

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/25/2013 03:54 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Summary Statement		
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	0	
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	32
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	22
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	12
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Personnel	10	6
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	15	0
Total	100	72

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Questions

Summary Statement - Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement (Optional)

General:

By using established models and clear metrics of measurement, the application shows potential for creating a model of principal development. The application, however, occasionally is confusing as to whether it is addressing principal development or whole school development. These aspects are obviously related, but for adding to the research-base of principal development, it would need to clarify how the principal is developing in order to address whole school development.

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project would implement a novel approach as compared with what has been previously attempted nationally.

(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to the development and advancement of theory, knowledge, and practices in the field of study.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project will substantially improve on the outcomes achieved by other practices, such as through better student outcomes, lower cost, or accelerated results.

Strengths:

A strength of the proposal is the targeted principal development at the middle school level (p.2). These development targets include "strategic goal setting and socio-emotional supports" (p.3). The application describes the needed skills for a successful principal and describes the process(es) for developing them through the "Leadership Matters" program (pp. 3-4), the STW Transformation Network and the supports (p.4) and the School-to-school networking (p.5). It also addresses the need for targeted high/middle school development via the Wallace Foundation study (pp. 6-7) as well as the limited amount of middle school research done. This application targets both needs.

Weaknesses:

The narrative describes "Leadership Matters" as a "distributed model" cultivating various leaders in the school (p.4). It is not clear if this is part of AP 1 in part of developing principals to cultivate other leaders in the school or it is part of a school-wide process.

The creation of on-line leadership training and PLC guidebooks is mentioned without providing any justification or research regarding these tools. There are abundant resources available in these media. The application should justify the reason for creating new models.

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

(2) The clarity and coherence of the project goals, including the extent to which the proposed project articulates an explicit plan or actions to achieve its goals (e.g., a fully developed logic model of the proposed project).

(3) The clarity, completeness, and coherence of the project goals, and whether the application includes a description of project activities that constitute a complete plan for achieving those goals, including the identification of potential risks to project success and strategies to mitigate those risks.

Strengths:

The application gives a 360 overview of leadership development (culture, programming, district-school relationship) within the objectives and includes sustainability and capacity-building in each (pp. 8-9). The objectives are coordinated and reinforce themselves through the skill development. Additionally, by focusing on culture (shared mission, vision, and beliefs), the potential for sustained improvement is laid out (p.8). The activities are described and include tools used (VAL ED, STW Rating Rubric, etc - p.10) and timelines (pp. 10 - 11).

Weaknesses:

It is unclear within Objective 1 if "distributed leadership" is developing the school principal's skills in this arena or if it is engaging the school as a whole (p.8). On p. 10, it is important to note justification or reasoning for what makes a "mentor school" and/or "strong practices or programs."

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the management plan articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, including the timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities, the metrics that will be used to assess progress on an ongoing basis, and annual performance targets the applicant will use to monitor whether the project is achieving its goals.

(2) The extent of the demonstrated commitment of any key partners or evidence of broad support from stakeholders whose participation is critical to the project's long-term success.

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

Strengths:

The lines of accountability are clear and who is responsible for each part of grant. The tools will allow the stakeholders to "monitor progress and adjust efforts" (p. 12). The mentoring and coaching component is clear and comprehensive as there is a Leadership Coach, a Principal Mentor, and Mentor School (p.12). Six months of planning and preparation are sufficient to lay groundwork for identification of schools and base-line data (p.13). Tools and rubrics are identified (Val-Ed, STW Rating Rubric and Self Study evaluation - p. 12, p. 14).

Weaknesses:

The management plan is a list of "who will do what" rather than a well-articulated description of roles and responsibilities. "The Forum will coordinate cross-state training" requires further development (p.11). "The network becomes a laboratory for innovation and source for sustaining progress" (p13) needs to be developed more.

Reader's Score: 12

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. In determining the quality and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(1) The adequacy of the project's staffing plan, particularly for the first year of the project, including the identification of the project director and, in the case of projects with unfilled key personnel positions at the beginning of the project, that the staffing plan identifies how critical work will proceed.

Strengths:

Personnel identified have expertise and experience in content, I3 grants, and research (pp. 16-17). The staff members current roles are identified and past experience is detailed for the proposal at hand.

Weaknesses:

While the current roles are stated, it is not clear what each member's role will be with the project. The proposed position along with the oversight needs to be added and developed. The lines of accountability are not delineated. It is not clear who is responsible for each aspect of the proposal.

