

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/09/2011 12:21 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cosmos Foundation, Inc. (U282M110010)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
Low-Income Demographic		
1. Low-Income Demographic	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
School Improvement		
1. School Improvement	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Promoting Diversity		
1. Promoting Diversity	5	4
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the Applicant	50	47
Educationally Disadvantaged Students		
1. Assisting Students	10	8
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	10	9
Quality of the management plan and personnel		
1. Quality of Mngt. Plan	25	24
Quality of the Evaluation Plan		
1. Quality of the eval. plan	5	5
Total	120	97

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel - 1: 84.282M

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Cosmos Foundation, Inc. (U282M110010)

Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Low-Income Demographic

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that at least 60 percent of all students in the charter schools it currently operates or manages are individuals from low-income families.

Individual from a low-income family means an individual who is determined by an SEA or LEA to be a child, ages 5 through 17, from a low-income family, on the basis of (a) data used by the Secretary to determine allocations under section 1124 of the ESEA, (b) data on children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, (c) data on children in families receiving assistance under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act, (d) data on children eligible to receive medical assistance under the Medicaid program under Title XIX of the Social Security Act, or (e) an alternate method that combines or extrapolates from the data in items (a) through (d) of this definition (see 20 U.S.C. 6537(3)).

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

Although the application states that 56% of all students in the charter schools it currently operates or manages are individuals from low-income families, it does not meet the 60% low income demographic required to receive points for this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - School Improvement

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that its proposed replication or expansion of one or more high-quality charter schools will occur in partnership with, and will be designed to assist, one or more local educational agencies (LEAs) in implementing academic or structural interventions to serve students attending schools that have been identified for improvement, corrective action, closure, or restructuring under section 1116 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), and as described in the notice of final requirements for the School Improvement Grants, published in the Federal Register on October 28, 2010 (75 FR 66363).

Strengths:

Not applicable

Weaknesses:

The application does not identify any activities that specifically address this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Promoting Diversity

1. This priority is for applicants that demonstrate a record of (in the schools they currently operate or manage), as well as an intent to continue (in schools that they will be creating or substantially expanding under this grant), taking active measures to--

- (a) Promote student diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity, or avoid racial isolation;
- (b) Serve students with disabilities at a rate that is at least comparable to the rate at which these students are served in public schools in the surrounding area; and
- (c) Serve English learners at a rate that is at least comparable to the rate at which these students are served in public schools in the surrounding area.

In support of this priority, applicants must provide enrollment data as well as descriptions of existing policies and activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken.

Note: An applicant addressing this priority is invited to discuss how the proposed design of its project will encourage approaches by charter schools that help bring together students of different backgrounds, including students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, to attain the benefits that flow from a diverse student body. The applicant should discuss in its application how it would ensure that those approaches are permissible under current law.

Strengths:

The application demonstrates parity with the state in African American and Latino populations. The Asian population at Harmony schools is overrepresented and the White population is underrepresented. Within this context, Cosmos schools reflect broad diversity and avoid racial isolation.

Weaknesses:

The application does not address school activities that promote cultural awareness and respect for diversity. The application does not provide information on ELL and special education enrollment rates

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

In determining the quality of the applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (20 points).

(2) Either (i) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant, or (ii) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which there have not been significant achievement gaps between any of the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant and to which significant gains in student academic achievement have been made with all populations of students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (15 points).

(3) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has achieved results (including performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates where applicable and available) for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State (15 points).

Strengths:

See subcategory comments.

Weaknesses:

See subcategory comments.

Reader's Score: 47

Sub Question

- 1. (1) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (20 points).**

Strengths:

The application provides data for all schools for all years of operation. School wide academic achievement is significantly higher than the regions of location and the state for all subjects and all grades at most schools.

Weaknesses:

The performance levels are slightly decreasing in the last three years in most cases at the schools, while the district and state performance levels are slightly increasing. Performance levels are still quite high, but the application would have been strengthened by providing context to these data.

