70%. These aforementioned projects are funded beyond the grant period for this application through several anonymous donors who are very active in the planning and implementation of the expansion programs. The agency is very confident in the AmeriCorps partnership with early childhood will be a model for success to increase the percentage of students ready to enter kindergarten and is fully committed to the continued success of this program.

### **b. Compliance and Accountability**

Porter-Leath will ensure compliance and accountability through several different, independent methods. First, the Generations Manager and AmeriCorps Coordinator will monitor all sites for compliance to AmeriCorps program rules and regulations, as well as AmeriCorps' requirements. All site managers of agency Head Starts will monitor the members for the same requirements and report any findings to the Generations Manager. Second, the AmeriCorps Coordinator will complete weekly visits to monitor and address concerns related to member service and compliance. During the monthly trainings and meetings, members are reminded of the activities they agreed to in their member agreement, as well as the prohibited activities. Third, the Performance and Quality Improvement Department will monitor, collect and report on performance goals and conduct a program evaluation.

All agency site managers, no subgrantees are part of the program, participate in AmeriCorps orientation and receive a copy of the AmeriCorps rules and regulations, AmeriCorps handbook and list of prohibited activities to ensure that they are aware of all current requirements. Any detected issues will be addressed immediately by the direct supervisor. Continued concerns will be brought to the

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attention of the AmeriCorps Coordinator or Generations Manager. Members can bring program concerns to the attention of the AmeriCorps Coordinator, who will address them, involving the the manager or agency leadership as necessary. The Generations Manager monitors the Members and the program for compliance, including that the program does not violate non-duplication, non-displacement and non-supplementation requirements, as well as to ensure volunteers are not engaged in prohibited/unallowable activities like fundraising.

Progressive disciplinary process will be followed, starting at the center level elevating to program management as needed. The following process outlines the consequences of violating any policies: (1) verbal warning, (2) written warning and reprimand, (3) suspension from service, (4) release for cause. Progressive discipline may not be followed in all cases. Depending on the nature of the violation other circumstances including, past conduct, one or more steps may be repeated or skipped. In a case of serious infractions, especially those involving violent or criminal behavior, the member will be released immediately for cause. The agency's Leadership Council and Board of Directors will become involved if necessary, although this has not been necessary in the history of the partnership between Porter-Leath and AmeriCorps.

### **Budget/Cost Effectiveness**

#### a. Cost Effectiveness

The CNCS investment is \$322,320 which will provide 24 Members to serve over 480 children. Porter-Leath's cost per MSY is \$13,430, which includes the living allowance (\$12,100) FICA, insurance, uniforms, training and client incentives (\$1,330). Program costs include salaries and benefits for 2 staff, a manager (30%) and a coordinator (100%); special events, supplies, training and conferences, travel- local and out of town, utilities, communication and occupancy.

Porter-Leath's fixed amount full-time application of \$322,320 represents approximately 1% of the agency's budget. Supporting funds will come from United Way and other private funding. Porter-Leath Head Start has received public accolades for its cost/benefit ratio and is a viable solution to preparing children for a lifetime of academic success. The budget is in alignment with the narrative in that funding will provide 24 members to the project, allowing it to be implemented successfully.

Porter-Leath currently supports the AmeriCorps program with grants and donations from private foundations, corporations and individuals. Through structured and systematic program development, fiscal oversight, strategic planning and program evaluation, the agency has achieved local, state and national funding to support the agency including funding from United Way. Despite the tough economic conditions, Porter-Leath has not eliminated or reduced any service delivery.

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### **b. Budget Adequacy**

The majority of the funding will support the member living allowance and the agency has included a minimum amount to cover travel for CNCS required meetings. Additional travel is included for members to use when traveling from their job site to the main campus of Porter-Leath. Supplies include member shirts, AmeriCorps buttons and other AmeriCorps branded items to assist with the clear distinction of AmeriCorps members while at their service site. Criminal Background checks are budgeted for the program staff, with Members' checks being provided by the Early Childhood Program. The budget will support these 24 members in carrying out the program to improve Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills assessment scores through individualized attention for students in need. The budget provides sufficient funding to achieve all objectives in the performance measures.

### **Evaluation Summary or Plan**

Evaluation Plan: AmeriCorps members will serve with Porter-Leath Head Start children to provide needed individual literacy activities. Every year the AmeriCorps members will serve 480 children that need individual enrichment as identified by Brigance assessment scores. The Brigance is an assessment tool used in early childhood education to identify learning delays, as well as strengths and weaknesses in language and cognitive skills. Porter-Leath follows a pre, mid and post- test method over the course of the school year. Twenty-four full-time AmeriCorps members will be assigned in two person teams to 12 Head Start centers. Each Member will be assigned 20 children from within the center to work on literacy activities that focus on cognitive skills, reading abilities, and writing abilities. Members will work with their assigned children weekly for a minimum of 16 weeks, where during this period, children will receive two Brigance screenings. Outcomes for the program will be to increase the Brigance scores for 90% of the children served during the year, with 80% of the children served during the three year period to enter kindergarten ready to learn. Over the course of the three year grant period, a total of 1,400 children will be reached with 1120 children (80%) ready to enter kindergarten.

