



Reading Partners: Innovation and Scaling of National Literacy Tutoring Program

Project Narrative

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Project Introduction

Reading Partners (RP) seeks a mid-phase Education Innovation and Research (EIR) grant to evaluate and scale the implementation of its Reading Partners Connects (RPCx) program. The overall goal of the proposed project is to expand RP's ability to provide its proven literacy support programming through a virtual program delivery method, RPCx, and evaluate the efficacy of RPCx. Implementation of the project will increase availability of RP's proven literacy intervention model, through RPCx, to improve student literacy outcomes and support equity, access, and national program scale.

Absolute and Invitational Priorities

RP's proposed mid-phase EIR project addresses the following of the Department of Education's Absolute and Invitational Priorities:

Absolute Priority 1 – *Moderate Evidence*: Several sources, including previous rigorous evaluations proving the significance of RP's literacy intervention, have found one-on-one tutoring to be an effective method for increasing student literacy achievement. This project builds on the 2015 RP randomized control trial (RCT), conducted by MDRC, which proved the effectiveness of the Reading Partners Traditional (RPT) in-person volunteer tutoring program for students in grades 2-5 (Jacob, R., Armstrong, C. & Willard, J., 2015).

Absolute Priority 2 – *Field-Initiated Innovations-General*: RP's RPCx program is an innovative model of delivering its one-on-one tutoring program in a virtual context. Evidence from this study will be used to validate the modality of RP's virtual literacy intervention as a viable method to scale the program to improve student achievement and attainment. Early outcome data from RP indicates that RPCx is a needed, useful innovation in the tutoring field.

Invitational Priority 1- *Innovative Approaches to Addressing the Impact of COVID-19 on Underserved Students and Educators*: Early research on the impact of COVID-19 on underserved students and educators in the US shows that the pandemic has resulted in unprecedented learning loss and widening inequity (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2020). Through RPCx, RP will be able to increase its volunteer tutor capacity and therefore will be able to reach a larger population of underserved students and educators that have been impacted by disrupted education.

Invitational Priority 2- *Promoting Equity and Adequacy in Student Access to Educational Resources and Opportunities*. RP's programs and RPCx are positioned to increase equity and adequacy for literacy interventions. Private tutoring is a \$47 billion industry in the United States alone (Global Industry Analysts, 2020). For low-income and underserved students, financial barriers keep students from accessing needed tutoring support resources. The enormous demand for tutoring attests to the intervention efficacy, yet access to tutoring services remains inherently unequal and many tutoring programs are poorly designed, not of high quality, adequate dosage, and/or do not have evidence of impact on students' learning. Scaling of RPCx will allow RP to extend proven, high-quality tutoring interventions to target student populations at no cost to participants and their families, directly in a school setting.

A. Significance

National Significance

Several studies have confirmed that tutoring is among the most effective education interventions ever to be evaluated (Dietrichson et al., 2017; Fryer, 2017; Nickow et al., 2020). Further, based on evidence, literacy tutoring, particularly in grades K-3, can have a profound, positive impact on student literacy achievement. As communities face an unprecedented

challenge to student education, validated field innovations are needed to scaffold students' learning as schools and communities navigate a changed educational landscape. RPCx is an innovative implementation of RP's literacy tutoring program in a virtual context. RPCx is poised to meet the critical need for continued literacy tutoring post-pandemic and beyond to ensure that the most vulnerable students receive access to high-quality literacy instruction at the same rates as their more affluent peers. RP anticipates that the need for our program will continue to grow over the next five years as students begin to return to in-person instruction and the long-term impacts of interrupted instruction resulting from COVID-19 become apparent.

According to the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 21% of fourth-graders from low-income households are reading proficiently. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US was already dealing with a literacy crisis, with over nine million students not able to read on grade level by fourth grade (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2013). While the total impact of the pandemic on disrupted learning and widening the opportunity gap is not fully known at this point, experts expect it to be monumental. A June 2020 report from McKinsey and Company anticipates that most students will lose an average of seven months of learning due to COVID-19, but for Black students the estimate is 10.3 months, Latinx students, 9.2 months, and students from low-income households by more than a year. Based on the previous evaluation of RPT, evidence proves that RP's model of one-on-one literacy tutoring results in approximately one and a half to two months of additional growth in student reading proficiency (Jacob, R., Armstrong, C. & Willard, J., 2015). Though not equal to the current estimated loss caused by disrupted learning, RP's tutoring program has demonstrated ability to support learning growth in populations that are most at risk of adverse COVID-19 learning impacts. Further, RP's proposed project directly aligns with Robert Slavin's *Tutoring Marshall Plan*, which calls for a large-scale

investment in proven tutoring interventions for Title 1 schools to advance student achievement in light of the impacts of COVID-19 (Slavin, 2020). Through this grant, RP will expand its ability to provide its proven one-on-one tutoring model to support students directly in their schools through RPCx to impact students on a national scale while also evaluating its virtual delivery model.