Reader's Score: 19

- 2. (2) Either (i) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant, or (ii) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which there have not been significant achievement gaps between any of the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant and to which significant gains in student academic achievement have been made with all populations of students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (15 points).**

Strengths:

The application provides data that clearly indicates significant closure of historic achievement gaps on state summative assessments compared to the statewide data and within the school system.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 15

- 3. (3) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has**

Sub Question

achieved results (including performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates where applicable and available) for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State (15 points).

Strengths:

Academic performance, attendance, graduation, and college acceptance rates are high among listed student subgroups.

Weaknesses:

Although the application states that its schools have no drop outs and 100 percent college acceptance, it is unclear whether the 100% college acceptance rate refers to all graduating seniors or only those who applied to colleges, and whether the dropout rate reflects students who transfer out of the school for academic reasons prior to graduation.

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Educationally Disadvantaged Students

1. Contribution in assisting economically disadvantaged students

The contribution the proposed project will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready. When responding to this selection criterion, applicants must discuss the proposed locations of schools to be created or substantially expanded and the student populations to be served.

Strengths:

The application documents enrollments that are more than half low income and are ethnically diverse. Given this level of enrollment of educationally disadvantaged students, and their significant academic achievement in current schools, it is likely that seven additional schools will have a similar positive impact. The application lists several academic interventions that support educationally disadvantaged students, including home visits, parent engagement and the system's performance management database. The application also describes innovative programs including project based and experiential learning, six week assessment intervals, immediate feedback, science fairs in which all students participate, and extended school hours and days. The college guidance program is comprehensive and begins at 6th grade.

Weaknesses:

Academic performance information was not provided in the application for all educationally disadvantaged subgroups making it unclear whether there are gaps in achievement in ELL and special education subgroups. Locations for expansion were not discussed.

Reader's Score: 8

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. Applicants proposing to open schools serving substantially different populations than those currently served by the model for which they have demonstrated evidence of success must address the attainability of outcomes given this difference.**

Strengths:

The application describes performance goals that include expansion and dissemination to broaden the positive impact of the academic achievement attained at the applicant's schools. It sets specific targets for academic achievement and individual student guidance. The application provides benchmarks for all goals, and describes robust educational and supplemental programs to serve the same targeted population as is served at its existing schools.

Weaknesses:

The application contains benchmarks that are not relevant to the proposed project. For example, the application proposes to increase attendance rates by 3%. Existing school attendance rates are above 96% and have not increased over time and therefore the proposed benchmark of attendance increases does not appear to be based on historic data at existing schools. The application proposes to open two or three new schools in each year of the grant project period, and a benchmark of 70% is not a relevant measure.

Reader's Score: 9

Selection Criteria - Quality of the management plan and personnel

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and personnel to replicate and substantially expand high-quality charter schools. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) 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.

(2) The business plan for improving, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools created or substantially expanded under these grants beyond the initial period of Federal funding in areas including, but not limited to, facilities, financial management, central office, student academic achievement, governance, oversight, and human resources of the charter schools.

(3) A multi-year financial and operating model for the organization, a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners, and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.

(4) The plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality.

(5) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, chief executive officer or organization leader, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.

Strengths:

The application states that the project will undergo an internal and external review which will guide it to make necessary adjustments for future replication. It is clear from the current track record of success that this management team is effective at opening and operating additional high quality charter schools. The organization is fiscally sound and is able to secure bonds for its facilities acquisition. It provides assurance the grant will not be used to supplant other funding. The application provides a complex, yet simple diagram of its basic approach to developing a school, building a strong network and making a global impact. Its plan for determining whether to close a school is well defined and includes progressive intervention over three years. The key personnel are very experienced and successful in expanding the number of charter schools that they operate.

Weaknesses:

The application discusses bond funding for facilities but more robust explanation of how facilities are identified and selected would have been helpful.

