



**Request for Proposals**  
**AmeriCorps Program Impact Evaluation**  
**Communities In Schools of Central Texas**

**September 16, 2022**

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Since 1985, Communities In Schools of Central Texas (CISCT) has worked inside public schools, connecting kids to caring adults and community resources. CISCT sees potential in every student—regardless of race, zip code, or history of marginalization—and works toward a Central Texas where all children have access to needed support, resources, and opportunities to succeed in school, earn post-secondary credentials, and lead happy, healthy, and prosperous lives.

CISCT’s evidence-based programming is grounded in the philosophy that caring, supportive relationships can significantly impact a child’s ability to come to school every day, ready to learn. To build these relationships with students, CISCT places full-time social service professionals, AmeriCorps Members, and clinical interns on public school campuses to support students’ social-emotional health, mental health, and basic needs. In doing so, CISCT empowers students to overcome barriers to their success.

CISCT surrounds students with a community of support, empowering students to stay in school and achieve in life. Our mission calls on us to embrace the rich backgrounds, experience, talents, cultures, and contributions that our students, families, and staff bring to the work of transforming schools and communities. Diversity is a vital resource and integral part of who we are as an organization. Our passion for social justice calls on us to be honest, transparent, and equitable in all that we do.

Currently, CISCT works with 103 campuses in eight Central Texas school districts: Austin ISD, Bastrop ISD, Elgin ISD, Hays CISD, Lockhart ISD, Manor ISD, Pflugerville ISD, and San Marcos CISD. During the 2021-2022 school year, CISCT empowered 8,519 students through individualized case management services at 100 schools; an additional 54,452 students received short-term services, basic needs assistance, or school-wide supports. As a result of our support, 98% of students served intensively by CISCT completed the school year, 99% graduated or were promoted to the next grade, and 81% improved their academics, attendance, and or behavior.

The CISCT AmeriCorps Program engages 60-80 individuals in national service each year through school-based mentoring to support social emotional learning and academic support in our targeted areas of need (academics, behavior, attendance, social services). CISCT AmeriCorps Mentors work with 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students individually or in small groups to set targeted goals and support students in making progress toward these identified outcomes. During the 2021-2022 school year, the CISCT AmeriCorps program collectively served 812 students across 39 campuses.

Communities In Schools of Central Texas invites proposals from qualified individuals and organizations to respond to this Request for Proposals (RFP) to conduct an impact evaluation for the Communities In Schools of Central Texas AmeriCorps program.

### **A. Deadlines and Submission Information**

#### **1. Proposal Deadline**

Proposals must be received no later than 5:00p.m. CST on Friday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

#### **2. Submission Process**

Proposals should be submitted via email, postal service, or hand delivery to:

- Amanda Miller, AmeriCorps Program Director
- [amiller@ciscentraltexas.org](mailto:amiller@ciscentraltexas.org)
- 3000 S. IH 35, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78704

### **3. Inquiries**

Inquiries may be submitted via email to Amanda Miller at [amiller@ciscentraltexas.org](mailto:amiller@ciscentraltexas.org).

### **4. Notification**

Successful applicants will be notified via email no later than 5:00p.m. CST on Friday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022.

## **B. Project Purpose, Program Background, and Theory of Change**

### Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this study is to build on previous evaluations and to conduct an impact analysis to determine the impact CISCT AmeriCorps members have on students' academic engagement, including behavior, attendance, and social emotional skills. CISCT provides national service opportunities for 80+ AmeriCorps members each year; members provide both 1:1 and small group mentoring and academic support to nearly 1,000 students on 40 elementary and middle school campuses across the Central Texas region.

CISCT AmeriCorps Member primary service activities are to provide one-on-one or small group mentoring to students in grades 3-8. AmeriCorps members use the evidence-based integrated student supports ([ISS](#)) model that is used nationally by CIS programs. As shown in this [2018 Research Brief](#), The CIS ISS model is well-positioned to make a direct impact on social and emotional learning, including competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. The CISCT AmeriCorps program uses an integrated approach of the ISS model paired with the [Developmental Relationships Framework](#) (DRF) from the Search Institute. The DRF provides five core elements of a successful, productive relationship, including providing support, challenging growth, sharing power, expressing care, and expanding possibilities. Using these two frameworks in tandem, CISCT AmeriCorps Members provide supportive, individualized mentoring relationships to the students on their caseload with the intended outcome of an overall increase in attendance, decrease in behavior issues, and increase in academic scores over time. Data will be collected from participating students beginning in 2021-2022 to evaluate the impact of member intervention on student outcomes.

