

**Applicant Feedback Summary**  
**2015 Social Innovation Fund Grant Competition**  
(Program and Evaluation Reviewers)

**Legal Applicant:** United Way of Lane County

**Applicant ID:** 15SI172403

**Project Name:** United Way of Lane County

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 provides well-documented data to clearly describe the geographical focus area of the program. The applicant also provides compelling statistical data to support the need for programming that includes references to area educational goals ; kindergarten assessment data in the areas of literacy, math, and approaches to learning; and area per capita income (comparably low) in relation to state and national averages. The applicant substantiates that current solutions are not achieving adequate and timely outcomes. The applicant clearly explains the three phases of the theory of change which are the types of organizations they will invest in and why, as well as the specific technical assistance they will provide to subrecipients. The applicant makes a compelling case for implementing the innovative, evidence based Kids In Transition to School (KITS) Program, which has proven to be effective in the targeted geographical area.

The applicant clearly articulates the profile of the type of subrecipient organizations and how they align with the rationale and approach. The applicant states the estimated number of subawards (four to six), the estimated range of the subawards, the criteria that will be used to determine the fit with the proposed Kids In Transition to School (KITS) Program, and a general timeline of when the stages of selection will be complete (December 2015). The applicant clearly articulates a selection process that will identify high performing subrecipients. The applicant shows extensive experience in implementing their proposed award selection process and successfully selecting subrecipients well-suited to implement the proposed programming intervention.

The applicant provides an adequate history of the capacity to support grantee growth with the Applicant's County investment process; strategic investments in early learning; and expansion of evidenced based parenting education. The applicant's approach to growing effective subrecipient program models is congruent with their theory of change. The applicant clearly articulates what they will provide the subrecipient to support growth and sustainability.

The applicant provides specific examples of successfully supporting approaches leading to positive outcomes (Success by 6; Parent Helpline; Cherish Every Child"). The applicant also provides specific examples of outcome measures and reliance on the data to suggest changes. Staff capacity is clearly outlined (name; education; and experience) and the capacity of staff listed is well linked to the applicability of the proposed program.

The applicant provides compelling evidence of their prior experience setting and implementing goals with recipients (years of service; role in community; fiscal award amounts and associated programs supported). Specific measurements for monitoring sub-recipient performance is listed, that includes training and technical assistance in program implementation; evaluation technical assistance; data collection technical assistance; and fundraising supports. Monitoring schedules are clearly articulated.

The budget proposed is reasonable to the program activities outlined. The budget is aligned with the application narrative and provides adequate explanation for expenses. The applicant demonstrates the ability and experience in raising non-federal funds necessary for the match.

The applicant presents compelling evidence to describe the lack of kindergarten readiness as a result of early learning deficits in the targeted, geographical area. The applicant describes an evidence-based program that has been piloted in the targeted area, with plans for expansion through the selection of qualified sub-recipients in both rural and urban sectors. The applicant provides a detailed description of its strengths in supporting community programs through technical assistance, leveraging resources, and a clear match commitment.

The proposal is well organized and outlines a thoughtful approach to improving early childhood education in Lane County, Oregon. The applicant appears to be an appropriate organization to lead this effort as a grant maker, convener, and technical advisor, given their role in the community. Also, the **Kids In Transition to School (KITS)** program's local team approach has merit. United Way's role in scaling this up and focusing on metrics is appropriate. Likewise, the plan to scale this is clearly laid out. An added strength to this application is the coordination with the statewide plan for implementing a full day kindergarten program that would include this model.

**Weaknesses:**

Insufficient evidence is presented to support the correlation between the program need and the ability of the program to directly impact kindergarten outcomes, long term educational goals of children showing positive adjustment in school, satisfactory academic achievement, prosocial skills with peers as well as teachers, and success controlling youth behaviors.

Contractual and consultant services appear disproportionately low on the CNCS share and high on the grantee share, without clear explanation to the disparity.