Reader's Score: 24

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Evaluation Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data.**

Strengths:

The applicant will hire an external reviewer to measure achievement of the specific, measurable, attainable and time specific goals identified in the application.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

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Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Cosmos Foundation, Inc. (U282M110010)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
Low-Income Demographic		
1. Low-Income Demographic	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
School Improvement		
1. School Improvement	5	0
Competitive Preference Priority 3		
Promoting Diversity		
1. Promoting Diversity	5	4
Selection Criteria		
Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the Applicant	50	45
Educationally Disadvantaged Students		
1. Assisting Students	10	9
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	10	10
Quality of the management plan and personnel		
1. Quality of Mngt. Plan	25	25
Quality of the Evaluation Plan		
1. Quality of the eval. plan	5	4
Total	120	97

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel - 1: 84.282M

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Cosmos Foundation, Inc. (U282M110010)

Questions

Competitive Preference Priority 1 - Low-Income Demographic

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that at least 60 percent of all students in the charter schools it currently operates or manages are individuals from low-income families.

Individual from a low-income family means an individual who is determined by an SEA or LEA to be a child, ages 5 through 17, from a low-income family, on the basis of (a) data used by the Secretary to determine allocations under section 1124 of the ESEA, (b) data on children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, (c) data on children in families receiving assistance under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act, (d) data on children eligible to receive medical assistance under the Medicaid program under Title XIX of the Social Security Act, or (e) an alternate method that combines or extrapolates from the data in items (a) through (d) of this definition (see 20 U.S.C. 6537(3)).

Strengths:

No strengths were found.

Weaknesses:

The low-income population average of the currently served students is 56.6%, putting them just below the threshold of this competitive priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - School Improvement

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that its proposed replication or expansion of one or more high-quality charter schools will occur in partnership with, and will be designed to assist, one or more local educational agencies (LEAs) in implementing academic or structural interventions to serve students attending schools that have been identified for improvement, corrective action, closure, or restructuring under section 1116 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), and as described in the notice of final requirements for the School Improvement Grants, published in the Federal Register on October 28, 2010 (75 FR 66363).

Strengths:

The applicant did not address this competitive priority.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not address this competitive priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Promoting Diversity

1. This priority is for applicants that demonstrate a record of (in the schools they currently operate or manage), as well as an intent to continue (in schools that they will be creating or substantially expanding under this grant), taking active measures to--

- (a) Promote student diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity, or avoid racial isolation;
- (b) Serve students with disabilities at a rate that is at least comparable to the rate at which these students are served in public schools in the surrounding area; and
- (c) Serve English learners at a rate that is at least comparable to the rate at which these students are served in public schools in the surrounding area.

In support of this priority, applicants must provide enrollment data as well as descriptions of existing policies and activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken.

Note: An applicant addressing this priority is invited to discuss how the proposed design of its project will encourage approaches by charter schools that help bring together students of different backgrounds, including students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, to attain the benefits that flow from a diverse student body. The applicant should discuss in its application how it would ensure that those approaches are permissible under current law.

Strengths:

The applicant provided demographic data on students served, as well as comparative data for the State of Texas. Harmony serves a greater percentage of children with disabilities and ELL students than comparative averages. The schools bring together students from diverse backgrounds and promote cultural understanding and interchange.

Weaknesses:

More specific information on existing policies and activities undertaken or planned to promote diversity would be helpful.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

In determining the quality of the applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (20 points).

(2) Either (i) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant, or (ii) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which there have not been significant achievement gaps between any of the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant and to which significant gains in student academic achievement have been made with all populations of students

served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (15 points).

(3) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has achieved results (including performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates where applicable and available) for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State (15 points).

Strengths:

See comments on each subsection below.

Weaknesses:

See comments on each subsection below.

Reader's Score: 45

Sub Question

1. (1) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (20 points).