Evaluation questions to be addressed through this outcome study will be 1) What is the effect of the AmeriCorps program on literacy outcomes? 2) Does the effect on literacy outcomes vary by student characteristics/demographics? and 3) Do effects on literacy outcomes vary by site?

Members will be assigned children by classroom teachers based on the results of the Brigance Inventory of Basic Skills. Parents will give consent for the Member to provide individualized activities to meet the literacy needs of the child. Data will be collected through the Brigance assessments completed within 45 days of enrollment, mid and end year. At the end of the school year, the

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Performance and Quality Improvement staff will collect, track, monitor and assess data for outcomes. Final reports will provide comparison of the data between children served through the AmeriCorps program and those not.

The Performance and Quality Improvement director will act as the evaluator during the process. Ms. Toni Edmond has 10 years of experience in program evaluations, ongoing measuring and monitoring of programs and adherence to accreditation/regulatory standards. Since the agency has quality staff on hand, through the PQI department, there should be minimal cost to the program for the evaluation study.

### Amendment Justification

N/A

### Clarification Summary

1. Porter-Leath ensures that each National Service program operates separately. Even though all three programs fall under the supervision of one director, each program has a full time coordinator who provides for the day to day operations of the program and monitors for compliance with volunteers and assignments. The AmeriCorps members and the Foster Grandparent volunteers both serve in the same geographic area, but the RSVP volunteers serve specifically in the DeSoto county Mississippi community. Even though both the AmeriCorps members and the Foster Grandparent volunteers both serve in the Memphis community, the 24 AmeriCorps members primarily serve in Porter-Leath sponsored Head Start and Early Head Start centers only. Foster Grandparent volunteers serve in Head Start, Early Head Start, preschool centers, elementary schools and residential treatment center schools. In the centers where both Foster Grandparent volunteers serve along with AmeriCorps members, each member/volunteer are assigned to a different set of students by the classroom teacher with the parent completing a Parental Consent Form. Parental consent forms are logged by the Performance and Quality Department, assuring that member and volunteer assignments do not overlap and children are unduplicated in all counts.

2. AmeriCorps members are assigned to specific service locations as an additional support to the teachers. Teachers are expected to serve an entire class of 20 students in a head start classroom. When students fall behind their peers or have low performance, it is impossible for the teacher to spend additional one-on-one time to help meet specific needs of these students. AmeriCorps members are that additional one-on-one support for low performing students. Teachers make assignments for both

## Narratives

the AmeriCorps member and the Foster Grandparent volunteer, allowing more students to receive additional one-on-one support needed to meet their literacy needs. Once the AmeriCorps member is assigned to a student, the teacher designs a unique lesson plan with specific outcomes that may not be met within the normal classroom curriculum, to help meet the needs of that student. The member uses this unique lesson plan to plan the literacy activities they will use during their individual sessions, documenting the performance outcomes on a Child Individualization Form that notes the learning objective, the activities completed, the engagement of the child during the sessions and the outcome of the learning objective, which are then signed by both the member and the teacher. AmeriCorps members spend a more intensive time with targeted students to provide much needed individualized support. Foster Grandparent volunteers are assigned to different students, as many as five, using an Assignment and Parental Consent Form outlining their specific activities and performance outcomes, that may not be met through the normal classroom curriculum. Foster grandparent volunteers focus their activities on pre-literacy and social skills to allow children to be successful in the classroom. They do not provide the intensive support as do the AmeriCorps members. Together, the programs allow more students to receive additional one-on-one support to help them reach their educational benchmarks. Other volunteers placed within the centers assist with the overall activities within the center and classroom. They do not provide individual support to students. Interns assigned to the center function in activities that assist in the overall management of the centers and are supervised by the center supervisor.

3. Porter-Leath has sponsored the AmeriCorps program since 1995, with a rich history of achieving meaningful outcomes. The cost per MSY of \$13,430, only covers member costs of \$12,100 for the living allowance and \$1,330 for insurance, uniforms, and training. The Porter-Leath match covers all other costs, including leadership salaries, benefits, special event and project costs, supplies, training and conferences, travel, utilities, communication and occupancy. This is the lowest MSY cost that Porter-Leath can sustain at this time. Porter-Leath has several federal initiatives, including 2 Senior Corps programs, Head Start and Early Head Start, that all have substantial match requirements. The agency has been faced with a reduction of outside funding from multiple sources which has impacted the ability to provide additional monetary support to all programs within the agency. According to the Alliance for Nonprofit Excellence, with fewer businesses and potential funders in Memphis and more nonprofits competing for funding, many nonprofits are ending their budget years in a deficit. For cities with a population from 500,000 to 1 million, Memphis is the poorest in the nation, with

## **Narratives**

47% of the children under 18 living in poverty. In Memphis, poverty rates for African-Americans (34%) and Hispanics (45%) are higher than the national average. One in every 3 children in Memphis lives in poverty in single parent households. This puts a strain on the economic and social-emotional support systems for these families. Support services for these families are critical. Services provided by AmeriCorps aid Head Start centers in providing services at a level that would increase the opportunities for families served to break the cycle of poverty through education and connection to community resources. The agency will continue to seek additional funding streams to replace this support with the plan of reducing MSY costs in the future years of this grant request.

### **Continuation Changes**

N/A

### **Grant Characteristics**