APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY
FY2012 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition

Legal Applicant Name: Greater Twin Cities United Way **Program Name: Greater Twin Cities United Way Social Innovation Fund**	**Application ID: 12SI138281**

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. This feedback is provided on a restricted basis and cannot be shared or distributed outside of your organization. We hope you will find this information helpful in completing applications to our future grant competitions. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of your application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory.

There were two stages of expert review for the 2012 SIF competition, the Program Review focused on the quality of the applicant's response in most of the Program Design and Organizational Capability sections and all of the Cost Effectiveness/Budget Adequacy section.

Program Reviewers' Summary Comments:

- The applicant clearly identifies the target communities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The issue area they propose is youth development. Their theory of change is based on research which indicates that transformative change occurs through collaborative actions focused on a "common agenda for solving a specific problem." This approach is consistent with their youth development plan, which relies on engagement of multiple stakeholders at many levels of intervention.

  The applicant directly links the theory of change to grow subgrantee effectiveness by defining a plan for continuously improving the quality of programs, impact and sharing lessons learned. The applicant adequately provides a list of five appropriate categories they will use to assess subgrantee capacity for growth. Examples include the current level of evaluation work and use of evaluation results to drive improvements.

- Greater Twin Cities United Way is working to reduce the achievement gap among students of color in Minneapolis and St. Paul through a theory of collective impact, involving the critical stakeholders in education and youth initiatives. They have some strong partners including the University of Minnesota evaluation initiative coupled with Wilder Foundation and the local philanthropic community. There is strong focus on capacity building but the applicant does not talk about its intermediary and capacity building support for previous innovative initiatives in the Twin Cities. The indirect and staff costs seem high for an intermediary capacity building initiative funding subgrantees.

- The applicant articulates clearly the current situation in their region of interest as well as their goals and objectives and their theory of change. Their plan for selecting the subgrantees is clear as is their selection process. This applicant has plans to help their subgrantees and have supporting organizations to assist. This United Way has a long history of awarding competitive grants and lists examples of past efforts that have been replicated. Their program support and financial oversight is acceptable and they have engaged others to assist them. The applicant's budget is adequate and they seem quite capable of raising the matching funds needed.

The applicant does not provide a clear profile of their potential subgrantees nor how they would effectively use their analysis of the subgrantees. They will need to hire five key positions including the Executive Director, a Director of Operations, a Senior Programs Manager, a Financial Grants Manager and an Administrative Assistant. Thus it is difficult to assess their qualifications or whether all positions are needed full time. Partially because of these new staff, only 57 % of the total budget would be used in grants to their grantees.

- The applicant clearly identifies the overall geographic target market of the Twin Cities (Minneapolis/St. Paul) and is clear about the target issue of youth development (closing academic achievement gaps). Statistical information is included that clearly substantiates the need for the project to address gaps in educational attainment among children in the targeted area. Identified outcomes are noted with five specific goals that are measurable. The applicant is vague about the type of subgrantee organization they hope to fund and is not clear about the extent to which developed characteristics will be used to assess subgrantee capacity for growth. A well-developed plan for securing the total match commitment for their SIF is noted. The proposal lacks clarity about the amount of the budget that is set to realize the goals related to technical assistance to subgrantees.

The second stage of expert review for the 2012 SIF competition was the Evaluation Review. The Evaluation Review focused on the quality of the applicant's response in the Proposal for Evaluation in the Program Design category and Evaluation Experience in the Organizational Capacity category.

Evaluation Reviewers' Summary Comments:

- Among the many strengths of this application, its greatest is its willingness to set specific goals, especially that of reducing "the gap between baseline and 100 percent proficiency...by half in each of the five goal areas". To the extent that this effort either succeeds in reaching all or some of those goals, and can explain why it has or has not done so, this holds the potential to be an influential initiative. The record of this applicant in successfully undertaken related efforts, the relationship with experienced evaluators and its clear depth of relationships in the community serve, further, to increase the likelihood of success.

- The evaluation components focus around very clear and specific overarching questions at both the subgrantee level and the applicant level**.**

  The applicant will build on its existing relationships with education and evaluation experts including The University of Minnesota Center for Research and Education Improvement (the contracted evaluation partner), Wilder Research (data systems development), and issue-area experts who serve on Improvement Networks- all are partners in the proposal.

  The Theory of Collective Impact (a theory of change model) created by John Kania and Mark Kramer has been well researched and has been used successfully as a theoretical framework for quality evaluation design.

  The applicant appears to have laid a solid foundation for the design and implementation of the proposed evaluation as seen by their creation of a framework for a decision-making group, formation of a strong executive committee, charged with providing ongoing leadership for the project, articulation of a

collective vision, common goals, shared objectives and indicators, creation of cross-sector Improvement Networks for continuous feedback loops among all involved, and strong relationships with nationally-known evaluation partners.

The applicant and evaluation experts propose to conduct a quasi-experimental design at the portfolio level to ensure overall initiative progress and at the program level to ensure subgrantees reach a moderate evidence level by the end of the funding period. Interim progress indicators and intermediate outcome measures will be established for each subgrantee. Ample and quality data support the need for the intervention and the baseline for the five goals.

The applicant reports having extensive experience in managing and supporting more comprehensive evaluations through partnerships with external evaluation experts such as Child Trends, Wilder Research, and CAREI, which have the capacity to manage complex data analyses and experience designing and implementing rigorous evaluation studies.

The applicant has been committed to an outcome- and results-driven approach to its subgrantees selection, ensuring that strong research and evaluation plans are established as part of the application process prior to making funding decisions. The application also offers a solid plan for building the evaluation capacities of its subgrantees with expertise being drawn from well-recognized evaluators from Child Trends, Wilder Research, and CAREI.

The application also includes appropriate contractual expenses with the consultants who will support the design and implementation of the rigorous, quasi-experimental evaluation, and the development and integration of the proposed data system that will be capable of tracking extensive child- and program-level data and providing accessible reports of progress toward benchmarks and goals.