Strengths:

The applicant presents clear evidence of consistent success in significantly increasing student achievement for all students since 2000. The state ratings of the 33 Cosmos-run schools are found on pages 10-11. Sixteen of the twenty-five schools with ratings in 2010 achieved the highest category of Exemplary. The percentage of "Exemplary" and "Recognized" Harmony schools is higher than the state average, and higher than the average of charter schools in Texas for each of the past three years (see page 12). The applicant provides data showing the higher percentage of Harmony students passing state exams in Math, Science, English/Language Arts and Social Studies for the past three years. The applicant also provides data on the passing rates of the economically disadvantaged students served in the Harmony schools. Data on pages 25-26 demonstrate that economically disadvantaged students in the Harmony schools have had higher percent passing rates when compared to the region and to the State of Texas consistently since 2000.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 20

2. (2) Either (i) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant, or (ii) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which there have not been significant achievement gaps between any of the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant and to which significant gains in student academic achievement have been made with all populations of students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (15 points).

Strengths:

Table 2. Achievement Gap Comparison between Harmony and Texas is found on page e26. Results show that Harmony students as a whole, and in the ESEA subgroups of African American, Hispanic and Low Income students, have had higher passing rates than the state of Texas for the past three years. And, the average difference between the percent passing rate for all students at the schools does not differ greatly from the passing

Sub Question

rates of the students in various ESEA subgroups (the largest discrepancy is 3 points).

Weaknesses:

Data tables listing the academic achievement over the years for ELL and Special Needs were not included.

Reader's Score: 13

3. (3) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has achieved results (including performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates where applicable and available) for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State (15 points).

Strengths:

Cosmos provides clear evidence that the performance on state tests, attendance rates and graduation rates exceed regional and state comparisons. Attendance data is provided on page 35. The average attendance at all Harmony schools is higher than both the Regional and State average. Graduation data for the Houston and Austin schools are provided on pages 45-47. The college acceptance rate is 100%.

Weaknesses:

There is no reference to the applicant's retention rates and college attendance and persistence rates.

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - Educationally Disadvantaged Students

1. Contribution in assisting economically disadvantaged students

The contribution the proposed project will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready. When responding to this selection criterion, applicants must discuss the proposed locations of schools to be created or substantially expanded and the student populations to be served.

Strengths:

The Cosmos foundation has schools throughout Texas, thus is familiar with a variety of populations - urban, rural, and Hispanic, for example. Harmony Public Schools were recognized as a Title 1 Distinguished School by the Texas Education Agency, and as a Title 1 National Distinguished School.

Two Harmony schools were recognized nationally in the top ten of Newsweek's Miracle Schools. The applicant provided clear evidence over three years that their schools assist educationally disadvantaged students exceed State achievement standards. Data tables on pages 16-17 show the percent passing rates for on the Math TAKS test for all schools for the past three years, and provides a comparison to the Region and to the State. Science TAKS comparison results are on pages 18-19, Reading/Language Arts comparison results are on pages 21, and Social Studies comparison results are on page 23. 100% of students graduate and are accepted to college.

Weaknesses:

More specific information on where the schools are to be located would be helpful.

Reader's Score: 9

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. Applicants proposing to open schools serving substantially different populations than those currently served by the model for which they have demonstrated evidence of success must address the attainability of outcomes given this difference.

Strengths:

Harmony has a strong reputation of achieving high quality results. The organization has grown by five schools a year for a number of years, and schools remain high performing. The applicant has the capacity, experience and knowledge to attain the very clear, comprehensive and relevant project goals, objectives, activities and outcomes listed. Objectives are measurable. Metrics and measures are included. The applicant has a demonstrated record of success in multiple areas across the state. Past evidence indicates a high level of certainty that objectives will be realized.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the management plan and personnel

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and personnel to replicate and substantially expand high-quality charter schools. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

(1) 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.

(2) The business plan for improving, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools created or substantially expanded under these grants beyond the initial period of Federal funding in areas including, but not limited to, facilities, financial management, central office, student academic achievement, governance, oversight, and human resources of the charter schools.