Reading Partners Connects (RPCx)

RP's literacy support model transforms a dedicated space at a partner school into a reading center, provides a full-time AmeriCorps member on site to manage day-to-day operations, and recruits a corps of 40 to 100 community volunteers to work one-on-one with students in pull-out sessions during the school day or after school in kindergarten through grade 4. RP provides its services through partnerships with Title 1 schools where the demographics of students served include 79% systemically/economically disadvantaged, based on publicly available Free and Reduced Meals school data, and 93% are students of color. Though RP's traditional in-person program is highly effective, the scale of implementation for RPT is limited by the "brick and mortar" reading center model.

Under development since April 2020 and launched in fall 2020, RPCx is Reading Partner's online tutoring platform. RP recognized the need to continue its programming during the pandemic and was able to accelerate implementation of RPCx to respond to challenges presented by the pandemic. RPCx is designed on the same framework as RP's traditional in-person tutoring, using its evidence-based Reading Partners curriculum, lesson plans, and tutor guides as RP's traditional in-person tutoring. As a rigorous, nationally-recognized Tier 2 reading intervention backed by gold-standard evidence of impact, RP's program empowers volunteer

tutors to follow structured, guided lesson plans and helps young readers develop mastery of grade-appropriate foundational reading skills and improve their literacy skill development.

Using video conferencing in an established RP school reading center, high-quality lesson content based on the science of reading, and ebooks for tutors and students to use for reading skill-building, RP's online learning solution supports tutors in engaging students in a 45-minute tutoring session twice per week. Lessons follow RP's research-based curriculum and focus on developing mastery of literacy skills. For RPCx, RP provides students with access to laptops, internet, and additional learning materials in their in-person school setting.

RPCx intentionally incorporates important elements of social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum. RP's tutors create safe spaces where students can use literacy education and books as a lever for critical thinking and SEL. Program lessons feature SEL topics such as growth mindset, kindness, empathy, mindfulness, and confidence. These skills empower students beyond literacy growth and classroom success to develop into confident critical thinkers, learners, and global citizens. RPCx's combination of research-based literacy instruction with relationship building brings both educational equity and social-emotional learning to online learning spaces. RP is currently evaluating the impact of its tutoring programs on student SEL skills through RPCx via an evaluation with OMNI Institute scheduled for the 2021-2022 school year.

RPCx Impact

Research demonstrates that tutoring programs, including volunteer-driven programs, are highly effective in helping students who are struggling with reading (Nickow, Oreopoulos & Quan, 2020; Jacob, Armstrong & Willard, 2015; Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes & Moody, 2000). MDRC, a leading independent research firm, conducted a study of Reading Partners' traditional,

in-person program and found that two sessions of one-on-one tutoring per week by a trained community volunteer have a positive and statistically significant impact on reading comprehension, reading fluency, and sight-word reading (Jacob, Armstrong, & Altuna-Willard, 2015). RPCx takes the research-based principles and best practices of volunteer-led tutoring and applies them to one-on-one online tutoring. Tutors who volunteer with RPCx undergo a more robust training sequence compared to RP's in-person program, including two 2-hour orientations, 1-2 practice sessions with AmeriCorps coordinators, and have access to volunteer focused office hours to ask questions. Training also includes cultural competency modules to support equity and inclusive practices. Tutors then lead lessons using RP's step-by-step lesson plans and guides. RP's onsite AmeriCorps members always join the first RPCx session to support quality implementation, and regularly observe and coach tutors to improve their effectiveness in engaging students through RPCx.

Because of the need to pivot to a virtual delivery system in the context of COVID-19, 94% of the 110,914 tutoring sessions RP provided in 2020-2021 were provided through RPCx. Initial outcome data from the implementation of RPCx in 2020-2021 show that students, volunteers, and teachers/principals, saw similar results and satisfaction to RPT. Based on early outcome data from implementation of RPCx in 2020-2021, RP believes that RPCx will yield similar results to RPT. Scaling RPCx through this project is anticipated to significantly impact students' literacy gains in grades K-4.

Through this project, RP and its evaluation partner, MDRC, will produce new evidence on tutoring programs in a virtual setting that will clarify whether and how RPCx can be implemented with positive impacts on student literacy performance. Additionally, this project will support the field in increasing knowledge of the evaluation, implementation, scale, and cost

of traditional in-person tutoring to a virtual context with fidelity to the proven model. RP and MDRC will disseminate research on best practices, implementation models, curriculum resources, and training and coaching processes through this project and evaluation to benefit a wider population of students, schools, and organizations. Further, evaluation findings will support decision makers at the school, district, state, and national levels in understanding the benefits of volunteer one-on-one literacy support to improve student achievement.