### Summary of Previous Research

Nationally, the impact of CIS support has been extensively evaluated. Results from school-level evaluations confirm that CIS is: 1) One of a small number of dropout prevention organizations with scientifically-based evidence of effectiveness, 2) One of a handful of organizations proven to decrease dropout rates, and 3) The only organization proven to increase graduation rates. As part of a comprehensive national evaluation in 2007-2009, CISCT participated in a Randomized Controlled Trial Study designed and conducted by ICF International. The study examined the value added of CISCT case-managed services on student-level outcomes at six participating high schools with students from two 9th grade cohorts followed for 2 years. Students were randomly assigned to receive or not receive CISCT services. The treatment group consisted of 50.5% male, 49.5% female, 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 26.9% African American, 64.5% Hispanic, and 7.5% White. Data collection included student surveys, service logs, school records, and information regarding receipt and non-receipt of CISCT services. In Year 1, students receiving services (i.e., average of 18.4 hours of service) significantly outperformed other students in GPA, and credit completion. Positive findings were also found in year 2 but were not statistically significant and could be due to the decrease in the number of service hours per student. The treatment students had significant outcomes in year 1 where they received an average of 18.4 hours of service and positive findings in year 2 where they received an average of 10.7 hours of service. The study's findings directly inform the activities and number of service hours provided by the

members. This study and report were on the same intervention as the program model described in this application. (ICF International, 2010, Communities In Schools National Evaluation Volume 5: Randomized Controlled Trial Study).

As part of the AmeriCorps impact evaluation requirement, the CISCT AmeriCorps program has completed two quasi-experimental outcome studies to date, one in 2017 and 2020. In the 2017 evaluation conducted by Creekside Research Solutions (intervention period 2016-2017), the goal was to build upon the previous evaluation by identifying the unique impact of members on student outcomes and examining the program's implementation and fidelity measures. A random selected sample consisted of 2,568 students; of those, 1,140 were students served by CISCT on campuses with no members present, 552 were students served directly by members, and 876 were students served by CISCT on campuses that had members but were not paired with a member. Participating members and program managers (CISCT staff) were randomly selected to avoid bias. One key finding of this study is the students served by members were statistically more likely to be promoted to the next grade level. Differences in group size and grade level in the comparison groups was an identified limitation in this study, which has informed our current research plan. This study and report were on the same intervention as the program model described in this application. (Creekside Research, Stephanie Fairchild, 2017, AmeriCorps at Communities In Schools of Central Texas Impact Analysis, 2016-2017, self-published). In the [2020 impact evaluation](#) conducted by Agile Analytics (intervention year 2017-2018) the goal was to build upon the previous evaluation by identifying unique impact of member direct service activities on student academic outcomes as measured by standardized test scores, and compare the data with a representative comparison group. A random selected sample consisted of 342 students; of those, 171 were students served by members, and 171 were students on campuses without CIS. A matched sample was created from a limited data set provided by AISD on the following Ethnicity: Hispanic, Free/Reduced Lunch, 2017 STAAR Reading percentile, 2017 STAAR Math percentile, 2017 attendance rate, 2017 number of disciplinary incidents and grades in Math, ELA, Science, and Social Studies. One key finding of this study is that students served by CISCT AmeriCorps members had statistically significantly higher Social Studies grades in semester two than students in the control group. There were no other significant differences for any other variables assessed. This study and report were on the same intervention as the program model described in this application. (Agile Analytics, Andrea Hutson and Lindsay Lamb, CIS OF CENTRAL TEXAS Austin ISD AmeriCorps Outcomes Evaluation, 2020, self-published).

Our current impact evaluation will focus on differential impact on student outcomes based on AmeriCorps-provided interventions. Our aim is to understand the extent that students served by CISCT AmeriCorps members achieve their targeted outcomes in academics and behavior and how this compares to changes in academics and behavior for students who are in a matched comparison group without AmeriCorps member support.

### Program Theory of Change

In the 103 K-12 schools currently served by CIS of Central Texas (CISCT), over 46,000 students are at-risk for school dropout because they have repeated one or more grades; failed the state standardized test; have limited English proficiency; are homeless or in foster care; are pregnant or parenting; or have been set back academically by other challenges. More than 52,000 students at these schools are economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2017-18 Texas Academic Performance Reports). Students of color (particularly male), English Language Learners (ELL), and low-income students are overrepresented in dropout rates in Central Texas (E3 Alliance, 2020). The individual and societal consequences of dropping out have been well-documented. Students who drop out before graduation are more than twice as likely to live in poverty, over three times more likely to be arrested, and eight times more likely to be incarcerated (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011).

