

Applicant Feedback Summary

2015 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition

(Program and Evaluation Reviewers)

Legal Applicant: Annie E. Casey Foundation

Applicant ID: 15SI172115

Project Name: Annie E. Casey Foundation

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 program model for the Annie E Casey Foundation is able to achieve outcomes at scale. The applicant is proposing an issue-based Youth Development Program to invest in community based partnerships that will focus on improving the lives of low income youth.

The applicant's strategy clearly demonstrated how it would address the range of sub-awards, the number of sub-awards, and the outlined timeframe that addresses when the various selection process stages will be completed.

The applicant greatly demonstrated their capacity to support sub-recipient growth. Their numerous programs consist of access to coaches who will work with staff from the sub-recipient's program and local affiliates. The applicant presented relevant examples of successful past efforts to support growth through replication and expansion. The applicant also provided a thorough description of adequate resources to support successful sub-recipient growth.

The applicant thoroughly explained how they have a long history of national collaboration and technical assistance provisions, in addition to managing complex projects with multiple sites, partners, and funders to improve outcomes for children and youth in foster care and other systems.

The applicant provides a thorough description of the targeted geographical areas of 40 states to implement the pre-identified interventions for the Learn and Earn for Vulnerable Youth project. Detailed statistics are given for children's poverty rates, percentages of youth in foster care or transition from foster care, and percentages of youth in the juvenile justice system. Relevant and current data by state are derived from high-quality resources such as KIDS COUNT 2013 and AFCARS 2012.

The applicant presents research evidence to support its selection of both the Jobs for America's Graduates intervention training program and the selected strategies from the Back on Track intervention program. There is a high level of research evidence to support this selection, such as the recent study of the Jobs for America's Graduates high school program from The Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. Also, the applicant presents several other studies to support its selected interventions including recent studies for the positive impact of

post-secondary bridging interventions as addressed in studies from Stanford University School of Education and a study of eight summer bridge programs in Texas.

The applicant clearly details its plans to make subawards to a maximum of twelve communities for a range of awards between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

Eight concise criteria are appropriately detailed demonstrating the expected high quality of subrecipients. Examples of the criteria include demonstrated fiscal ability, capacity to manage complex funding streams over a grant cycle, and successful experience in working with external evaluators.

The applicant successfully explains the two project partners' past efforts in providing support for program replication. Examples include the Center for the Study of Social Policy's technical assistance with data collection, analysis, and leveraging financial resources in the recent Federal Promise Neighborhoods Grant Program and the Federal Choice Neighborhoods Grant Program. Jobs for the Future shows extensive program support for expansions, and the applicant documents that this partner has replicated its model for college and career readiness for low income and underrepresented youth in 32 state networks with over 1000 affiliate sites since 1980.

Details are evident of the types of technical resources, which will be offered to subrecipients as they implement one or both of the prescribed interventions. Strong resources include learning communities with other practitioners of the interventions, development of planning tools, "just-in-time virtual support," and intensive coaching at each site by the Learn and Earn for Vulnerable Youth Technical Team.

The applicant documents its strong fiscal health with an annual budget of \$176 million for 2015, and the Social Innovation Fund allocation of \$1.5 million only represents one percent of its budget. The Annie E. Casey Foundation also shows fiscal strength in having an endowment worth \$3 billion.

The applicant clearly outlines a robust management team that has extensive advanced educational degrees, national and state level experiences in working on major projects and policy change, and years of experience in both private and public sector in working with youth issues and service delivery. Key personnel are already aligned for the project's positions such as the Director of Strategic Initiatives having the responsibilities of Program Director.

Feasible methods are detailed for the monitoring of subrecipients as they implement their interventions and progress to both individual site goals and overall program goals. Key aspects include monitoring personnel (external consultant plus Annie E. Casey Foundation staff) and training of subrecipients on major grant requirements at onset of program.

The applicant clearly states its issue-based Youth Development approach to invest in community based partnerships focused on improving the lives of low income, system-involved youth, by significantly improving educational and employment related outcomes. System-involved youth include young people who are transitioning out of foster care, are currently involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, or are homeless.

The applicant makes a strong case that appropriate, evidence-based solutions exist to address the identified social problem in the target geographies. The applicant has pre-identified two interventions that were chosen, based upon preliminary evidence of success and demonstrated scaling potential, to propel youth transitioning from foster care, and other system-involved, youth toward positive education and employment outcomes. The two interventions involve preparation for success in school and work based on the Jobs for America's Graduates model and a postsecondary bridge program with first-year postsecondary supports for youth who have attained, or are poised to attain, high school credentials based on the Back on Track model.

The applicant is a national grant-making organization and has extensive experience in developing and implementing grant selection processes, both independently and as part of national collaborations. The applicant will partner with the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to lead the sub-award RFP design and selection process to enhance

the applicant's current capacity, focusing on how they select sub-recipients who are well-suited to implement one of the two predetermined models. CSSP's experience managing national competitive applications for funding includes developing and managing RFP processes, monitoring grants to multiple organizations and sites, and supporting grant recipients to ensure successful project implementation. They have worked in this capacity with, among others, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and Building Neighborhood Capacity Program funded through the US Department of Justice.

The applicant plans to allocate grant awards based on sub-recipient's proposed size and scale of their implementation plan, their ability to secure 1:1 match, their existing management infrastructure, the extent of their existing performance management and quality assurance protocols, and their experience and capacity to work with an external evaluator.

Both the applicant and a program partner, MDRC, possess a large capacity to collect and analyze data required for evaluation, continuous improvement, compliance and other purposes. They routinely conduct surveys and collect administrative data for analysis to establish baselines and to measure impact.