B. Strategy to Scale

Unmet Demand

Scholars, educators, philanthropists, journalists, and policymakers have made compelling cases for major expansions to tutoring and national service programs (Brooks, 2020; Burgess, 2020; Campbell et al., 2020; DiPerna, 2020; Dynarski, 2020; Goldrick-Rab & Yoshikawa, 2020; Kraft & Goldstein, 2020; Oreopoulos, 2020; Slavin, 2020; Wong, 2020). This call directly relates to the need to address learning gaps and learning loss that existed prior to the pandemic and those associated with disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This national call also supports the need to address inequities that exist in accessing literacy interventions, namely private and one-on-one tutoring.

Pre-pandemic, RP was serving approximately 11,000 students annually across 12 regions. Even with this reach, the organization recognizes a significant unmet need for the RP program and regularly receives requests from school systems to expand or launch new programs to provide literacy support to high-need students in their schools. However, RP's current traditional delivery model requires a level of investment in staff and resources that reduces opportunities to expand where there are unmet demands for RP's services. For example, a recent statement from the Dallas Independent School District highlights the unmet need for tutoring support in one of

RP's regions, "We need more partners to scale our tutoring work. We have four organizations that do fantastic work right now, but that limits us to 45 schools, and we have 150 elementary schools. Both across schools and within schools, we need to serve more students with tutoring." (National Student Support Accelerator, 2021). Additionally, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) requested that RP serve nine additional schools in 2021-2022, representing a 56% increase in the DCPS schools served by RP in 2020-2021.

Beyond the demand for services at the school system level, there is a clear unmet demand for comprehensive literacy support at the student level. According to the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, only 21 percent of fourth-graders from low-income communities are reading proficiently. Additionally, as evidenced in RP's previous evaluations and program impact, literacy tutoring, particularly in grades K-3, can have a profound, positive impact on student literacy achievement. In fact, when systemically disadvantaged students are reading at grade level by third grade, they are thirteen times more likely to graduate on time from high school (Hernandez, 2011). Equipping students with the foundational literacy skills they need to succeed unlocks lasting opportunities that can have a profound impact on their academic achievement and lifelong learning. RP recognizes the unmet need for one-on-one tutoring at a school, regional, and national level and seeks to scale its programming to meet students' needs.

Barriers to Scale

The demand for RP's tutoring program exists and the innovation presented by RPCx provides the organization with the opportunity to scale its literacy tutoring program. However, there are barriers to scale that exist that RP has identified and seeks to mitigate with its program design and strategy to scale.

As an organization serving nearly 11,000 students on an annual basis through one-on-one tutoring services, RP faces capacity constraints in terms of resources available to grow and scale the program. Financial support for RP's programming includes federal AmeriCorps funding, private philanthropy, and fee-for-service. While these sources support and sustain the organization, this funding is not available to fund organizational innovation, including scalability and replication of RPCx. RP plans to leverage an EIR grant from the Department of Education to increase the sustainability of scaling activities after the grant period. Through this project, RP will be able to attract private philanthropy support to grow and sustain future programming.

Another barrier to scale experienced by RP is the availability of local volunteers. To significantly scale programming to address unmet demand, RP will need at least 8,000 additional volunteers over the next five years. In the RPT model the volunteer pool is made up of local volunteers that need to be available at specific times and access transportation to meet in-person. RPCx mitigates barriers to the number of volunteers, availability of volunteers, background of volunteers, and travel/transportation for volunteers that could support program scale.

RPCx's virtual delivery system allows RP's one-on-one tutoring program to utilize tutors located across the country. This will allow RP to significantly increase its volunteer pool without geographic restrictions, thereby building in the opportunity to scale programming more rapidly to meet demand. The virtual model removes travel time and other constraints from volunteer capacity. This aspect of the RPCx model provides volunteers with an option to participate with a lower overall time commitment to the program. Further, it allows a more diverse pool of volunteers to join as the virtual model allows for workday participation in a way that in-person tutoring restricts.

Scaling Strategy

RP seeks to implement its strategy to scale through this Mid-Phase EIR grant. RP's strategy to scale includes developing the following capacities to deliver RPCx at scale. RP's overall scaling strategy over the five year grant is shown in Exhibit A in Appendix J.

