

# Applicant Feedback Summary

## 2015 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition

(Program and Evaluation Reviewers)

**Legal Applicant:** Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

**Applicant ID:** 15SI172082

**Project Name:** Project Everlast Model Expansion

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 geographic expansion of their Project Everlast youth development model to serve youth ages 14-24 who have experienced child welfare, juvenile justice involvement, or homelessness in rural Nebraska. While the proposed intervention exists in the larger urban areas of the State, rural communities lack the formal structure and services Project Everlast offers.

Measureable outcomes provided by the applicant were very specific and include baselines and timeframes. One example is the goal of increasing the number of youth served with a baseline of 1,000 in 2015 and the aggressive objective to support 2,500 youth by 2018.

The applicant provides encouraging Preliminary Evidence level data from their intervention model in urban Nebraska communities. Survey results indicate that the longer youth are involved in Project Everlast, the better outcomes they have in employment, education, housing, and transportation. One example is that the number of youth age 18 and older who received their high school diploma or equivalency increased from 62% to 96%, and even more hopeful, are those who received education beyond high school rose from 47% to 75%.

The applicant was definitive in the characteristics subrecipients should have to be considered for selection. The existing non-profit must be high performing, have competent leadership, and an aggressive strategic plan that aligns with the purpose of the applicant. In addition, to support their theory of change, subrecipients must also be a member of an existing cross-sector community collaborative with successful experience serving the target youth population.

The Older Youth System for Community Readiness Assessment and a review of the CNCS Capacity Building Measures will be completed by subrecipients. The applicant will review the results to assess their capacity and prepare assistance plans unique to the identified needs. Delivery methods of technical assistance may include workshops, peer learning opportunities, and internet training.

The qualifications and capacity of the staff and contractors associated with this applicant are more than sufficient. The President/CEO is the Board liaison and participates in state and national committees concerning child well-being with a focus on those involved in the welfare system. The Chief Financial Officer has an MBA and is a CPA, ensuring strong financial compliance with Social Innovation Funding requirements. The Vice President of Community Impact, who is responsible for community grant making, is an experienced practitioner in community organizing and assessment, and holds a BS Degree in Consumer and Family Science.

To ensure program success and help build subrecipient capacity, the applicant describes a key Leadership Team composed of vital stakeholders who will be available to support, guide, help plan, and oversee the implementation process. They will continue to make adjustments to the process as needed and help achieve the projects desired outcomes. In addition, experienced Project Everlast model implementers from the urban area will be available to offer technical assistance throughout the project period.

Compelling evidence was provided regarding the applicant's ability to raise non-federal funds.

The applicant is identified as a new applicant and presents a well-developed articulation that effectively addresses each of the criteria, specifying Project Everlast as a geographically based proposal that aims to scale a model program that is successfully operating in three urban counties in Nebraska. Identifying positive preliminary evidence, the proposed initiative is goal oriented and seeks to scale the evidence-based model, focused on reaching the remaining 90 counties in the state that lack formal structure which the Project Everlast infrastructure and services offers.

The applicant articulates a comprehensive description of support, monitoring and oversight strategies for subrecipients. They identify that subrecipients will be required to have engaged in a thorough cross-sector qualitative and quantitative assessment of community needs and conditions relevant to children and families with a focus on those involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems of care.

The applicant details a history of successful private fund raising and grant funding endeavors. For example, it is noted that \$20 million dollar of private funding was raised to match the \$40 million public investment to an endowment.

Evaluation of performance monitoring is well detailed and includes regular site visit of the leadership staff and the delivery of monthly reports based on performance review. It is clearly noted that the project staff will provide technical assistance and capacity building within each subrecipient collaborative to inform intervention practice, model development, and implementation specific to youth engagement equity, cultural relevance and social capital issues.

The applicant is proposing to expand their geographically based PE youth development model, currently in existence in two urban areas in Nebraska, to include targeted participants in rural areas throughout the state. The applicant clearly aligned statewide data on the needs of the targeted population. The project will collaborate with seven to ten sub-recipient service providers to create supportive communities committed to improving outcomes for youth ages 14-24 with foster care, juvenile justice or homelessness experiences. The goal of the project is to build strong collaborations and infrastructure to improve the positive outcomes for participating youth in the areas of education, employment, permanence, housing, health, transportation, and economic stability.

