

What is the community challenge?

Consistent and quality educational supports like tutoring can have a significant impact on a student's academic achievement. However, these can be difficult to access for families unable to pay for them. Across the United States nearly 80% of all K-5 students from low income families are reading below grade level. Children who experience difficulty reading in earlier grades have a higher risk of later negative outcomes, such as dropping out of high school.

What is Reading Partners' promising solution?

Reading Partners focuses on elementary school students who



are at least six months behind in reading, recruiting and using community volunteers to provide individualized instruction to help them master the reading fundamentals they need to reach grade level. The volunteers work one-on-one with these students twice a week, every week using an established curriculum that is aligned with Common Core and other state standards. AmeriCorps members are leveraged to act as coordinators and volunteer recruiters for Reading Partners' in-school sites.

What did the evaluation of Reading Partners find?

As a subgrantee of the Social Innovation Fund, Reading Partners engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate their program model. The study found that the program:

- **more effectively raised students' reading proficiency** than other similar reading programs in the same schools that were studied;
- **had a positive and statistically significant impact** on students' reading comprehension, reading fluency, and sight word efficiency;
- showed suggestive evidence that it was particularly **effective with students reading at the lowest levels**; and
- cost the host school/school district **on average \$710 per student, compared with an average of \$1690 per student** for other reading programs offered in the same school.

In addition, the program was **implemented as designed (i.e., with fidelity)** across sites studied, and has a **high likelihood of producing similar results** if implemented with fidelity elsewhere.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit nationalservice.gov/research.

Evaluation design, timeline and study locations

The evaluation of Reading Partners began in 2012 and finished reporting in 2014. This process included both an implementation evaluation to see whether the program was being run as designed and an impact evaluation intended to observe the changes in participant students' reading ability as a result of the program. In total 1,265 students took part in the study in 19 schools across three states.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Level of Evidence before Evaluation*: Preliminary

Level of Evidence** after Evaluation: Strong

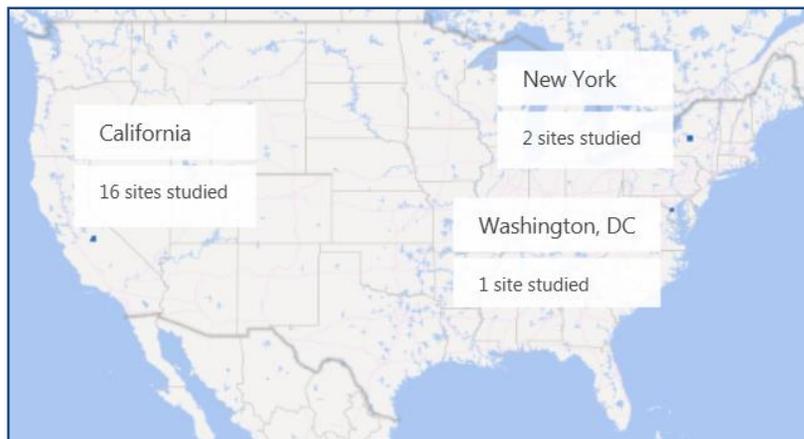
Evaluation Design(s): Implementation Evaluation;
Impact Evaluation (Randomized Controlled Trial);
Cost Study

Study Population: Students grades 2-5 in
predominately urban/suburban, Title I schools

Evaluator: MDRC

* SIF-supported interventions undergo a level of evidence assessment at the point of program entry and are expected to advance that base of evidence through rigorous evaluation during the grant period.

** SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.



How is Reading Partners using the evaluation findings to improve?

As a result of the knowledge gained from the evaluation, Reading Partners is making changes to its "core model" by expanding and improving their current program to address students' absolute literacy gains in order to achieve reading proficiency by 4th grade. Their key changes include: 1) reframing the target population to serve greater numbers of students in earlier grades before reading gaps become very large, 2) enhancing curriculum, assessment, training, and quality assurance systems, and 3) serving more students per site with extended sessions. Reading Partners will continue to expand into more schools and new districts across the country. In addition, Reading Partners has planned pilots of additional interventions aimed at increasing reading proficiency and include summer programming, multi-year support of high need students, and engaging additional community volunteers.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the United States. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.