- 1. Partnership development and management:** To expand to over 16,000 students annually by RP's FY2027 through RPCx, RP needs to increase its business development capacity to develop new relationships with school districts and, in the future, other third-party partners. To do this, RP plans to add strategic capacity to support its scale through the addition of a Chief Impact Officer and Partnership Development Director. RP has completed the development of these job descriptions and core competencies for both roles. Additionally, RP's Regional Executive Directors will support strategic partnership development and management to expand RP's footprint, thereby increasing access to more students.
- 2. Program delivery capacity:** To continue to scale RPCx and refine the platform and delivery model, RP needs additional program implementation capacity. RP also needs additional program management capacity as it expands to new schools, districts, geographies, and volunteer populations. RP is ready to hire, manage, and train additional RP staff and expand its AmeriCorps capacity. RP will also develop additional capacity to provide technical assistance and coaching on the RPCx model, curriculum, and system.
- 3. RPCx platform and content development:** In order to scale, RP will expand its capability to manage and evolve its virtual tutoring platform and content. To do this, RP will need web development and/or edtech product development capacity to manage the technology, conduct ongoing quality assurance, and develop features and functionality

that affect user experience. RP will continue to refine its RPCx training program to align with platform updates and functionality for RP staff and AmeriCorps members.

Additionally, to support scale and sustainability, RP will build its content library to include RP produced ebooks and materials to reduce reliance on external vendors for these materials, thereby reducing the cost of the program over time.

The RPCx program creates increased opportunities to connect with students in high-need communities that RP doesn't have the current capacity to serve. RPCx allows for expanded access to tutoring for students through reduced volunteer geographic and time restrictions (i.e., increased availability of a diverse pool of program volunteers). Additionally, this model to scale will allow RP to consider future expansion through evening and weekend tutoring, partnerships with out-of-school time programs, after-school programs, or community-based organizations.

Program Replication

RP will utilize this project to gather evidence to ensure that the organization can successfully replicate the program in its current regional settings and beyond. RP will achieve this by undertaking a five-year project to plan, design, implement, and evaluate RPCx, while utilizing opportunities to continuously improve the model as RP brings this innovation to scale.

The implementation and evaluation of RPCx, through this project, will be studied in up to five of RP's twelve regions. Potential regions included in this project are Los Angeles, North Texas, South Carolina, Tulsa, and Washington, DC. Based on the results of the study and implementation, RP will capitalize on lessons learned and expand access to one-on-one tutoring across all of its regions. RP also anticipates developing plans at the culmination of this project to assess the opportunity to scale RPCx beyond its current regions.

The basis for RPCx program replication feasibility and strategy will be derived from MDRC’s work to estimate the impacts of RPCx on literacy outcomes for a diverse population of students, to examine the implementation of RPCx in a virtual setting, provide guidance on scaling RPCx with fidelity to other schools, and analyze program cost. This body of evidence will significantly contribute to successful replication of RPCx and the field of literacy support with a focus on virtual interventions. RP will disseminate the results and information through its regular participation in national conferences, workshops, and events to share best practices and promote the work of local initiatives. Additionally, MDRC will participate in disseminating evaluation results through reports produced, conference participation, and through collaborations with national advocacy organizations, such as EdTrust and the Learning Policy Institute.

C. Project Design

Logic Model

The RPCx model is based-on implementing RP’s traditional, evidence-based literacy support intervention in the virtual context. This project’s logic model, shown in Appendix G, outlines the framework for RPCx resources and program inputs, process and mediators, student outcomes, and moderators.

Target Population. The target population for this project will also mirror the population served by RP’s traditional programming serving students at under-resourced, Title I schools in communities where a significant portion of students—most of whom identify as Black or Latinx—qualify for Free and Reduced Price Meals. Through this project, RP seeks to target students in grades K-4 who are six months to 2.5 years behind grade level in reading based on standardized, norm referenced and criterion referenced student assessments and do not have an IEP or are currently engaged in RP.

Resources/Program Inputs. As part of the RPCx program, RP provides students, volunteers, and staff with dedicated school space and use of materials. Within the dedicated space, program participants are provided with access to technology equipment including laptop computers, video conferencing, content hosted on the RPCx platform, and access to ebooks.

Processes/Mediators. Core components for RP's staff and tutors include rigorous onboarding training, ongoing training, and instructional supervision and support. Core components that RPCx students receive as part of the program are bi-weekly 45-minute tutoring sessions that follow an individualized reading plan tailored to each student's particular needs and strengths. Tutors use Reading Partners' research-based curriculum, which consists of a series of structured lesson plans that progress from alphabet knowledge and phonics instruction for early readers to comprehension strategy instruction for more advanced students. Exhibit B in Appendix J shows the interface of RPCx with live one-on-one tutor support. Students receive programming in a dedicated space in their schools with access to computers, internet, and Program Coordinator technology support.

Student Outcomes. Predicted outcomes for students participating in RPCx are improved foundational reading skills in reading comprehension, fluency, and sight word efficiency in the shorter term and improved reading proficiency at the end of the school year in the longer term. RPCx will serve over 70,000 students during this grant period and RP expects that students will significantly improve their reading achievement.

Project Goals, Objectives, Activities, and Outcomes

The project's goal is to build the capacity needed to scale RPCx to meet national needs for literacy support and intervention. Based on this goal, RP has developed four objectives and related outcomes linked to student learning, volunteer engagement, program replication, and

dissemination of evaluation findings. Objectives, activities, outcomes, and measures for the project are shown in Table A below.