The demonstrated capacity to support subrecipient growth lacks specificity in describing their long history, supported expansion, financial investments and training. It is unclear what the evidence of effectiveness is or how the evidence of effectiveness will be used to determine if the program is prepared for growth.

The applicant does not fully quantify the outcomes of the pilot programs. Also, the applicant does not clearly specify how the technical assistance will bring about sub-recipient fund development results. The applicant's budget narrative and budget categories are not fully detailed to show specific expenses for the identified personnel positions and contractual expenses of marketing and evaluation.

This proposal weaknesses exist around not clearly outlining the core competencies the subrecipient organizations requires to be considered ready to offer the **Kids In Transition to School (KITS)** program. The KITS included placing emphasis of program success and partners relationships on low staff turnover that isn't organizationally encouraged (or at least outlined in the application). As an example, needing to clearly define what fundraising support will be given to subrecipients, and the absence of a contingency plan to fundraising should the current plan be unsuccessful.

## **EVALUATION REVIEW**

### **Strengths:**

Overall, the applicant proposes a sound evaluation plan that will meet the SIF requirements of at least moderate level of evidence. The applicant presents a thorough description of the evidence that will be utilized to select sub-grantees, which is in alignment with the definition in the NOFA. The applicant also specifies how sub-grantees will be required to participate in a shared moderate level of evidence at the macro-level (evidence is quasi-experimental in design with the use of non-randomized school level data), thus convincingly demonstrating the feasibility of reaching a moderate level of evidence over the five year plan. Also, the applicant details its experience supporting sub-grantees in using evidence to improve education outcomes for youth, such as, the Oregon Parenting Education Collaborative project and the Lane Early Learning Alliance (hub) project.

Overall, the applicant provides a well-detailed plan to assess sub-recipient readiness and capacity to implement a semi-rigorous evaluation strategy. Strengths include the use of a competitive RFP process, a review plan with the requisite expertise, and a comprehensive list of review criteria, including a “Readiness Checklist.” Also, the applicant’s evaluation budget provides a detailed breakdown of how much time each evaluation team member will devote to the project each year, with time allocations aligned with proposed evaluation activities.

Overall, the applicant working with the contractor/consultant for Post-Intervention Ratings of Change., has taken the KITS Program from a research model to an empirically verified program model tested in three pilot sites over the past three years. The applicant plans to expand the program to additional schools and districts by utilizing standardized measures to assess multiple layers of targeted populations (i.e., the students, teachers and parents). The overall evaluation plan will be managed by a Technical Assistance and Oversight Committee.

### **Weaknesses:**

However, the applicant does not clearly identify which quasi-experiment design will be used in the project, such as generic outcomes measures as controls. It is not clear how the applicant will address the potential for erroneous results when comparing the proposed project’s quasi-experiments with their randomized experiments conducted using the same KITS program on different youth populations in the same county. Also, the applicant does not clearly identify an evaluation budget to support their proposed evaluation design. Finally, the applicant does not provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the KITS program is an appropriate evidence-based intervention for the proposed project. There is limited data regarding the randomized efficacy trials conducted using the KITS program with different youth populations in the same county. Lastly, it is not clear if the participant’s scores on standardized kindergarten assessments will be compared to published norms for school children in the same school district.

However, the applicant does not provide sufficient information from prior research studies. As an example, information on effect sizes and confidence intervals from prior studies are missing. Additionally, the applicant does not describe how they intend to address and strengthen the internal validity of the quasi-experimental evaluation study. The applicant does not include information on the psychometric properties of the outcome instruments.

The applicant does not provide the outcome data from randomized efficacy trials conducted on KITS Program in order to verify the “significant effects” of the program. Additionally, the overall science and evaluation assessment standards of the program are primarily the responsibility of the contractor/consultant – the designer of the Kids in Transition to School curriculum - which does not align with the need for a third party evaluation component (for example the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, both of which were mention in the application) to insure that the designer of the program in no way biases the outcome of program implementation.