While graduation rates are improving nationally, in Central Texas disparities in graduation rates persist among students of color, low-income, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities (E3 Alliance, 2020). CISCT provides year-round dropout prevention services at 103 high-need schools in 7 Central Texas Independent School Districts (ISD)-Austin, Bastrop, Elgin, Lockhart, Manor, Hays Consolidated, and San Marcos Consolidated. CISCT partners with schools in underserved communities with large percentages of at-risk and economically disadvantaged students. In 2019-2020 86.4% of CISCT students received free and reduced lunch; 25% were ELL; 10.3% had an incarcerated parent; 13.4% were in special education; and 0.6% were pregnant or parenting.

The CISCT theory of change is centered on providing students with opportunities to develop positive and safe relationships with a caring adult. We believe that relationships are crucial to student success and that every student deserves a one-on-one relationship with a caring adult. The CISCT AmeriCorps program plays a critical role in this model by providing supportive mentoring relationships to at-risk, economically disadvantaged students attending a CISCT supported school. CISCT AmeriCorps Members meet with a caseload of students for up to an hour on a weekly basis and are available for drop-in support as needed. Through these dedicated mentoring times, AmeriCorps members can implement developmental relationships with their students and work toward student-set goals. These goals are based on students' self-identified needs in the areas of academics, attendance and/or behavior. Specific activities during mentoring sessions vary based on the students' goals, grade level, and individual interests, however, AmeriCorps members use the time with students to connect with them and build social emotional skills that support student success in the classroom. When students have a caring adult relationship in their lives, they are more likely to be engaged in school. As noted in CISCT's 2020-2021 Impact Report, 83% of students with an academic need, 72% of students with an attendance need, and 71% of students with a behavior need showed improvement in these areas. This number reflects the impact that both CISCT program staff and CISCT AmeriCorps Members have on our Central Texas students.

Research conducted during COVID-19 highlights the school achievement disparities across income levels and between white students and students of Black and Latinx/Hispanic heritage. School shutdowns not only cause disproportionate learning losses for students but also compound existing gaps between students that will lead to an increase in drop out (McKinsey & Company, 2019). While the average COVID-19 learning loss is projected to be 7 months, the projection for Black students is 10.3 months, Latinx/Hispanic students is 9.2 months, and students from low-income families by more than a year. COVID-19 is expected to exacerbate existing gaps by 15-20 percent. To this end, we believe that the support provided by AmeriCorps members will be critical to addressing student achievement gaps as a result of COVID-related learning loss.

The CISCT dropout prevention model ensures that individualized, comprehensive supports are provided for students to overcome the barriers keeping them from engaging in school so they can reengage in the classroom, focus on learning, and succeed in an academic environment. The CISCT AmeriCorps program plays a critical role in this mission by providing supportive mentoring relationships to at-risk, economically disadvantaged students attending a CIS supported school.

### **C. Project Description**

#### **Outcomes of Interest**

The evaluation will be designed to assess changes in targeted needs as a result of AmeriCorps member intervention. Targeted needs include academics (if failing two or more core classes, did not meet readiness test/STAAR/EOC standards), and/or behavior (measured by student school discipline records).

## Research Questions

1. (QED Research Question): To what extent do academic and/or behavior outcomes improve for CISCT students served by AmeriCorps members compared to a matched sample of students not served by AmeriCorps members (Between-groups comparison, pre-post change for AmeriCorps participants vs. comparison sample)?
2. (Within group – exploratory question): Does improvement in academic and/or behavior outcomes vary depending on individual student characteristics such as: grade level, gender, ethnicity, economic disadvantage, English Language Learner, special education, and number of years (if any) students previously received CIS services? (Within-group/between students' comparison, pre-post change for each AmeriCorps-served student participants)
3. (Within group – exploratory question): To what extent do the targeted outcomes vary based on number of hours and type of services provided to students? (Within-group/between students' comparison, pre-post change for each AmeriCorps-served student participants)

## Proposed Research Design

CISCT has Data Sharing agreements with all districts in which CIS operates; however, for the scope of this study we will limit the research sample to students served within Austin Independent School District (AISD), due to greater availability of matched comparison data for non-AmeriCorps-served students in the district. We may also request data via Open Records Request to the Texas Education Agency, if needed.