Reader's Score: 6

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan includes a clear and credible analysis plan, including a proposed sample size and minimum detectable effect size that aligns with the expected project impact, and an analytic approach for addressing the research questions.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key components and outcomes of the project, as well as a measureable threshold for acceptable implementation.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Summary Statement		
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	0	
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	32
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	23
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	15
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Personnel	10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	15	0
Total	100	80

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Questions

Summary Statement - Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement (Optional)

General:

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project would implement a novel approach as compared with what has been previously attempted nationally.

(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to the development and advancement of theory, knowledge, and practices in the field of study.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project will substantially improve on the outcomes achieved by other practices, such as through better student outcomes, lower cost, or accelerated results.

Strengths:

1. The applicant evidences a well-developed program design supported with current research clearly detailing the implementation of a novel approach, as compared with what has been previously attempted nationally. For example, they reference that the "one size fits all" professional development does not address the needs of principals in high risk schools and that currently principal training is generalist in nature without regard to grade-level context. The proposed initiative addresses this and presets an innovate program in opposition to conventional thinking that asserts that once prepared, principals can effectively lead in any k-12setting. It appears to be a novel approach specifically addressing the unique needs of principals and building capacity for sustainability within the school and laying the foundation for replication in other schools across the country through the National Forum and its network. Pages 2-4

The Middle Grades Leadership Development design highlights numerous novel and innovative promising features including: accelerating reform within the school-to-school networking model; providing insight and strategies for effective leadership focused on networking focused to increase student outcomes and cultivating strong leaders for struggling middle schools. Pages 4-6

The Middle Grades Leadership Development program design showcases a theory of change which is grounded in research from the Wallace Foundation's final report, entitled Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improve Student Learning. The applicant clearly identifies this research to support this innovative approach noting that the study is a six-year investigation of leadership in 9 states, 43 districts, and 180 elementary and secondary schools and one of the largest in-depth studies of educational leadership in the country. Page 8, Appendix D

2. The applicant copiously details a program design that appears to potentially contribute to the development and advancement of theory, knowledge, and practices in the field of study. This is evidenced in specifying that program results

will serve to inform the field of middle school instruction and leadership in identifying guidelines and parameters for how to effectively and efficiently assist middle school principals in their challenging work to lead students to attain academic proficiency. They identify valuable tools proposed to be developed, implemented and disseminated. They specify the project will create and disseminate how-to-guidelines for replication of research based best practices in middle grades. Page 7

The applicant identifies their organization as the only middle grades entity with a network of sufficient size and magnitude to impact practice and scale up nationally. The applicant organization is identified as consisting of 60 national organizations, 18 state Schools to Watch organizations, and over 350 Schools To Watch schools. They detail the fact that their organization and their project will continue their mission and will assist schools beyond the project by sharing products and lessons learned through the programs electronic media. Pages 7, 8

3. The applicant details a comprehensive and well developed program design that builds on their organization's success and research in the field. It appears highly likely that the proposed project will substantially improve on the outcomes achieved by other practices related to better student outcomes through effectively providing professional development, networking and resources to advance the leadership skills of middle school principals. Pages 7, 8

Weaknesses:

Information is lacking detailing strategies for the recruitment of participants.

Adequate information is lacking detailing the proposed on-line leadership courses to be offered to middle grades principals.

Reader's Score: 32

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

(2) The clarity and coherence of the project goals, including the extent to which the proposed project articulates an explicit plan or actions to achieve its goals (e.g., a fully developed logic model of the proposed project).

(3) The clarity, completeness, and coherence of the project goals, and whether the application includes a description of project activities that constitute a complete plan for achieving those goals, including the identification of potential risks to project success and strategies to mitigate those risks.

Strengths:

1. The applicant details an extremely well developed program design that clearly addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet identified as Priority 1: Improving the effectiveness of principals through the development of, and equitable access to (Part A) quality middle school principals. They clearly identify the goal of the Middle Grades Leadership Development is to increase student achievement by developing effective and motivational leaders who can create and lead high-performing, middle-grades schools. They aptly delineate program objectives which are focused on developing distribute leadership; improving collaboration skills; implementing strategies to increase student achievement and building collaborative relationships with districts. Pages e14, and 8, 9

