

**U.S. Department of Education - EDCAPS
G5-Technical Review Form (New)**

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - OSP 2015 - 1: 84.370A

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: DC School Reform Now (U370A150002)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Services

1. A. Quality of project services (20 points).

- (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed project.
- (2) In determining the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed project, the Secretary considers the quality and sufficiency of strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.
- (3) In addition, the Secretary considers the extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project are appropriate to the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries of those services.

Strengths:

- p. 5-16 The applicant addresses each element of the priorities in a clear and easy to follow format.
- p. 3 The applicant has resources and services in place (e.g., parent-friendly materials, workshops, virtual school tours) that are relevant tools for OSP and can be expanded to include the private school sector.
- p. 5-16 The applicant understands and has experience with the target population for OSP and recruitment of that population.
- p. 7 The applicant has a Salesforce database in place and can modify it for OSP.
- In the GEPA statement, the applicant mentions children with special needs and having partnerships that can support those students in receiving appropriate services.

Weaknesses:

- While the application is well-written and each priority is addressed, in the Abstract, and throughout, there are references to actions that will occur (e.g., "DCSRN will evaluate the current practices of the OSP..." which signify a likely learning curve.
- No private school support or scholarship organization partnerships are referenced for involvement in the recruitment or retention activities.
- There is much more information provided about student/family recruitment as compared to oversight and administrative management of the program.

Reader's Score: 17

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. B. Quality of project personnel (25 points).

- (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project.
- (2) In determining the quality of project personnel, the Secretary considers the extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.
- (3) In addition, the Secretary considers:
 - (i) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director or principal investigator.

(ii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel.

Strengths:

- p. 17 David Pickens has significant public school system and political experience (from Chicago).
- p. 16 All current board members are DC residents with strong local public education landscape knowledge. Staff experience with the target population and the other education partners could assist in building bridges across the public and private education sectors and could mitigate some of the backlash against the OSP.

Weaknesses:

- It is unclear from the application how many of the staff/board members are from underrepresented groups. There is no indication that any of the current personnel have private school or school voucher experience, locally or in another jurisdiction and no noted experience in dealing with the politics of voucher programs.
- p. 16-19 The applicant states that there is a development director and 6 dedicated parent advocates but otherwise it is unclear how the current DCSRN staff will carry out the duties of the OSP – no organizational chart or position descriptions are provided for the leadership/administration of the program. It does not state who will manage the congressional relationships, finances, audits, new school recruitment, compliance, etc.
 - p. 13 Aside from the mention of Salesforce on page 7, there is minimal evidence of an appreciation of the complexity of the data management and reporting requirements and who will oversee that part of the work. While the application says that DCSRN will work with the Archdiocese and AIMS, there appears to be no existing relationship with private schools – the partner list indicates no private schools and no school choice support organizations or scholarship programs.

Reader's Score: 18

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources

1. C. Adequacy of resources (20 points).

- (1) The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources for the proposed project.**
- (2) In determining the adequacy of resources for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**
 - (i) The adequacy of support, including facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources, from the applicant organization or the lead applicant organization.**
 - (ii) The extent to which the budget is adequate to support the proposed project.**

Strengths:

- p. 18 The applicant indicates that the infrastructure is already in place and able to expand.
- p. 18 DCSRN has an existing website that can be expanded for OSP.
- p. 19 The applicant has a full-time development director who can assist with supplemental fundraising as needed.
- p. 19 The applicant states that the staff, board members and funders are in support of this expansion of the DCSRN mission.

Weaknesses:

- The budget narrative and table do not match. Specifically line 8 in the budget table – \$4,028,000 – which appears to be for the scholarships – is very low and contradicts the narrative.
- There are 2 FTEs mentioned in the budget narrative and it's not clear what their duties will entail. It doesn't state who will do data management, tech support, compliance monitoring, OSP training and supervision of parent advocates, reporting, etc.
- There is no allocation of funds for personnel other than the two new FTEs and it is unrealistic that those two can accomplish all of the leadership, administration and oversight needed for the program.
- Budget allocations for travel, equipment and supplies seem to be low and there is no reference for costs to modify Salesforce database or IT support time.

It appears that DCSRN will provide some services “in-kind” but none of that is specifically quantified in the budget narrative or the Section B Budget Summary table.

Reader's Score: 16

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. D. Quality of the management plan (35 points).

(1) The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project.

(2) In determining the quality of the management plan for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(i) The adequacy of the management plan to achieve the objectives of the proposed project on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

(ii) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.

(iii) The adequacy of mechanisms for ensuring high-quality products and services from the proposed project.

Strengths:

p. 19 The OSP calendar loosely aligns with the current HQSC timeline to allow for smooth transition for inclusion/integration of OSP.

p. 19-28 The applicant has provided a detailed timeline for each year of the grant.

p. 20, 22 The applicant references evaluation of “OSP tools and practices” to occur throughout year 1 with adjustments made as needed.

p. 22 The applicant references finding “supplemental resources” such as tutoring to students in need.

