

<p><i>Mile High United Way</i></p> <p><i>2505 18th Street</i></p> <p><i>Denver, Colorado</i></p>	<p>Application ID: 11SI127773</p>
<p>Please find below comments from five Program Reviewers and two Evaluation Reviewers of your application. Reviewers were not required to reach consensus regarding their comments for this review; therefore, there may be disparate views between Reviewers on the quality of your proposal.</p>	
<p>PROGRAM REVIEW</p>	
<p>I. Program Reviewer 1</p> <p>COMMENTS: Overall, the application is extremely successful. Statistics and specifics are clearly defined. The applicant begins by clearly defining the target community to serve – 3rd graders in Colorado’s 47 rural counties and 17 urban counties. The applicant also clearly specifies an area of focus (literacy) and provides strong statistical information to identify need. In addition to general statistics (unemployment, high school drop-out rates), the applicant mentions specific literacy rates for Colorado’s 3rd graders. The applicant provides specific measurable outcomes (reading proficiency based on standardized testing) that are clear and easy to measure. Given the specific focus and measurable outcomes, the applicant makes a compelling case for their ability to be successful. The subgrantee process as well as the support provided to subgrantees is well defined. The applicant describes in detail the basis on which each subgrant award will be determined per NOFA. Specifically, each subgrantee must demonstrate the capacity to achieve at least a 25% increase in 3rd grade reading proficiency levels by 2016 based on standardized testing in Colorado. The applicant clearly defines the number of applicants (10-15 organizations), as well as the range of the grant (\$100,000-\$500,000). The applicant clearly outlines what support will be given to subgrantees (reviews, sharing and integrating lessons across grantees, designing performance measurement, etc.). They clearly outline how their partnerships (with other United Ways, local universities, research firms) will allow them to be committed to the long-term relationships with subgrantees. The applicant provides specific examples of its previous successes (Birth to Five, Ready to Succeed) and gives confidence that this experience has prepared the organization to be successful for the SIF grant. They also cite specific personnel whose expertise will allow them to be successful, including Lindsey Morgan Tracy whose experience with education is clearly applicable to the project. The applicant demonstrates a diversity of funding sources including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, as well as several private funders; how these funds will allow the applicant to provide more than the minimum required share of the costs of their program is not described in sufficient detail. Overall, the applicant appears to be well prepared to implement an SIF grant.</p>	
<p>II. Program Reviewer 2</p> <p>COMMENTS: The applicant has identified early childhood literacy as their target area. Although this United Way directly serves only a part of the state of Colorado, their subgranting competition will be open to applicants throughout the state. However, priority will be given to those applicants who fall into the top two of three tiers that the applicant has set up to determine need. Statistics and background provided by the applicant not only describe a compellingly need for this investment, but also provide credible evidence of the applicant’s ability to use data to inform their processes. The applicant is focused on one main goal: increase the number of third graders reading at proficiency in Colorado by 25% by 2016. The applicant has described an application solicitation process that will reach a broad audience, in part by engaging their many networks of business and government partners. Their application and review process mirrors that of CNCS’s review of SIF applications. Standards are described as rigorous, with a heavy emphasis on selecting those subgrantees with a high likelihood of success and those who are likely to be able to transition to a moderate evidence level if they are not already there. Plans for technical assistance focus heavily on evaluation, a prime focus</p>	

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<p>of the SIF program. The applicant has identified other areas that will be critical for success, such as collaboration with school districts to have access to student records, and the applicant will work with subgrantees to ensure this is successful. Fewer specific details are provided for other technical assistance needs subgrantees may face, including meeting matching funds requirements and sustainability planning. While the applicant's history of related work lends confidence to the belief that they will attend to this, more specifics on meeting matching funds requirements and organizational capacity/sustainability planning were not provided. The applicant has a highly skilled and trained senior management team. The applicant has a history of co-creating and investing in educational improvement. Staff in financial management, evaluation, data collection and more is all available to support this project; the applicant is already set up to receive and administer Federal funds. The applicant has extensive financial and political capital which it intends to bring to this project. Existing relationships with corporations, political leaders and national funders, and the United Way model of fundraising suggest that the applicant should be able to achieve the full match requirement and leverage in-kind resources in support of the projects success. The applicant is not proposing a match greater than the 1:1 required by the SIF program. Staffing seems reasonable for this project. Existing infrastructure is adequate to meet the needs of the SIF program. It is not clear the extent to which programs will be supported in meeting their own match requirements, a concern in this fiscal climate of dramatic cuts to education and other largely government funded services.</p>	
<p>III. Program Reviewer 3</p> <p>COMMENTS: The proposal notes specific statistical analysis to substantiate that geographic targets within Colorado shows high school dropout rates of nearly 50% and provides evidence that the intervention of reading proficiency programs at young(er) ages can result in a decline in the dropout issue leading to better educated and more successful young people. The proposal notes specific measurable outcomes that will be achieved evidenced by the overall goal that includes a 25% increase in third grade reading proficiency levels by 2016. The applicant makes a compelling case for their ability to successfully support the focus, goals and approach by offering an overall logic model that shows how addressing reading proficiency rates at lower elementary grade levels can result in improved high school dropout rates. The applicant outlines a clear and comprehensive plan for carrying out a competitive subgrant process. This includes leveraging existing relationships including state government leaders, education leaders, and nonprofit organization managers to promote the grant(s) opportunity. There is a clear plan for how the applicant will achieve success in subgrantee selection evidenced by their depiction of: compliance review, initial eligibility review, internal review and subgrantee selection. The proposal notes that capacity development for subgrantees will occur through leveraging relationships by the applicant to support matching fund requirements and program evaluation goals. For example, the use of a cross-sector coalition of leaders, already organized by the applicant for other projects, has already been secured in a commitment to support this project and support subgrantees. The proposal details a sound organization structure with experienced staff that has substantive history in administering both private sector and government grants. The applicant demonstrates that more than the minimum required share of the costs of their program has been secured.</p>	
<p>IV. Program Reviewer 4</p> <p>COMMENTS: The applicant provides a clear and comprehensive plan that is appropriate and responsive to the identified communities and target population, as well as potential subgrantees. The applicant also provides a wealth of information concerning why it is the appropriate entity to receive funding, and documents its expertise and experience in working with the</p>	