2. The applicant coherently charts project goals and articulates an explicit plan of action to achieve them. This is evidenced in a discussion of one program goal and five objectives and in charts detailing the elements of the program goal and objectives. For example, the applicant clearly identifies the program goal to increase student achievement and reduce achievement gaps. A logic model concisely coordinates the progression of the program. Pages 11, 12 and e 171

and appendix page e 93

3. The applicant details a coherent overview of project goals, and a description of project activities that constitute a complete plan for achieving those goals. This is evidenced in a program design that uses effective and research based strategies to achieve the program goal. For example, the applicant clearly details using strategies which include vision guideline; on site coaching and principal mentoring; network based learning, data analysis and reflective practices technique. Program activities are well detailed and research based. Pages 8, 9

The applicant presents a narration of the program's timelines detailing activities for each year of the program. They specify that by years 3 and 4, lessons learned and tools will be shared with the Nation Forum members and the national Schools To Watch network in order to teach and enable non project schools to use materials and knowledge for transformation. A well-developed time line is detailed in an appendix. Pages 10, 11 and appendix J

It is noteworthy that the leadership team will provide mentors who in turn will demonstrate how identified barriers can be overcome and in implementing the Schools To Watch criteria for high performing schools to remove learning barriers and increase student achievement. Page 8

Weaknesses:

Information is lacking to adequately detail the qualifications for the selection of the mentor schools.

Reader's Score: 23

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the management plan articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, including the timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities, the metrics that will be used to assess progress on an ongoing basis, and annual performance targets the applicant will use to monitor whether the project is achieving its goals.

(2) The extent of the demonstrated commitment of any key partners or evidence of broad support from stakeholders whose participation is critical to the project's long-term success.

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

Strengths:

1. The applicant evidenced a well-planned management plan that precisely articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities. For example, the applicant clearly delineates the various roles of the management team including overseeing the implementation of the proposed program. They clearly detail customized electronic learning platforms, hosting webinars and on-line discussions and creating tools for replication. Page 11

The applicant aptly presents the organizational chart for the National Forum Middle Grades Leadership Development project. They specify the partnering organizations in the initiative to include the CA School To Watch Team to serve as the technical advisory team and the Center for Prevention Research and Development to serve as the evaluation partner. Pages 11, 12 and Appendix J, page e144

The applicant effectively identifies each program objective and delineates the audience it targets and specifies related activities to be implemented to attain the objective. For example, they propose objectives to develop distributed leadership which will be accomplished in attaining 100% of schools establishing school leadership teams which meet at least twice a

month. They effectively detail activities or actions to attain this including developing leadership coaches who will provide experiences and resources for improving communication, developing trust, examining data, and establishing plans of action. Aligned to coaches are principal mentors whose responsibility it is to demonstrate how program models are implemented and provides insight to detail strategies to overcome barriers. Pages 12, 13

2. The applicant details the demonstrated commitment of key partners evidencing broad support from stakeholders whose participation is critical to the project' long-term success. For example, letters of commitment are from schools in Kentucky and Michigan and from national and state partnering organizations. For example, the California League of Middle Schools and the Kentucky Middle Schools Association detail their commitment and support specifying serving to provide technical assistance and orientation training, and managing fiscal tasks and providing mentors and coaches. Pages e 62, 63

The University of Illinois has provided a letter of commitment detailing their support to conduct the program evaluation and will use a quasi-experimental mixed method design to assess the planning and implementation of the program. Page e 64 The applicant identifies the history of their organization as established in 1997 and maintaining a track record of managing complex work and uniting stakeholders who work together to advance middle grades education. They identify each program partner as an existing member of the National Forum for at least 8 years, which demonstrates a long term commitment to maintaining high performing in middle grades a priority for education across the nation. In addition, the precisely identify the fact that Forum members have contributed hundreds of volunteer hours to the Schools to Watch services in their states and have shown a commitment to underwriting Forum participation. Page 14

3. The applicant identifies the first six months of the program to focus on project planning and preparation and the evaluation plan to start in spring 2014. They assert the initiative to obtain human subjects clearance, identify comparisons schools and begin collecting base line data. Page 13

The applicant adequately identifies the fact that they have multiple procedures for gaining feedback which are based on experience in coordinating a 2010 i3 development grant across three states. They provide the example of lessons learned and the value of project conference calls for discussing progress, discussing program challenge and considering problem solving options and analyzing data reports from evaluator. They effectively identify a challenge that arose in the implementation of a prior grant program and details their strategies to address it. Page 14

The applicant clearly identifies procedures for ensuring feedback and continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project to include strategies such as: regular calls and annual face to face meetings which will be scheduled and coordinated with program monitoring. They identify that at the state level the data provided by the evaluator will be used to ensure continuous improvement. At the local level they clearly identify the coaches to use feedback from the Schools To Watch Reading Rubric and the Self Study evaluation to track yearly progress and in turn work with the leadership team to establish annual goals. Pages 14, 15

Weaknesses:

None are noted.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. In determining the quality and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(1) The adequacy of the project's staffing plan, particularly for the first year of the project, including the identification of the project director and, in the case of projects with unfilled key personnel positions at the beginning of the project, that the staffing plan identifies how critical work will proceed.