The applicant's current organizational budget is \$176 million with an endowment of about \$3 billion. The \$1.5 million funding request in Year 1 represents less than 1% of the budget. The applicant expressed the implications, stating that although the percentage is low, it is significant and represents the first time the applicant has applied for federal funds.

The applicant is committed to performance management. Central to this effort is the applicant's use of goal setting with grantees using Results-Based Accountability framework.

The applicant will provide technical assistance and other services to support the success of sub-recipients to achieve proposed outcomes. Services include a thorough assessment of sub-recipients' capacity, a gap analysis, and the development of a strategic action plan to guide implementation. Ongoing technical assistance will be provided through site-based coaching, quarterly visits and peer-to-peer leaning opportunities. Other areas of assistance will be data collection and analysis, accountability, evaluation, continuous improvement and sustainability planning.

The applicant will engage a third party consultant, with specific federal grants management systems compliance experience related to foundations, to ensure systems and procedures are developed on the front end of the program at the national and local levels. The consultant will strengthen the capacity of sub-recipients to develop compliant federal grants management systems through trainings, regular visits and follow-up calls during the term of the grant, which will ensure sub-recipients develop and implement proper policies, procedure and internal controls.

The program activities set out in the application are aligned directly with the applicant's mission to create bright futures for all children and youth. The applicant has a long-term priority of developing solutions, programs and policies that help the most disadvantaged children and is committed to continuing the investment priorities articulated in this application, beyond the life of the grant. The applicant's focus on the 14-25 age population is at the core of their ongoing work, and they demonstrate regularly, through action, that they will continue to invest in these priorities and populations in the long-term.

The applicant plans to grant sub-awards in areas that are philanthropically underserved. The applicant will seek locations that meet the sub-award criteria, as well as locations that offer geographic and population diversity. The applicant will pay particular attention to geography as the sub-award pool is determined.

Weaknesses:

Even though the applicant briefly mentions one major study of the interventions impacting foster youth, incomplete details are given to address which specific interventions have been attempted, and there is not a description of the one intervention model showing positive impact, as studied by the Urban Institute in 2003. Furthermore, no details are

evident of any attempted solutions for increased employment and higher education for youth in, or recently in, the juvenile justice system.

The applicant gives no details or evidence to support that there are no proven solutions to youth in the juvenile justice system and homeless youth.

EVALUATION REVIEW

Strengths:

The applicant provided exceptional evidence that they have the capacity to ensure a successful evaluation, which includes their Research, Evaluation and Learning unit. This unit manages the foundation's evaluation, research, data development, performance management, knowledge and learning related strategies, and investments to inform program innovation, policy reform, and the building of a strong evidence base. The applicant also provides strong evidence of staff and contractors who have experience in designing and conducting rigorous evaluations of programs that aim to improve the well-being of low-income people.

The applicant provides a clear understanding of how they will complete the necessary steps to achieve a moderate level of evidence that will include an impact study and an outcome comparison study with details provided. The applicant's plan to work closely with the designated evaluator to ensure that sub-recipient staff is trained to implement certain research procedures is excellent.

The applicant provides a strong plan for providing technical assistance to sub-recipients, to achieve at least moderate levels of evidence, that will include assessing sub-recipients' technical assistance needs as they prepare for evaluation related activities and educating the sub-recipients, their referral partners, and other local stakeholders on the strengths, limitations, and operational realities of various impact design options.

The applicant describes, in detail, a two-step evaluation plan which would produce moderate levels of evidence of success over a three to five year period. They have addressed research design and included how design might be adjusted if constraints do not allow a fully randomized control.

They additionally have thought through Technical Assistance issues with regard both to evaluation and program. A Technical Assistance team will begin work with each subrecipient by assessing their needs in the areas of grant implementation, progress tracking, aligning resources, coordinating partners, and use of data to improve effectiveness.

The applicant has a budget that effectively details projected costs to date and evaluation personnel needed. The budget appears sufficient to implement grant activities and includes expenses for multiple years of the grant and proposed uses for matching funds.

The applicant provides a well-defined narrative describing the history of their experiences in managing and supporting evaluations of past funded program models.

The Technical Assistance offered in the area of the learning lab supported program performance and evaluates program models.

The applicant describes their evaluation plan as using a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the program that will increase the level of evidence over two to five year period. This method will analyze program impacts separately for subgroups of youth who have been in foster care, separately from youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not provide an outline of how they themselves have integrated evidence into program changes or decisions.

The applicant does not clearly describe how the evaluation plan is aligned with the goals, measurable objectives and the expected outcomes of the proposed program and the current Performance Indicators for the Social Innovation Fund.

The proposal does not clearly identify strategies that will likely result in an increased level of evidence to ensure that sub-recipients will have preliminary evidence.

The applicant does not provide a clear and concise evaluation plan to assess the required criteria set forth by the SIF project guidelines. It is unclear to determine if the methods are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the goals, objectives, and outcomes.

The context within which the project operates needed more clarity to assess if the evaluation plan is appropriate. The methods of evaluation for examining the effectiveness of the project implementation strategies lack clarity.

The lack of information makes it difficult to assess if the proposed project will provide timely guidance for quality assurance, performance feedback, periodic assessment of progress, and effective strategies appropriate for replication or testing in other settings. It was difficult to understand how information gained from the evaluation plan will be used to monitor progress and guide ongoing efforts for continuous program improvement that are aligned with the goals of partnering schools and district for college and career readiness.

The proposal was not clear and concise about identifying and describing the qualifications of the external evaluator who will collect and analyze data to assess progress toward meeting the program's measurable outcomes for program improvement.

The budget does not demonstrate a moderate level of evidence that will ensure high level of rigorous analysis will be appropriate for the SIF project.

The budget narrative lacks information on how the funds will be used to support the evaluation plan such as activities, services for the target population, the sub-recipient growth, the evaluation support, and research