Weaknesses:

The applicant lists compliance requirements for participating schools but implementation is not reflected in the management plan – no indication of how and when this oversight will occur.

Time to set-up/build-out Salesforce is not referenced in the timeline.

There is no evidence of existing relationships with private school stakeholders. Evidence of the amount of time and resources needed to get up to speed on the private school sector and the related politics that accompany the OSP is not referenced in the timeline.

An overall human resources management plan and “clearly defined responsibilities” is missing. There is no allocation of time for David Pickens, the development director or the communications director. It doesn't state who is responsible for what.

Reader's Score: 27

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - OSP 2015 - 1: 84.370A

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: DC School Reform Now (U370A150002)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Services

1. A. Quality of project services (20 points).

- (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed project.
- (2) In determining the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed project, the Secretary considers the quality and sufficiency of strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.
- (3) In addition, the Secretary considers the extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project are appropriate to the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries of those services.

Strengths:

There is no doubt that the applicant has an extensive network into the target population, understands the needs of the population well, and is highly effective in working with this population to understand educational options and opportunity. DCSRN's High Quality Schools Campaign (HQSC), as described in the application, is in many ways a strong fit for the OSP. The HQSC "was developed to support families applying to, enrolling in and continuing in quality public schools" and DCSRN has spent the last four years developing and refining this program model. Using community-based partnerships to reach the targeted population is a powerful strategy, and has evidently produced impressive results including more than 50 active partnerships which collectively serve more than 1,000 families.

Weaknesses:

There is some question whether the applicant will have the technological capability to meet the requirements of administering a complex, detail-oriented program like the OSP. The application suggests the applicant will continue to rely on processes that are "already in place" (Grant Narrative p. 15). The applicant currently uses a Salesforce database to track families representing 2,000 students (Grant Narrative p. 7). The OSP would double that capacity. The proposal mentions that "the OSP is a program that requires sophisticated data management" but does not contain any detailed explanation for how DCSRN will handle the technology requirements of the program. For example, the proposal does not compare and contrast between its current technological capabilities, and the different and additional capabilities that will be required to administer the OSP. As a result of this omission, the proposal fails to address the quality of the services the applicant will provide in meeting the technology requirements of administering the OSP. There is no new vision for the use of technology to enhance and improve the administration of the OSP.

Reader's Score: 17

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. B. Quality of project personnel (25 points).

- (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the personnel who will carry out the proposed project.
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- (3) In addition, the Secretary considers:
 - (i) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director or principal investigator.
 - (ii) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of key project personnel.

Strengths:

The application reflects a strong familiarity with the target population, and relationships with many schools and community-based organizations and individuals who work well with the target population. Staff and partners understand the needs of the target population. The association with strong community-based partners such as Flamboyan and DCAYA could soften local opposition to the program in very positive ways. The strong partnerships with DCPS, the PCSB, and OSSE, and the strong Board of Directors are important strengths of the proposal.

Weaknesses:

The fact that there is little to no non-public school experience among senior staff members proposed by this applicant is a significant weakness. Also, there does not appear to be any senior staff dedicated on a full-time basis to running this program. There is no dedicated personnel for technology management, nor is there any high-level technology partnership. There are no senior level staff or Board with national level political contacts - a weakness for a program that is federally funded. And it is not clear how supportive of the OSP the applicant's Board members or senior staff have been, in the face of historically weak local support for the program.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources**1. C. Adequacy of resources (20 points).**

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 - (i) The adequacy of support, including facilities, equipment, supplies, and other resources, from the applicant organization or the lead applicant organization.**
 - (ii) The extent to which the budget is adequate to support the proposed project.**

Strengths:

The proposal reflects strong support for families and students. The fact that parent advocates are already in place is a strength. The fact that the applicant already has office space with expansion capacity, appropriate materials and a website, and a director of development in place, are all significant strengths. All of these are important assets that will help the applicant to be prepared to hit the ground running in administering the OSP.

Weaknesses:

In a significant weakness, the proposal does not include identified technology support, nor does it include a strategy for improving technology support for the program, nor is a technology vendor identified. The OSP is a very complex program that contains many moving parts, from determining income eligibility of applicants, to matching applicants with schools, and keeping track of slots available at a number of different schools, as well as monitoring and tracking student performance and student satisfaction at the schools. This will require a good deal of technological sophistication. It is a shortcoming of this proposal that no provision is made for the importance of technology in administering the program. It is also a significant shortcoming of the proposal that there is no dedicated senior staff person to work full time on this program - and there is no senior staff time budgeted for the OSP, as if to suggest that no additional time of the Director will be required.