CISCT external evaluations will utilize a quasi-experimental design, examining quantitative data for academic and behavior improvement pre-post intervention. This evaluation will build on previous evaluations, with the results used to ensure the continuous improvement of the program. We selected a quasi-experimental design to assess the impact of the CISCT AmeriCorps program because this design, which compares the outcomes of matched groups, is consistent with the Corporation for National and Community Service's criteria for causality. Quasi-experimental designs offer an alternative path for establishing causality when random assignment is not feasible. Unlike experimental designs, quasi-experimental designs operate in real-life, messy contexts. The results are more generalizable. Also, quasi-experiments require fewer resources than experiments. Despite these strengths, quasi-experimental designs pose potential challenges to internal validity, or the certainty that the outcomes are attributable to the program. Without random assignment, differences might exist between the participants and the comparison group, potentially obscuring the results.

## Analysis Plan

Data will be collected from students participating in CISCT AmeriCorps service along with matched students not participating in CISCT in 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years to address the research questions outlined above. Students will be matched on the independent variables from 2021-2022 year (including school, grade level, gender, ethnicity, LEP monitored status, gifted and talented, special education, number of days enrolled) Ideally, comparison sample students will also be matched on baseline academic performance and behavior/discipline incidents (if possible within school district capability).

Program outcomes will be assessed by comparing participants to matched non-participants on amount of change (from baseline) in academic performance as measured by STARR (Texas state assessment – normed and standardized for equivalency for grade levels) proficiency level in math and reading, and behavior, as measured by discipline incidents in school records.

Research Question 1a (QED) differences between Americorps-served students and matched non-participants will be analyzed with a repeated measures (pre/post) between-groups design, using regression analysis to compare academic and behavior change. Research Questions 1b/1c

(exploratory) within-group design will test for differences in Americorps-served students' academic and behavior change depending on individual characteristics (demographic and service provision variables) using multiple regression for continuous variables e.g. service hours/ and General Linear Model for mixed measures, (e.g. gender x service hours).

All analyses will include student grade level in the regression model (though past years' CIS data has not shown significant differences in degree of academic improvement by grade level within elementary and middle school samples).

#### Final Report Requirements and Dissemination Plan

The final report will include a 1-3 page executive summary and a thorough discussion of areas of future exploration in subsequent impact evaluations. Results of the program evaluation will be reviewed and shared with AmeriCorps program staff, executive and program leadership within CISCT, OneStar, members and program managers as appropriate. The program will incorporate the evaluation findings into the program's strategic plan and act on any recommendations or suggestions for improvement outlined within the report.

#### D. Eligible Applicants

The evaluator must be an established evaluator with quantitative expertise and experience in the field of education research. The evaluator should be independent and unaffiliated with the CISCT AmeriCorps program. The evaluator should be a strong leader, team player, and possess good analytical skills along with experience in evaluating educational based programs. The evaluator must also have experience conducting a program evaluation that is similar in size and scope to the requested program evaluation.

#### E. Contract Period

The evaluation will be carried out during the current grant cycle (2021-2024) and the evaluation report should be ready by September 30<sup>th</sup> 2023, in order to inform the CISCT AmeriCorps Programs competitive recomplete application submitted during the next grant cycle (November 2023).

09/16/2022 – 10/07/2022	RFP live and accepting proposals
10/10/2022 – 10/20/2022	Proposal review & evaluator selection period
10/21/2022	Notification of selection sent via email
11/01/2022 – 04/01/2023	Project Part 1: Request for data to AISD and analysis of 2021-2022 student data
04/01/2023 – 08/01/2023	Project Part 2: analysis of 2022-2023 student data, as available
08/01/2023 – 09/15/2023	Final analysis and report draft
09/15/2023 – 09/30/2023	Report revisions and final version due to program*

*\*Timeline may change based on availability of 2022-2023 final student data from AISD*

#### F. Available Funds

This evaluation project is funded by AmeriCorps the federal agency; the total amount available for this proposed research is \$20,000, following this timeframe:

Year 1 (9/1/2022 – 8/31/2023): \$10,000 - Data collection and primary analysis for evaluation project

Year 2 (9/1/2023 – 8/31/2024): \$10,000 - Final discussion and summary, final report draft and review

The budget covers the evaluator's time, mileage, materials, and supplies in completing the evaluation.

### **G. Proposal Contents**

Proposals should consist of the following sections:

1. Understanding of the project scope
2. Specific approach to be used for each task
3. Deliverables
4. Past Performance, including list of previous evaluation projects undertaken in the past three years
5. List of key personnel and resumes, including evaluators' familiarity with equitable evaluation principles and experience with ethical storytelling through data interpretation and presentation