(3) A multi-year financial and operating model for the organization, a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners, and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.

(4) The plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality.

(5) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, chief executive officer or organization leader, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.

Strengths:

Cosmos has a detailed, comprehensive, and proven model. They have efficiencies of scale by sharing back office functions, professional development, and a database that monitors instructional effectiveness. The management team has demonstrated that they can successfully replicate the college-going model in settings across Texas.

Cosmos schools have a record of excellent fiscal stewardship. They are one of the first charter organizations to achieve a bond. There is clear evidence of knowledge and skill in grants management, facilities, financial management, central office, student academic achievement, governance, oversight and human resources.

A plan for closing charter schools that do not meet high standards of quality is presented. The plan is as follows: 1) if standards of quality are not met the first year, the principal will be replaced. The school will write an improvement plan and be closely monitored, 2) if quality standards are not met the second year, Cosmos Foundation will change all personnel in the school and assign an interventionist to the school, 3) If the school continues to not meet high standards of quality at the end of the third year of operation, Cosmos Foundation will close the school and provide safeguards for federal and state funds. Note: no Harmony school to date has had to be closed.

Lead project personnel are well qualified. Harmony schools have been growing at the rate of five new schools each year for the past four years (page 5). The size and scope of the project is manageable.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses were found.

Reader's Score: 25

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Evaluation Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data.**

Strengths:

Cosmos partners with the Texas Charter Schools Association and is involved with the Quality Framework Initiative with the Institute for Public School Initiatives. There is clear attention to performance management and to the use of data to monitor results. The Cosmos Foundation staff will broadly disseminate the results of their work via conferences, professional organizations, publications, and the web (page e17).

Weaknesses:

No use of qualitative data was found. The use of an independent, third-party evaluator would be useful.

Reader's Score: 4

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Reader #3: *****

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Quality of the eligible applicant		
1. Quality of the Applicant	50	44
Educationally Disadvantaged Students		
1. Assisting Students	10	7
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	10	10
Quality of the management plan and personnel		
1. Quality of Mngt. Plan	25	24
Quality of the Evaluation Plan		
1. Quality of the eval. plan	5	4
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Panel #1 - Panel - 1: 84.282M

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Cosmos Foundation, Inc. (U282M110010)

Questions

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Strengths:

There is no strength

Weaknesses:

The low income ratio is 56.6% (e20), which does not meet the threshold for this competitive preference priority.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 2 - School Improvement

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must demonstrate that its proposed replication or expansion of one or more high-quality charter schools will occur in partnership with, and will be designed to assist, one or more local educational agencies (LEAs) in implementing academic or structural interventions to serve students attending schools that have been identified for improvement, corrective action, closure, or restructuring under section 1116 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (ESEA), and as described in the notice of final requirements for the School Improvement Grants, published in the Federal Register on October 28, 2010 (75 FR 66363).

Strengths:

There is no strength.

Weaknesses:

No LEA partner information was provided.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority 3 - Promoting Diversity

1. This priority is for applicants that demonstrate a record of (in the schools they currently operate or manage), as well as an intent to continue (in schools that they will be creating or substantially expanding under this grant), taking active measures to--

- (a) Promote student diversity, including racial and ethnic diversity, or avoid racial isolation;
- (b) Serve students with disabilities at a rate that is at least comparable to the rate at which these students are served in public schools in the surrounding area; and
- (c) Serve English learners at a rate that is at least comparable to the rate at which these students are served in public schools in the surrounding area.

In support of this priority, applicants must provide enrollment data as well as descriptions of existing policies and activities undertaken or planned to be undertaken.

Note: An applicant addressing this priority is invited to discuss how the proposed design of its project will encourage approaches by charter schools that help bring together students of different backgrounds, including students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, to attain the benefits that flow from a diverse student body. The applicant should discuss in its application how it would ensure that those approaches are permissible under current law.