Strengths:

The applicant details an adequate staffing plan, particularly for the first year of the project, which includes the identification of the project director and key personnel. This is evidenced in identifying and detailing the expertise of the program team which includes: the existing Principal Investigator and Executive Director of the lead agency and the California League of Middle Schools Director of Grant Programs. In addition, they clearly detail high profile members of their management team to include the Executive Director of Kentucky Middle Schools Association and the State Director of Kentucky Schools to Watch program. Pages 16, 17

Resumes for key staff are included in the appendix, evidencing their education, expertise and experience. Appendix F, pages e 120-131

An organization chart is detailed noting the chain of operations and the activities of each team member. For example, the Center for Prevention Research is responsible for the program evaluation and the California League of Middle Schools serves as a partner an responsible for technical advising. Appendix J, page e 144

Weaknesses:

None are noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan includes a clear and credible analysis plan, including a proposed sample size and minimum detectable effect size that aligns with the expected project impact, and an analytic approach for addressing the research questions.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key components and outcomes of the project, as well as a measureable threshold for acceptable implementation.

Strengths:

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Weaknesses:

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Reader's Score: 0

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Summary Statement		
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	0	
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	35
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	25
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	15
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Personnel	10	10
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	15	0
Total	100	85

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Questions

Summary Statement - Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement (Optional)

General:

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project would implement a novel approach as compared with what has been previously attempted nationally.

(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to the development and advancement of theory, knowledge, and practices in the field of study.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project will substantially improve on the outcomes achieved by other practices, such as through better student outcomes, lower cost, or accelerated results.

Strengths:

To a great extent, the applicant's project proposes novel approaches to the preparation of effective middle school principals and also demonstrates an approach which exceeds what has been accomplished nationally. The unique approach is defined with clear novel aspects including specific principal development for leaders of grades five through eight, involvement of various stakeholders in the school, and acceleration of the change through networking with other schools. (pp. e20-e21)

The applicant's project is well-described to advance the knowledge and practice in the national field of middle school principalship preparation and increase in student achievement in those particular schools. The project's impact is focused on "12 high-need schools in Michigan and Kentucky." (pp. e17, e90-e91) The applicant cites strong research of the approach and gives sufficient evidence that research regarding principalship of students in grades 5-8 is limited. A strong point is that the applicant specifically conducted research outreach to state-level officials to determine types of middle school principalship licensure and training in the project's states of Kentucky and Michigan and in an additional non-project state of California. (pp. e105-e106) Further potential for advancing the project's educational practices is noted with the utilization of the National Forum, a national network of national/state organizations and over 350 STW schools. They will disseminate the project's on-line training modules, PLC guidebooks, and guidebooks for project leadership replication and sustainability. (p. e23)

The applicant does not fully explain the level of expected impact with the implementation of the project. Too general of outcomes are given such as improving leadership ratings on VAL ED or an increase will occur in number of school visits to high-achieving middle schools. (p. e14)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Reader's Score: 35

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design**1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

(1) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

(2) The clarity and coherence of the project goals, including the extent to which the proposed project articulates an explicit plan or actions to achieve its goals (e.g., a fully developed logic model of the proposed project).

(3) The clarity, completeness, and coherence of the project goals, and whether the application includes a description of project activities that constitute a complete plan for achieving those goals, including the identification of potential risks to project success and strategies to mitigate those risks.

Strengths:

The applicant fully correlates its Middle Grades Leadership Development project with Absolute Priority 1 and the specific subpart to "increase equitable access to quality leaders" for high-need students. (p. e14) A clear project goal is presented which is "to increase student achievement by developing leaders for creating high-performing, middle-grades schools." (p. e24) A clear logic model is evident with primary goals, five objectives, program interventions, intermediate outcomes, and long-term outcomes. (p. e93) An explicit plan is outlined and contains strong components of evaluation data types including the VAL-ED Assessment, Self Study Teacher Survey, STW Rating Rubric, student achievement data, data reflecting the fidelity of project implementation, focus group data, and data from principal coaches' logs. (p. e148)

