

Applicant Feedback Summary

2015 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition

(Program and Evaluation Reviewers)

Legal Applicant: Youthprise

Applicant ID: 15SI171769

Project Name: Youthprise Social Innovation Proposal

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. 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 the 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. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

Reviewer's Summary Comments:

PROGRAM REVIEW

Strengths:

The applicant proposes a geographically based initiative to serve low-income at-risk youth in Minneapolis and St. Paul Minnesota, designed to leverage the capacity and strengths of existing workforce programs. Selected subrecipients will use the innovative, evidence-based Career Pathways approach that aligns education, training and workforce development programs to provide better outcomes for youth who are homeless, in foster care, or involved in the juvenile justice system.

Invested organizations will have a history of providing comprehensive services to at-risk youth and the ability to align services with the Career Pathways framework. They will be expected to track and succeed in meeting numerous outcomes for youth. Their participants will complete a valid and reliable youth self-report survey at program entry and transition points that will provide evidence of improvement on critical social emotional skills such as decision making, problem-solving, and self-regulation.

A well-organized plan for carrying out a competitive subrecipient selection process, including all elements being completed within the specified timeframe was presented by the applicant. Top subrecipient applicants will undergo a site visit and complete a pre-award survey to ensure strong leadership, good fiscal standing, and competency to implement the innovative approach.

The applicant states they will develop a formula to ensure increased allocations are awarded to those subrecipients who have moderate or higher levels of evidence in order for them to have more ambitious scaling goals that lead to more substantial growth. The formula will include costs associated with replication, evaluation and TA needs for expansion.

The applicant provided numerous examples that demonstrate their ability and that of their grant partners to grow subrecipient capacity for greater impact. For instance, the applicant recently had over 35 organizations participate in its capacity-building initiative with over 90% on track to secure a Charities Review Council seal of approval, similar to the "Good Housekeeping" approval for non-profits in Minnesota.

The applicant will ensure appropriate data collection and analysis. Through its partnership with an entity who has engaged in a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evaluation projects including a multi-year youth development program, continuous improvements and compliance will occur.

The applicant describes a staffing and advisory make-up that appears very capable of effectively implementing the proposed program. Not only do they include a broad range of expertise, experience, and necessary qualifications, the applicant also states they reserve eight of the 20 Board slots for youth between the ages of 16 and 25, ensuring their constituents are well represented in policy and decision making.

To achieve the initiative's outcomes, numerous learning opportunities, annual meetings and individualized support will be offered to subrecipients. A major focus will be on supporting subrecipients in enriching their proven program models in supporting the growth and improvement of participant's social-emotional skills through trainings on the use of reliable and valid assessment tools. To support the growth of social-emotional skills of participants, training and technical assistance will be offered to subrecipients on how to mentor to youth on skills such as setting boundaries and self-regulation.

To build capacity around federal government regulations, the applicant will work together with their Workforce Investment partner, who has a strong history of ensuring subrecipients are compliant with federal grant management. A pre-award meeting with subrecipients will be held to go over these areas and tools and resources such as checklists, site visits and reports will be provided to assist organizations in establishing protocols and systems.

The applicant describes a reasonable timeline for building program capacity, scaling, and evaluation that includes intense training, continual readiness assessment, peer-mentoring, and eventual quasi-experimental outcomes towards the end of the grant lifecycle.

The applicant lists helping subrecipients raise additional funds and working with their Workforce Investment partner to ensure the leverage and maximization of state and federal resources to support the initiative beyond the grant lifecycle.

While the applicant's match is already raised, they indicate commitment to raising additional funds in support of their subrecipients match requirements. Through their partners and coordination of the Youth Funders Network, a strong foundation exists in which to expand the initiative. In addition, a link to a network of community foundations is described.

Youthprise articulates a comprehensive proposed initiative, effectively addressing each criteria. The proposed initiative is a geographically- issue-based Social Innovation Fund program focused on leveraging the capacity and strengths of existing workforce programs to more effectively create pathways to school, career and life success for at-risk youth in the target population. The applicant presents a comprehensive plan to provide youth with opportunities by expanding services and integrating an intentional systematic focus on social and emotional development to meet the needs of youth ages 14-24 who are either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system or disconnected from school and education

The applicant effectively articulates strong organizational management. Six board committees are chaired by a person under 25 years of age and an older adult. The board meets bi monthly to monitor progress. Active engagement of youth in the organization is evidenced in the fact that of a 20 member board eight positions are reserved for youth ages 16-25. Members of the leadership team are identified and their qualifications detailed as appropriate to lead and advance the proposed initiative.

The applicant clearly describes their successful experiences in securing funds for their endeavors specifying that of the current \$8.2 million budget less than 29% is from federal resources. It is identified that collaboration with state agencies has been successful in leveraging funds such as a recent \$500,000 commitment to support Youthbuild and

\$150,000 to support the expansion of the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative. It is precisely stated that the applicant engages with a large network of over 70 youth funders across the State in the Youth Funders Network. It is noteworthy that the applicant organization was created by the McKnight Foundation to promote economic development in Greater Minnesota. The McKnight Foundation is identified as one of the state's largest private foundations.