Strengths:

The Harmony Schools demographics mirror those of the state of Texas (e20). Harmony Public Schools are college preparatory and enroll more African American and Hispanic students, combined with a lower proportion of Caucasian students (e17; e21). Harmony serves a higher rate of ELL students than surrounding schools and has closed the achievement gap (e21). Harmony ESE students scored 14 percentage points higher than their peers in the region and the State (e44)

Weaknesses:

Harmony schools serve fewer ESE students than average for the state of Texas (e25). The application does not provide data to support assertions about the enrollment of ELL and SPED students.

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the eligible applicant

In determining the quality of the applicant, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (20 points).

(2) Either (i) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant, or (ii) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which there have not been significant achievement gaps between any of the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant and to which significant gains in student academic achievement have been made with all populations of students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (15 points).

(3) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has achieved results (including performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates where applicable and

available) for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State (15 points).

Strengths:

See responses 1-3.

Weaknesses:

See responses 1-3.

Reader's Score: 44

Sub Question

1. (1) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (20 points).

Strengths:

Over the past three years, the applicant has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement and attainment for all students, including, as applicable, educationally disadvantaged students. In 2010, Harmony had 2 Academically Acceptable, 7 Recognized and 16 Exemplary schools. The application provides academic proficiency data for all years of operation. The organization has a waiver to open unlimited schools in the state of Texas.

Weaknesses:

Academic proficiency scores decreased slightly in recent years and the application did not account for the drop in performance.

Reader's Score: 16

2. (2) Either (i) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant, or (ii) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which there have not been significant achievement gaps between any of the subgroups of students described in section 1111(b)(2)(C)(v)(II) of the ESEA at the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant and to which significant gains in student academic achievement have been made with all populations of students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant (15 points).

Strengths:

Over the past three years, the applicant has demonstrated success in closing historic achievement gaps for the subgroups of students. The applicant provided three years of achievement data with subgroups and state comparisons. Over three years, there was no achievement gap in Math, Reading and Social Studies (e26). Harmony has closed the achievement gap in the African American subgroup, scoring 15% higher than comparable students in the region and 16% higher than the state average (e47). Harmony Hispanic students scored 11% higher than regional students and 12% higher than the State average (e49).

Weaknesses:

A slight achievement gap exists in Science for low income and Hispanic (e26). Special Education and ELL students were not addressed in reference to the historic achievement gap.

Sub Question

Reader's Score: 15

3. (3) The degree, including the consistency over the past three years, to which the applicant has achieved results (including performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, high school graduation rates, college attendance rates, and college persistence rates where applicable and available) for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State (15 points).

Strengths:

Over the past three years, the applicant has achieved results with performance on statewide tests, annual student attendance and retention rates, and high school graduation rates for low-income and other educationally disadvantaged students served by the charter schools operated or managed by the applicant that are significantly above the average academic achievement results for such students in the State. Harmony Schools attendance averaged 96.6% for all students, with no statistically significant differences in subgroup attendance rates. Harmony schools attendance was 1.3% higher than the state average and all subgroup attendance rates were higher than subgroup percentages for the State (e52). Harmony Science Academy- Houston has a 100% college acceptance rate and 0% drop out rate (e30). Harmonys current graduation rate is 100% compared to 87% for Region 4 and 88% for the State (e45).

Weaknesses:

College acceptance, going and persistence rates were not provided for all Harmony schools (e30).

Reader's Score: 13

Selection Criteria - Educationally Disadvantaged Students

1. Contribution in assisting economically disadvantaged students

The contribution the proposed project will make in assisting educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready. When responding to this selection criterion, applicants must discuss the proposed locations of schools to be created or substantially expanded and the student populations to be served.

Strengths:

The proposed project will assist educationally disadvantaged students served by the applicant to meet or exceed State academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, and to graduate college- and career-ready. Harmony Public Schools are Title I Distinguished schools (e25) that offer extended day and Saturday tutorials for struggling students (e31). Technology based intervention and remediation feedback is provided through the Harmony Performance Management Database (e68). Harmony offers a college prep program to assist in all areas of college preparation (e69-70). The Cosmos Foundation has schools throughout Texas and is familiar with the needs of multiple communities. The application documents enrollment that is diverse and predominantly low income.