Taken together the impact of RPCx will produce student, school, regional, and national outcomes related to improved literacy achievement. At the student level, approximately 13,800 students to meet their primary, individualized literacy goal. At the school and regional levels, partnering with RP will help build the capacity of 363 schools and the corresponding school districts by stemming learning loss and student achievement gaps. RP creates long-term partnerships with schools and school districts ensuring that positive outcomes continue in the school systems year over year. Finally, this project will produce national level outcomes by building RP’s capacity to scale the RPCx model, which will increase the reach of programming beyond RP’s 12 regions. The long-term impacts of RP’s national scale will fall outside of the project period but the groundwork for national impact will be established with this project.

Table A: Objectives, Activities, Outcomes, and Measures

Objective 1: RP will build its organizational capacity to support implementation of RPCx at scale		
Activities	Outcomes	Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recruit and hire RP Staff, AmeriCorps members, and volunteers ● Recruit additional students and schools ● Improve the RPCx platform and create 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● By the end of year five, 16 RP staff will be added. ● By the end of year five, 281 AmeriCorps members will be added. ● By the end of year five, 7,959 volunteers will be added. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Number of staff recruited ● Number of AmeriCorps members recruited ● Number of volunteers recruited ● Number/types of content created

<p>original RP RPCx content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the end of year five, 6,914 additional students will be enrolled in Reading Partners. • By the end of year five, Reading Partners will partner with 151 additional schools. • 80% of students, volunteers, and RP staff report increased satisfaction with the RPCx program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPCx user satisfaction survey data
<p>Objective 2: RPCx students will meet or exceed their primary, individualized end-of-year literacy growth goal</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver RPCx program to target population across RP's 12 regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of RPCx students will meet or exceed their primary, individualized end-of-year literacy growth goal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End-of- year assessments administered by RP
<p>Objective 3: Rigorously evaluate the RPCx program</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MDRC conducts RCT of RPCx program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation provides evidence that RPCx is effective in increasing literacy achievement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation results
<p>Objective 4: Scale RPCx Program</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the delivery of RPCx programming by 70% each year. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16,327 students receive RP programming from 2022-2025 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enrollment data

D. Adequacy of Resources and Quality of the Management Plan

Reading Partners Capacity

RP has over 22 years of experience in designing, implementing, and expanding its literacy support initiatives. RP's staff alongside evaluation partner, MDRC, are uniquely qualified to carry out the proposed work. RP's team has significant experience in literacy instruction, managing large scale implementation projects, volunteer recruitment and training, and monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, RP's team has prior experience working in the context of a RCT. Listed below are the key project personnel for RP and MDRC. Exhibit C in Appendix J details the full list of RP and MDRC personnel involved with this project.

- [REDACTED], EIR Project Director and [REDACTED]. Mr. [REDACTED] has served as project lead for all of RP's third-party evaluations and research studies. Executive leader focused on program strategy, program development, student assessment, and learning.
- [REDACTED], [REDACTED]. Ms. [REDACTED] served at iMentor from 2016-2020 and oversaw the scale and management of the organization's portfolio of regions and programs across the country. At RP from 2012-2016, she played a leadership role in the process of identifying and launching new regions for expansion.
- [REDACTED], [REDACTED]. Ms. [REDACTED] has extensive experience with RP in designing literacy curriculum scope/sequence, leading program growth and scale, and developing new ways to serve students and connecting with families.
- Dr. [REDACTED], Principal Investigator, MDRC/University of Michigan. Dr. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Dr. [REDACTED] [REDACTED].

[REDACTED], and a longtime MDRC partner with over 15 years of experience conducting 6 large RCTs and quasi-experimental evaluations of educational interventions.

Management Plan

This project will take place over three phases: planning, evaluation, and program scaling. These phases will take place over a five-year period; a breakdown of the project’s objectives, milestones, grant year, and responsibility is detailed in Table B below.

Table B: Proposed management plan and timeline for planning, evaluation, and scaling phases of RPCx Project

Milestone	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Partner Responsible
Objective 1: RP will build its organizational capacity to support implementation of RPCx program at scale						
Recruit and hire additional RP staff, AmeriCorps members, and volunteers	X	X	X	X	X	RP
Improve RPCx virtual platform	X	X	X	X	X	RP
Recruit and enroll new students, schools, school districts	X	X	X	X	X	RP
Objective 2: 80% percent of all RP students will meet or exceed their primary, individualized end-of-year literacy growth goal						
Deliver RPCx to enrolled students in grades 1-4	X	X	X	X	X	RP