The applicant effectively demonstrates that the current project model that has been operational in two urban areas is at a Preliminary Evidence level. The program provided evidence of the project's theory of change and the desired results and training necessary for all the sub-recipients. The applicant effectively demonstrates that procedures and strategies are in place to ensure ongoing sustainability. The applicant indicated that their main focus will be on outcomes and integrating evidence-based practices into existing services and sharing outcomes across partnering organizations.

**Weaknesses:**

While the applicant appears committed to the priority, more specific activities as to how it will sustain it after the grant lifecycle would provide clarity.

Qualifications of board members are lacking in an adequate description.

**EVALUATION REVIEW**

**Strengths:**

The applicant provides sufficient preliminary evidence that the Project Everlast (PE) model has been effective with the target population (14-24 year old youth served by and exiting the child welfare or juvenile justice system) in urban areas in Nebraska. While the applicant has a well thought out theory of change for their PE program model, they understand that a single intervention model, tested in an urban environment, might not be appropriate in the rural communities of the state. They propose a rigorous evaluation, with the assistance of a third party evaluator, to determine the differences in urban and rural implementation of the practice model that has proven successful in the urban areas of the state. This study will enable them to effectively take this program to scale statewide.

The applicant has described sufficient experience to indicate that they are capable of managing and supporting an evaluation that will result in at least moderate levels of evidence over a three to five year period. They employ evaluation professionals internally as well as have a commitment to hiring a third party evaluator. The applicant has a clear plan to provide technical assistance to sub-grantees that begins at the first orientation session and will continue on a regular basis, depending on assessed need of each sub-grantee. The applicant will encourage and support best practices in data collection, tracking and reporting methods, as well as using data to inform decision making and continuous improvement.

The applicant effectively describes their extensive experience in managing and supporting evaluations. Specifically, they have been successfully using third party evaluators for their funded programs since 2007. Such routine use of this evaluation process has provided applicant staff with valuable experience in working with such endeavors and personnel.

The applicant describes a plethora of technical assistance topics that will be provided to subrecipients including an overview of the process and requirements of a quasi-experimental evaluation design to achieve a moderate level of evidence. Subrecipients will benefit from a customized, formal Evaluation Assistance Plan tailored to each subrecipient's identified technical assistance needs as they design, implement, manage, monitor, and sustain the project model.

**Weaknesses:**

The applicant proposes expanding a community-capacity building program previously implemented in urban settings to rural settings in the state. The goal of the program is to build community capacity to serve transition age, post-foster care youth and to improve their outcomes. While the applicant had a well-developed statement of the problem their solution did not follow from the data presented. For example, it appears that many of the underserved rural youth have high rates of teen pregnancy. The project did not directly address a response to these needs. The desired outcomes appear to be related to increasing concrete-level supports, such as housing and decreased unemployment, but it is unclear how community capacity building would lead to such outcomes. The applicant mentions the importance of prevention and protective factors but does not show evidence of how these would lead to better access to supports or how the subrecipients would implement programs designed to prevent problems and protect youth from the negative impacts of their environments. There is some mention of the importance of social support as a protective factor but no evidence of how the proposed project would promote social supports for this population.

There is no mention of the process of random assignment and whether it will be conducted by a contracted evaluator or whether sub-grantees will conduct random assignment of individuals in program or wait-list groups. It is a weaker design when sub-grantees assume this part of the research design.

There is also no assurance provided that the wait-list individuals will not receive any program service when program slots become available. This part of the evaluation design was not explained fully in the proposal.

It appears from the proposal that individual sub-grantees will continue to use their existing survey forms and administer them on their existing schedules. It is a weaker design not to have a common set of measures administered at the same intervals across sub-grantees.

Achieving rigorous evaluation results may be hampered by the limited sample sizes and types of statistical analyses available for such sample sizes.

The applicant is relying on their experienced in-house evaluator to determine the adequacy and reasonableness of their evaluation budget of \$169,600 for year one. They have not cited research or other data that supports their assessment to justify costs of these evaluation activities.