Weaknesses:

The applicant did not discuss the proposed locations of schools to be created and the student populations to be served. Academic proficiency information was not provided for SPED and ELL students.

Reader's Score: 7

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the design of the proposed project, the Secretary considers the extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. Applicants proposing to open schools serving substantially different populations than those currently served by the model for which they have demonstrated evidence of success must address the attainability of outcomes given this difference.**

Strengths:

The goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and attainable. The school model is based on the cluster model, collaboration and distributed leadership (e89). The model is replicable with a culture of high expectations. The STEM Curriculum is challenging, and ongoing assessment is the foundation of the educational program (e86). The projects goals and objectives are relative to local schools. Harmony has a strong reputation for being high quality and has grown by 5 schools for the past 5 years. Project goals and outcomes are clear and measureable. Performance goals are related to dissemination and best practices of schools in the communities Harmony serves.

Weaknesses:

There is no weakness.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the management plan and personnel

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the management plan and personnel to replicate and substantially expand high-quality charter schools. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers:**

(1) 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.

(2) The business plan for improving, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools created or substantially expanded under these grants beyond the initial period of Federal funding in areas including, but not limited to, facilities, financial management, central office, student academic achievement, governance, oversight, and human resources of the charter schools.

(3) A multi-year financial and operating model for the organization, a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners, and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success.

(4) The plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality.

(5) The qualifications, including relevant training and experience, of the project director, chief executive officer or organization leader, and key project personnel, especially in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project.

Strengths:

(1) The 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 is in place. The plan proposes specific, quantitative outcomes that are aligned to project objectives (e74). The project will undertake an internal and external review to be used for continuous improvement. The global impact and small school expansion diagram is clear at demonstrating the projects impact.

2) The business plan for improving, sustaining, and ensuring the quality and performance of charter schools created or

substantially expanded under these grants beyond the initial period of Federal funding includes facilities, financial management, central office, student academic achievement, governance, oversight, and human resources of the charter schools. The business plan provided for the expansion and replication of charters is strong (e84). The management team design mirrors the 5 core processes of school operations (e90). The proposed schools are financially sustainable (e90). Harmony schools have a BBB credit rating from Standard and Poors (e92). The grant budget is reasonable and includes a highly detailed rationale for expenditures (e443).

(3) The multi-year financial and operating model for the organization provides a demonstrated commitment of current and future partners and evidence of broad support from stakeholders critical to the project's long-term success. The project sets goals for attendance, parent and student satisfaction surveys (e75). Parents and community members will be invited to attend workshops, and read school publications (e80). A tool has been created for evaluating partnership opportunities (e93).

(4) The plan for closing charter schools supported, overseen, or managed by the applicant that do not meet high standards of quality includes a rationale and process for decision-making for school closure (e96).

5) The project director, chief executive officer or organization leader, and key project personnel are highly qualified in managing projects of the size and scope of the proposed project. Harmony has received STEM funds from the Gates Foundation, Dell Foundation and Texas Education Agency. Staff is experienced at running a high quality charter management organization throughout the State of Texas.

Weaknesses:

Timelines and milestones are solid but could use additional detail with relation to staffing.

Reader's Score: 24

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Evaluation Plan

- 1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation, the Secretary considers the extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data.**

Strengths:

The methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data. The project evaluation will be conducted by an external evaluator. Monthly meetings will be held to assess progress on the 10 operational and academic systems. Measurement will occur through over 400 evaluative statements and quantitative metrics (e94). The performance measures, benchmarks, outcomes, timelines, collection methods and implementation are provided in the application.

Weaknesses:

The evaluative statement and quantitative metrics to be used in assessment were not provided in the application.

Reader's Score: 4

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