The applicant clearly demonstrates that the proposed project is a geographically based Social Innovation Fund (SIF) program called Youthprise. The project will address the focus areas of Youth Development and Economic Opportunities for youth who are between the ages of 14 and 24 and are either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, or disconnected from school and education. The program will meet the need for additional programming to accommodate more youth who seek workforce development programs. The applicant effectively demonstrates a logical theory of change that outlines the approach and measureable outcomes that will be achieved through the program. The applicant effectively demonstrates that a plan and procedures are in place to select qualified sub-recipient organizations whose programs and services are aligned with applicant's rationale and approach. Based on a review of the applicant's experiences and accomplishments, the applicant has successfully documented a track record of working with grant and grantees. Based on the many years of experience, the applicant has the potential to be successful with the SIF project.

The applicant effectively demonstrates that the Youthprise organization has a strong history of setting goals with grantees and putting the support and accountability mechanisms in place to ensure success. The applicant shows strong experience working with youth serving programs by ensuring their grantees are using a validated instrument to measure quality and make the necessary program improvements based on quality scores and achieving established outcomes. The applicant effectively demonstrates their capacity to support sub-recipients growth through technical assistance and developing strategic plans to align each project with the overall theory of change.

Weaknesses:

None noted.

EVALUATION REVIEW

Strengths:

The applicant and their partners will provide technical assistance and training to develop the subrecipient's capacity to obtain moderate levels of evidence, and to bring programs to scale. Technical assistance opportunities will occur within a peer-learning environment where subrecipients share data leading to program improvement. Individualized support for subrecipients will be made available as needed. Subrecipients will receive summary reports about their progress over time. Subrecipient award levels will be determined by the level of evidence upon which the subrecipient enters the program.

The applicant has put together a team with the capacity to implement their proposed Social Innovation Strategy B Initiative. The applicant's premise is that building the capacity of workforce readiness and youth development organizations to equip "opportunity youth" with the academic, technical, and social-emotional skills and social capital necessary for economic independence will enhance the value and impact of existing programs that are present in just one of these domains.

Sub-grantees will be required to align their programs models with a Career Pathworks framework. The applicant has identified a number of promising program models (e.g., YouthBuild, Gateway to College, and Back on Track) that fit that framework as well as show sufficient preliminary evidence of effectiveness that can be enhanced in terms of reach and impact.

The applicant is partnering with an evaluation firm, Search Institute, which has a proven track record of research with youth development programs. This third party evaluator will participate in the sub-grantee selection process by assessing the quality of the data already being collected and determining the level of capacity potential sub-grantees have to participate in a more rigorous evaluation and grow their program models.

To be selected, sub-grantees must provide at least preliminary evidence that their proposed program model is effective. Those who have preliminary evidence will be required to further validate the application of their model as they achieve limited scaling of the program. Those with moderate levels of effectiveness will be expected to achieve more ambitious scaling goals for program growth.

It is notable that the applicant has personnel with experience and training in program evaluation, particularly the Director of Partnerships & External Relations who will hire the Project Manager for the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) project and serve as a liaison to its partners. In addition, the applicant's research partner, Search Institute, has significant experience in conducting a wide range of qualitative and quantitative evaluation projects, including formative and summative evaluations focused on a variety of areas of youth development programming.

It is pertinent that that the applicant and the external evaluator will use numerous methods to assess the subrecipients' readiness and capacity to implement a rigorous evaluation for continuous improvement and capacity growth. For example, research validated tools for social-emotional skills important for workforce, have been developed by Search Institute and will be used over time as a means to build subrecipient capacity to collect pre- and post-data and determine participant impact.

Additional evaluation data will be used to provide guidance in making program improvements. Readiness for this process will be continuously assessed, and technical assistance will be provided to increase evidence of the program's effectiveness. Ongoing training, technical assistance, and peer mentoring will be available to ensure that subrecipients achieve at least a moderate level of evidence during the grant period.

The applicant has sufficiently developed key objectives related to the assessment of the subrecipients' need for technical assistance as they design, implement, and monitor evaluations of their program models. Some of these include assessing the ability of subrecipients to consistently collect quality pre- and post-project data, as well as building the capacity of program staff to use data to inform continuous improvement of programs through systematic use of the Search Institute's Development Assets Profile.

Weaknesses:

The logic model includes references to the importance of building social-emotional skills and supports of youth participants in order for them to reach successful life outcomes. However, the mechanisms by which social-emotional skills lead to improved educational and workforce outcomes was not well-articulated in the proposal.

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It is not clear what experience the applicant has obtained in managing and supporting evaluations of past funded program models. The information provided focuses on the expertise of the external evaluator, Search Institute.

The applicant does not provide sufficient information to understand their experience influencing and supporting recipients to use evidence as a way to improve program performance. Descriptive information, or examples of activities that support the use of evidence from their former projects for program improvement, were not included.

The applicant does not describe their ability to apply evidence and evaluation results to decision-making and investment strategies. Instead, the applicant focuses on an investment approach describing the subrecipients' selection process.