Reader's Score: 16

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan**1. D. Quality of the management plan (35 points).**

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- (ii) The adequacy of procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project.**
- (iii) The adequacy of mechanisms for ensuring high-quality products and services from the proposed project.**

Strengths:

The proposal's reliance on the "parent-advocate" model to assist families with applications and decisions about schools is a strong, individualized approach. It is a strength of this proposal that it provides for 2 full-time staff, up to 6 parent advocates, and tutors for up to 55 students, to provide for this individualized attention. The Management Plan itself is broken down into quarterly periods, and there is evidence that the applicant has thought through the steps that will be involved in administering the OSP. It is a strength of this proposal that the applicant has experience working with families specifically to identify the most appropriate educational opportunities for their children. The proposal mentions that each year, the OSP school booklet will be updated, and the applicant will visit all participating schools. The end of year surveys to determine strengths and areas in need of improvement for the applicants HQSC will be a strength for the OSP program as well.

Weaknesses:

The Management Plan was scant on details, and was largely repetitive after Year 1. While the proposal is strong on outreach to families, there is little detail of how the applicant will reach out to participating schools to improve their experience with the program, or to non-participating schools to encourage more schools to participate in the program. Although the proposal mentions the Archdiocese as an important contact point for participating schools, the proposal does not lay out a strategy for identifying new schools and working with participating schools (as it does lay out a strategy for identifying and working with participating families). The proposal does not lay out a strategy for evaluating the effectiveness of the participating schools, or for holding schools accountable for their performance. Finally, the proposal does not lay out a strategy for gathering feedback from the schools about the administration of the program. The proposal also does not provide for dedicated senior level staff for the program. This lack of dedicated senior level staff results in an over-reliance on the parent advocates, who are not in the best position to make managerial decisions for running the program, and a general lack of responsiveness to concerns about the quality of participating schools, accountability, and timely eligibility determinations.

Reader's Score: 27

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Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - OSP 2015 - 1: 84.370A

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: DC School Reform Now (U370A150002)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Services

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- (3) In addition, the Secretary considers the extent to which the services to be provided by the proposed project are appropriate to the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries of those services.

Strengths:

DCSRN is uniquely prepared to administer a scholarship program and is connected with the communities that the DC OSP program serves. Their existing relationships within the low-income community and experience with successful outreach to parents, application processes, and partnerships offer them a distinct advantage for this program.

Weaknesses:

Despite the distinct advantage of being an organization that already does the work of parent outreach and applications - programs in other states have shown the dramatic importance of relationships with the private sector. These relationships are absolutely essential to the success of private school scholarship programs. DCSRN has very limited experience in this arena, few ties to private schools or entities that manage private schools, and this could significantly hamper their efforts to administrate the program.

Reader's Score: 16

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

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 - (i) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director or principal investigator.
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Strengths:

DCSRN has an excellent team of management, outreach, and key personnel who already have shown success at the type of work required to successfully implement this OSP program. The team is diverse in experience and community involvement and lends decades of experience to this proposal. The proposal provides detailed information on the qualifications of key personnel across the tasks needing to be done.

Weaknesses:

While the DCSRN team has extensive education experience, the team has very limited background in private school outreach, management or involvement, which has proven to hamper efforts in other states. This background is essential to the success of the program. The team also seems limited to those with direct outreach experience and public school advising/management. In order to properly execute the tasks required in this program, they are in need of high level experience in management and reporting of choice or scholarship programs. There is no experience on the direct team - in the information provided - in private choice administration.

Reader's Score: 20

Selection Criteria - Adequacy of Resources**1. C. Adequacy of resources (20 points).**

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Strengths:

This organization's budget is personnel-heavy and reasonable, due to existing infrastructure in place for this type of work. The organization does not need to hire a large number of staff to execute the work of the grant. The budget focuses directly on the people required to achieve the goals of the grant. DCSRN's existing work gives them a distinct financial advantage with their existing infrastructure. This provides an added benefit to the program and will dramatically streamline the transition period to get the OSP program up and running with the new entity.

Weaknesses:

The budget provided, while lean, significantly underestimates the cost of the program's expected implementation events, supplies, postage, and direct costs to execute the program. While this organization's existing infrastructure can manage some of these activities, the OSP program is a large program in itself, requiring significant OSP-specific outreach to complete the tasks required. The resources allocated to private school outreach/visits especially seemed unrealistic and too limited.

Reader's Score: 16

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan**1. D. Quality of the management plan (35 points).**

- (1) The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan for the proposed project.**
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 - (iii) The adequacy of mechanisms for ensuring high-quality products and services from the proposed project.**

Strengths:

DCSRN has a very detailed management and implementation plan for the DC OSP. The timeline is very helpful and absolutely essential to the success of the program and development of goals for each area of work. Given the

organization's background, they are well suited to execute the tasks required to be successful at administering this program. They have also offered clearly defined roles for existing staff and new hires for this program.

Weaknesses:

DCSRN significantly underestimates the work required to execute this OSP program, and assumes the existing staff of the organization can undertake much more than is required to execute the accountability and reporting measures required by this grant. Without adequate staffing and planning for staffing, the program could be severely hampered during crucial application periods. The time allocated to school visits, and direct interaction with the key partners in this program, is severely underestimated in the timeline. If DCSRN is not able to quickly build relationships with private sector entities, the options and use of this program will be dramatically limited and the work will be ineffective at providing quality options.

Reader's Score: 26

Status: Submitted

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