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<p>target population. In addition, the applicant demonstrates how their organizational structure is appropriate for the operational and oversight needs of the project, including how the organization is maintaining a fully staffed management team. While the applicant organization outlines several key outcomes, and beneficiaries to be served by the project, specific goals, and objectives are not clear or descriptive, which could prove problematic for a project of this scope and size.</p>	
<p>V. Program Reviewer 5</p> <p>COMMENTS: This plan seems very promising. The applicant has identified a key educational challenge that the state faces, picked out a clear, high-leverage way of addressing that challenge, defined a specific measurable outcome that they hope to achieve, and researched a set of models that have been effective elsewhere for their subgrantees to draw on. Furthermore the applicant is a strong intermediary with a long record of accomplishments and a recent history of fostering impressive evidence-based innovation in education and other areas, so there is good reason to have confidence in their ability to carry it out.</p>	
<p>EVALUATION REVIEW</p>	
<p>VI. Evaluation Reviewer 1</p> <p>COMMENTS: The applicant has demonstrated their proficiency with measurement, evaluation and learning. It is clear that they take a rigorous approach to this work. The applicant has the ability to effectively gather evidence about their program and use it internally for planning and other decision making. The applicant demonstrates their experience using methods that are appropriate to the situation in their use of Propensity Score Matching in the Making Connections evaluation, which reflects current best practice in the field for addressing issues of selection bias and approximating the conditions of a randomized control trial study. The applicant demonstrated the effective provision of technical assistance in the improvement of data quality in the Homeless Management Information System for Denver's Road Home, the County's ten-year plan to end homelessness. Their experience with that type of large data repository should benefit them in collecting data on literacy rates. The applicant's ongoing engagement with private evaluation firms and university researchers are also good indications that the applicant is committed to evaluation and measurement. That said, there were several places where the proposed approach could have been described in more detail. Though the proposal references three models that have demonstrated improvements in literacy rates (Minnesota Reading Corps, Oregon SMART program and Experience Corps), the proposal is not clear about how those studies relate to key elements of the project proposed in Colorado. The applicant does not describe how pre- and post-literacy measures would be used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. This is implied through citations of other research, but is not explicitly stated. The program activities are described as flexible enough to allow some variation in the design of the literacy intervention, but the evaluation plan does not explain how they will evaluate the relative effectiveness of different interventions. The applicant lists areas to monitor such as subgrantee selection process, state-level collaboration on data sharing and information sharing across subgrantees that pertain to the grantmaking program rather than the literacy intervention. The literacy intervention and outcomes were not described in sufficient detail. The proposal discusses many measures; however the research questions that would be prioritized in the</p>	

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<p>evaluation were unclear.</p>	
<p>VII. Evaluation Reviewer 2</p> <p>COMMENTS: The proposal consistently demonstrates that the applicant thinks and implements in a way that approaches evidence-based programming developmentally. The applicant has consistently met and exceeded all of the criteria for the use of evidence, citing apposite examples from past experience and applying the principles from that past experience to the design of this proposal. The applicant's otherwise exhaustive discussion of the types of evidence that can be used for different purposes (such as outcome measurement, performance improvement, stakeholder engagement) has two notable omissions. One of these is constituency voice, meaning the systematic collection of feedback from program constituents and embedding that feedback in outcome measurement and performance management activities. Constituents here would include parents, schools, subgrantees, other education actors, and importantly, the volunteers whose contributions are pivotal to the theory of change. The preeminent analogy here is customer satisfaction data in business. This data is used for performance improvement and has been shown to be the leading indicator of desired business outcomes. Constituency voice methodology may be particularly appropriate for the respondent's theory of change, which is dependent on the effective coordination of diverse networks of organizations and large number of citizen volunteers. The other missing practice is benchmarking. Organizing and sharing data in the form of comparable benchmarks for subgrantees and other key actors is a proven effective way to support rapid adaptation of the most effective practices.</p>	