

Applicant Feedback Summary

2015 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition

(Program and Evaluation Reviewers)

Legal Applicant: REDF

Applicant ID: 15SI172374

Project Name: REDF

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 clearly describes its issue-based strategy for social change that aligns with the SIF by targeting economically disadvantaged populations through social enterprises that are supported through capacity building efforts. The applicant provides compelling evidence of past success by noting that its intervention strategy improves the social condition of targeted economically disadvantaged people. The applicant details a well-designed management system that it will use to assure subrecipient selection, support, evaluation, grant compliance and impact measurement process.

The applicant clearly describes the Social Enterprise change theory and provides anecdotal examples of prior success. The requirement that subrecipients conduct a trial project to demonstrate capacity and ability to execute the project is a strength of the proposal as is the well-defined selection process. The level of planned technical assistance and monitoring will likely ensure that subrecipients are provided appropriate supports as they engage participants and handle grant funds.

The applicant presents a strong and compelling case for expanding its current SIF Program, which addresses the national challenge of chronic unemployment of economically disadvantaged individuals. The innovative social enterprise model data is provided and demonstrates a positive and significant impact on individuals, families, businesses, and taxpayers. The applicant will increase the knowledge of the social enterprise model by replicating it on a larger scale, serving many thousands more people nationwide, and moving the evidence of success from moderate to strong.

The applicant has an extensive technical support system and uses an effective and high quality monitoring system. Its 18 years of providing grants in Southern California, conducting rigorous evaluation, and synthesizing and sharing data is notable. The applicant has started and scaled over 60 social enterprises, served 9,500 people, and generated over 140 million in business revenue. The framework they use provides the necessary supports including the use of best practice, extensive technical assistance, financial support, and stimulating local investment to build employment opportunities for disadvantaged adults. An online workshop on engaging and growing social enterprises based on the applicant's lessons and success is now available online.

The applicant makes a strong case for investment and commitment to the development of social enterprise ecosystems. The current SIF grant will scale the model and should achieve a significant financial impact on disadvantaged, unemployed beneficiaries, businesses, communities, and taxes.

Weaknesses:

The proposed lacks clarity regarding how the applicant will identify potential subrecipients outside the Northern and Southern California regions to implement their social enterprise intervention.

The applicant does not appropriately detail planned project expansion beyond California. Moreover, the lack of adequate support for claims that current systems are not addressing the challenges weakens the proposal. Finally, four of the five project goals are not stated using measureable terms, which may hinder project evaluation and outcome reporting.

The scaling of the social enterprise model will take place in the Midwest, West, and South, but limited information is provided on how the applicant will identify the ecosystems in these regions and identify interventions based on the need and gaps in services within the ecosystems is unclear. More detail is needed on the applicant's investment approach and the specific measurable outcomes (only one of the five goals identified is measurable) that will be achieved by the proposed program.

EVALUATION REVIEW

Strengths:

The applicant proposes a rigorous evaluation plan that meets Social Innovation Fund requirements of at least moderate levels of evidence. The applicant has worked with evaluation firm BTW Informing Change. The applicant proposes to work with subrecipients to design individual program evaluation to support their assessment conclusions over time. The proposed budget appears to be adequate for conducting evaluation activities based on programs needs as outlined in the grant request. The applicant plans to share data driven research with subrecipients to improve learning and promote program best practices.

The applicant describes the process to select subgrantees and the requirements to pursue the strongest evidence possible by the subgrantees' commitment of participating in randomized control trials in addition to using the evidence to improve the program. The applicant mentions technical assistance (e.g., webinars, site visits, program liaisons, evaluation training, and building capacity); which will provide the venue to meet the desired objectives for the program and evaluation activities.

The applicant mentioned that the BTW Informing Change firm performed a pre/post survey evaluation to understand the impact of the social enterprise model implemented between 1998 - 2008 on participants two years after being hired. Moreover, the applicant demonstrated the use of quasi-experimental designs in the past.

The applicant has over ten years of experience partnering with evaluation organizations and has experience supporting grantees in using their data to improve their program performance. The applicant proposes to conduct a two-tiered review process to review potential grantees' ability to participate in their proposed rigorous randomized control trial (RCT) evaluation protocol. This rigorous evaluation is likely to result in the funded program models increasing the level of evidence over the three to five year grant period. The applicant has earmarked a significant portion of the grant monies (approximately 29%) for evaluation, which for the type of proposed evaluation designs that the applicant has described is appropriate and realistic. The applicant cites previous research conducted by Mathematica Jobs Study that demonstrates their social enterprise model has achieved a moderate level of evidence and has the potential of increasing their level of evidence over the grant period.

Weaknesses:

Overall the applicant proposes a strong evaluation. However, a key challenge is to find an adequate number of organizations that utilize the social enterprise model. Subrecipients need to be able to generate a control group identical to the group of program. The applicant did not clearly identify the third partner evaluator. It is not clear whether the personnel who was mentioned in the application as having experience in evaluation capacity and data for performance will be the third party evaluator.

The amount designated for awards for subgrantees is indicated to range from \$100,000 to \$500,000, however, the amount or percentage to be dedicated for evaluation activities is not fully indicated and it may not be sufficient to comply with the evaluation requirements and the rigorous data collection/methodological design.

Since the applicant has not yet named a specific research partner that will be conducting the evaluation, it is unclear if the external evaluator will have the staff or capacity to successfully evaluate the subrecipients' program models. It is also unclear how the external evaluators and the data consultants will work together with the applicant and what roles they will take in regards to the evaluation of the grantees' programs.