Objective 3: Rigorously evaluate the impact of the RPCx program						
Random assignment			X	X		MDRC
Prepare instruments and collect data			X	X		MDRC
Measure implementation fidelity			X	X		MDRC
Assess intervention effects			X	X		MDRC
Refine materials and procedures			X	X		MDRC
Disseminate findings					X	MDRC/RP
Objective 4: Scale RPCx Program						
Increase number of RPCx students, volunteers, and schools by 70% each year.				X	X	RP

Planning. During the planning phase of the project January 2022-August 2023, RP will complete activities related to tutor, AmeriCorps, and staff recruitment, site and student recruitment, and RPCx technology capacity and expansion. Milestones for the planning phase of the project include: recruiting and training approximately 700 new RPCx volunteer tutors, hiring and onboarding approximately additional 25 AmeriCorps members, identifying RPCx site and student recruitment strategies, and enhancing RP’s technology platform for the RPCx program. At the end of the planning phase, RP will have all project components in place to launch the evaluation phase of the project.

Evaluation. Beginning in the Fall of academic year 2023-2024, MDRC will conduct an independent impact, implementation, and cost evaluation of RPCx using a student-level RCT. During the evaluation period RP will provide RPCx to 435 additional, unique students in each of the evaluation years. Milestones for the evaluation phase of the project include; recruitment and

assignment of 1,740 students to RPCx program or BAU group, data collection, evaluation, and analysis, and dissemination of evaluation results.

Program Scaling. Based on preliminary results of MDRC’s evaluation of RPCx and lessons learned in planning and implementation phases, RP will scale RPCx across its 12 regions during academic years 2025-2026 to 2026-2027. During this phase of the project RP plans to increase the number of students receiving RP traditional or RPCx from 11,000 annually to over 16,000 annually with a goal of continuous year over year program growth of 70%. Milestones for the scaling phase of the project include; over 16,000 students served annually through RPCx, approximately 8,000 new volunteers recruited and trained, and measurable student literacy gains through RPCx participation.

Resource Allocation and Cost

RP proposes a project budget of \$8 million to successfully implement and complete the proposed scope of work over a five-year period. As detailed in RP’s budget narrative form, RP plans on allocating \$1,641,000 for the planning phase of the project, \$3,715,254 for the evaluation phase of the project, and \$3,443,579 for the scaling phase of the project. These costs are based on projections for RP’s RPCx personnel (including fringe benefits), travel, supplies, and the de minimis indirect cost rate. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] These resources and costs have been budgeted based on past experience as well as compared to resources allocated for current, similar implementation and evaluation projects.

E. Quality of Project Evaluation

MDRC, a leading third-party evaluator for rigorous evaluations, and Dr. [REDACTED] from the University of Michigan, will conduct an independent impact, implementation, and cost

evaluation of RPCx for students in grades 1-4 using a student-level RCT. [REDACTED] a prior RCT of RPT by MDRC (Jacob, Armstrong, and Willard 2015—Exhibit D in Appendix J; “the 2015 RPT RCT”). The current evaluation builds from that study to estimate the impacts of RPCx on reading outcomes for a diverse population of students, to examine the implementation of RPCx in a virtual setting, to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of RPCx and to compare RPCx costs with RPT costs, and to provide guidance on scaling RPCx with fidelity to other schools.

Methods Designed to Meet WWC Standards Without Reservations

MDRC and Dr [REDACTED] (“the study team”) will conduct a RCT to address five research questions that align with RPCx’s logic model (Appendix G). RQ1: What are the impacts of RPCx on students’ component reading skills including reading comprehension, fluency, and sight word efficiency? RQ2: How do schools implement RPCx? What factors facilitate or hinder implementation? RQ3: Do RPCx students receive more reading support than they otherwise would have (i.e., compared to “business as usual” or BAU)? RQ4: What are the costs of RPCx? How do these costs compare to BAU and to RPT? RQ5: To what degree were scale-up plans achieved? What are lessons for future implementation and scaling of RPCx?

Participating Schools, Students, and Random Assignment

The study team will evaluate the impact of RPCx using student-level random assignment in 10-14 schools. RP will identify the schools, in consultation with the evaluation team, focusing on settings where sufficient treatment contrast is likely (that is, where other reading/literacy supports are limited). RP will focus on startup and training in their first year of implementation (AY2022-23) and MDRC will conduct the study in AY2023-24 and AY2024-25. The study population are students in grades 1-4 (RPCx kindergarten participants will not be part of the

RCT due to cost of assessing them) who are eligible for RPCx as described in Section C. At the start of AY23-24 and AY24-25, RP staff will provide the study team with a list of students that schools want to refer to RPCx based on a combination of test score review and recommendations by teachers and school staff, and who have parental permission to participate in the program and the study. Based on past experience, we anticipate that many more students will be eligible than can be served, so the study will use random assignment to determine which students will be invited to enroll in RPCx (“RPCx group”) or not (“non-RPCx group”). The non-RPCx group will receive BAU services during the study period, which the implementation study will document (e.g., typical in-class reading instruction, other literacy interventions offered by the school). In AY23-24, the study team will randomly assign eligible and consenting students by school and grade level blocks into RPCx. Random assignment will be conducted in a similar manner in AY24-25, with the pool of eligible pool RPCx students that year. (RP assesses eligibility each year.) The two consecutive rounds of random assignment will create two cohorts: students assigned in AY23-24; and students assigned in AY24-25. The confirmatory impact analyses will be conducted on the pooled sample (RQ1).

Student Outcome Measures

MDRC will assess: reading comprehension using the Stanford Achievement Test 10th Edition (SAT-10) reading comprehension subtest; fluency, the ability to read with speed and accuracy, using the AIMSweb one-minute oral reading fluency subtest; and sight word efficiency, the ability to quickly identify commonly used words without going through the process of decoding, using the Test of Word Reading Efficiency, 2nd Edition (TOWRE-2) sight word reading subtest. The study team will administer these tests—which were also used in the 2015 RPT RCT—in the spring to students in the RPCx group and in the non-RPCx group for

each random assignment cohort. The study will not assess reading comprehension for first graders because of the costs of individually assessing first graders and because prior research indicates that effects for fluency and decoding for first graders are likely to be relatively larger than for reading comprehension.

Meeting WWC Standards Without Reservations

The evaluation is very likely to meet the WWC Evidence Standards without reservations. First, the study uses a random assignment research design and the success of random assignment will be verified by testing the equivalence of the baseline characteristics of RPCx and non-RPCx students. Second, the study likely will meet the criteria for low overall and differential attrition: In the 2015 RPT RCT, 92% of both treatment and control students successfully completed end-of-year achievement tests (differential attrition = 0.40 percentage point). Third, the assessments are used nationwide, not aligned specifically with the RP program, and collected in the same manner for both program and control students. The tests' reliabilities range from 0.84 to 0.95. To reduce concerns about multiple hypothesis testing, the team will pre-specify one outcome in each literacy domain of the study (comprehension, fluency, and sight word efficiency); and will use the Benjamini-Hochberg (1995) procedure to correct for multiple hypothesis testing.

Impact Analysis

The analysis will provide the intent-to-treat impact estimate of offering students identified as needing intervention at the beginning of the school year the opportunity to enroll in RPCx for one year. We will estimate impacts on a given outcome based on all students for whom data on that outcome are available. The basic impact estimate will be from a regression model where the dependent variable is the outcome of interest, with the specification accounting for blocking random assignment by year-school-grade. To improve the precision of impact

estimates, the model will control for students' reading skill in the fall (using the RP applicant assessment); the time lapse between baseline testing and follow-up testing; whether the student had RPCx in a prior academic year, student's gender, race/ethnicity, free or reduced-meal status, English language learner status, obtained from RPs management information system (MIS). Because the covariates will come from study-team-administered testing and administrative data, missing data rates will be low. We will use multiple-regression imputation to fill in missing covariates (not outcomes).¹ While some students in the sample may have received RPCx in a previous year, random assignment will ensure that these students are equally distributed between the treatment and control groups in each evaluation year. In addition to including a covariate in the estimation model for prior exposure to RPCx, the study team also will conduct subgroup analyses to explore whether prior exposure to RPCx mediates program impacts.

Power Analysis

The study will be able to detect effects similar in size to those in the 2015 RPT RCT. The average effect size (ES) in that study for the same outcomes was 0.10. RP's own data on participant outcomes indicate the program impacts have likely grown since the first study. The study will be powered to detect minimum impacts of 0.12 ES for fluency and sight word efficiency and 0.135 for reading comprehension.² The anticipated study sample pooled across the two years is 1,740 unique students (RPCx and non-RPCx) and a final sample of 1,600 that

¹ The imputation regressions will include all impact regression covariates, an indicator for treatment status, and the outcome variable (WWC Standards Handbook 2020).

² First graders will not be assessed with the SAT10. For the end-of-year SAT10, we estimate the MDES assuming 1,200 2nd to 4th grade students complete it.

accounts for missing data (described next). All MDES assume a 50/50 treatment/control split, 80 percent power, alpha of 0.05, two-sided tests, missing outcome data rates of 0.08, and regression r-squares of 0.3, with all assumptions based on the 2015 RPT RCT.

Variation in Effects – Moderators

To inform program design and future implementation, the evaluation will explore variation in impacts across students. The districts in the study will be diverse with respect to ethnicity, poverty, and size, making it possible to conduct exploratory analyses of how RPCx impacts are moderated by student characteristics such as baseline reading proficiency, English language proficiency, and grade level as suggested by the 2015 RPT RCT.

Implementation Study

To evaluate RPCx implementation, we will develop and refine a set of research instruments based on those used in the 2015 RPT RCT and ongoing consultation with RP staff. Exhibit E in Appendix J presents the table of data sources that will be used to answer each of the implementation research questions. RQ2 will address each school's implementation of RPCx as designed, including fidelity and the factors that mediate the impacts as indicated in the logic model (Section C and Appendix G). The mediators include net hours (service contrast) of reading supports that RPCx students receive, including hours of RPCx support, and the program's overall fidelity. The study team will assess implementation fidelity for the six core components of the RPCx model: (1) regular, one-on-one tutoring; (2) dedicated school space and use of materials; (3) structured and individualized curriculum; (4) data-driven instruction; (5) rigorous and ongoing training; and (6) instructional supervision and support. The study team will use the fidelity index and cutoffs that were developed for the 2015 RPT RCT (Appendix J). The index contains 17 items created using quantitative data from the RP MIS; qualitative assessments

of fidelity based on interviews with RP staff, school staff, and volunteer tutors; a review of student folders kept on site in reading centers; and a facilities checklist, which assessed whether the reading centers contained the required components. The maximum possible score on the index is 23. The study team grouped scores into three categories of implementation. Scores of 15 and below (less than 65 percent of the total points possible) were considered “low fidelity”; scores of 19 or higher (over 83 percent of the total possible) were considered “high fidelity”; and scores between those delineations (15.5 to 18.5) were considered “moderate fidelity.”

RQ3 addresses the service contrast in literacy support between RPCx and non-RPCx students, measuring the types of programs, supports, and practices that are available to and received by RPCx and non-RPCx students. A teacher survey, fielded at the end of each school year, will provide information on the hours and types of supports that both RPCx and non-RPCx students received. This information will allow the study team to understand both BAU and the extent to which RPCx provides distinctive supports to students.

In addition to learning about the service contrast, the evaluation will examine how the broader context may influence RPCx implementation. Contextual factors include the coordinator attitudes towards technology-based tutoring and virtual learning, and the embeddedness of existing literacy support and tutoring initiatives in the school. Interviews with teachers and RPCx staff will provide information about context. Finally, compiling and summarizing publicly available data about school characteristics to describe sample schools will allow the study team to discuss generalizability of the findings.

Cost Analysis

The study team will compare costs of RPCx both with BAU reading programs offered to and received by RPCx and non-RPCx students during the study period, and with RPT in other

schools that are not part of the RCT study (RQ4). The study team will collect data on the cost of operating RPCx and BAU programs in the 10-14 schools that are part of the RCT. In addition, the study team will document the cost of running RPT in approximately five other schools in similar environments.

The study team will use the ingredients approach (Levin & McEwan, 2003), as it did in the 2015 RPT RCT, and will follow current guidance (e.g., Cost Analysis Standards Project, 2021). The ingredients method details the resources required to implement a program, in quantitative and qualitative terms (e.g., personnel are specified based on their qualifications, role, time commitments), and each ingredient is assigned a dollar value (market price or shadow price). The study team will price ingredients using average national 2024 (mid-study) prices per ingredient to make the estimates applicable nationally. Information about ingredients and costs will come from RP coordinator and school staff interviews, school budget documents, teacher salary schedules, the National Center for Education Statistics Fiscal Survey, and indices from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The study team will calculate the cost per enrollee of the RPCx, RPT, and BAU using the ingredients method, then disaggregate the costs by the constituent that bears them: RP, schools, and society. The costs, from RP's perspective, of RPCx and RPT are useful for thinking about scaling RPCx relative to RPT. The *net* cost to the school (program cost minus BAU costs) is the relevant information for school principals when deciding whether to adopt RPCx versus other reading programs. The net cost to society is the relevant cost for policymakers to compare to the impact estimates (because impacts are net outcomes) when considering the cost effective method for achieving a particular impact.

Scaling Study and Strategies for Replication

The evaluation will assess the scale-up of RPCx to new districts and schools by documenting RP's experience bringing RPCx to the 10-14 study schools, and by comparing that experience with their plans (RQ5). This assessment will be based on interviews with members of the RP leadership team at the start of the project before scaling has begun, and at the end of AY24-25. The study team will also identify the barriers and facilitators to successful implementation through interviews with school staff and RP coordinators at each site. In addition to providing essential information and context for interpreting RPCx impacts, the implementation will provide guidance on implementing RPCx with fidelity in other schools and the cost study will provide information on the kinds of resources necessary for implementation.

Evaluation Resources

The [REDACTED] evaluation budget includes resources for the study team to assist RP with site recruitment; prepare an analysis plan; develop instruments; and collect and analyze data. It includes time for the study team to prepare periodic internal feedback memos for RP and public deliverables. The study team has expertise conducting large-scale random assignment evaluations of literacy interventions and with IES-funded evaluations. The proposed project scope and budget align with the resources required for similar evaluations conducted by the study team.

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