Numerous project activities are presented, and they are aligned with the project goal and objectives. The applicant provides complete activities to accomplish the objective such as training middle level principals in the Cognitive Coaching TM, principals collaborating with CLMS, and and the Michigan/Kentucky Teams identifying and training coaches and mentors. (pp. e25, e146)

Specific and valid strategies are proposed for utilization during the project and include vision-building, on-site coaching and principal mentoring, and analysis of data. (p. e25) The applicant presents clear breadth of data for assessment including state test scores, student classroom performance, student attendance, STW Rating Rubric, and Middle Grades Self Study. (p. e26) The applicant also details specific quality module topics including traits of leadership (learner, engager, assessor and director), characteristics of high performing schools, traits of young adolescent learners, standards-based instruction and assessment, and collaborative communication skills. (p. e25) Completeness is noted in the plans even to the point of identifying the number and position title of persons in each leadership team. Strong description is given for the composition of the team which includes the building principal, a district administrator, and three teacher leaders. (p. e25)

The applicant does identify potential risks to the project's success and strategies to mitigate that risk. (p. e31) An identified risk is well-stated and reasonable as "principal turnover" which is to be mitigated through a distributed model of middle school leadership. (p. e31) The applicant also describes a risk of having unanticipated project problems and has learned through a prior i3 Grant project the great value of frequent communication with participants to offset the occurrence of major difficulties. (p. e30)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the management plan articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, including the timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities, the metrics that will be used to assess progress on an ongoing basis, and annual performance targets the applicant will use to monitor whether the project is achieving its goals.

(2) The extent of the demonstrated commitment of any key partners or evidence of broad support from stakeholders whose participation is critical to the project's long-term success.

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

Strengths:

A complete management plan is evident with good components of a project organizational chart, responsible entities for each activity, numerous specific activities for the objectives, and monthly/yearly timeline for completion of the milestone activities throughout the entire four-year project. Activities are very detailed such as "Michigan and Kentucky State Teams will assist participating middle schools in developing action plans for school year in July/August 2014, Jan/June 2015, Jan/June of 2016, and Jan/June 2017." (p. e146) The applicant provides sufficient rubrics and metrics for monitoring the project such as the National Forum's Accelerate Middle Grades Reform Schools to Watch Self-Study and Rating Rubric. (pp. e155-e163)

Strong measurable performance targets are presented for assessing the goals of the project. One good example is the establishing of middle school building-level leadership teams with a performance target of establishing a team at each participating school and having the teams meet at least twice monthly. (p. e28)

Key partners are clearly established and identified as evidenced by letters of support. Strong partners include California League of Middle Schools, the Kentucky Middle School Association, and the Institute for Excellence in Education in Michigan. (pp. e14, e45-e64) Partners indicate their participation being critical to the long-term success of students in the middle school, through high school, and beyond. (p. e49)

Strong procedures are described for ensuring project feedback and continuous improvement of the project elements. Comprehensive feedback components include project conference calls among partners and schools, in-person meetings, and annual face-to-face meetings with schools, partners, and the National Forum. (pp. e30-e31) Continuous improvement will be monitored with "feedback from the yearly STW Rating Rubric and Self Study Evaluation" from the middle schools' leadership teams. (p. e31)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. In determining the quality and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(1) The adequacy of the project's staffing plan, particularly for the first year of the project, including the identification of the project director and, in the case of projects with unfilled key personnel positions at the beginning of the project, that the staffing plan identifies how critical work will proceed.

Strengths:

The applicant clearly details the key personnel for the project: five individuals from the National Forum, California League of Middle Schools, Kentucky Middle School Association, Institute for Excellence in Education, and Center for Prevention Research and Development. A clear personnel organizational chart is presented to represent the relationship of the lead agency, National Forum, the partners, and the participating middle schools. (pp. e120, e144) All individuals have numerous years of experience in the field of education, several university degrees in education and related fields, experience with implementation of large grants, and middle school knowledge backgrounds. (pp. e121-e133)

A person has been selected to lead the project and is designated as the Principal Investigator. The applicant shows evidence of this person's prior experience in managing grants and bringing successful projects through the various steps towards completion. (p. e167) This individual has five university degrees, executive experience leading national organizations, experience in teaching in the middle school, and leadership on fourteen grants. Grants include U.S. Department of Education's i3 Grant of \$450,000 and a Carnegie Corporation Grant of \$200,000. (pp. e122-e123)

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses are noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan includes a clear and credible analysis plan, including a proposed sample size and minimum detectable effect size that aligns with the expected project impact, and an analytic approach for addressing the research questions.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key components and outcomes of the project, as well as a measureable threshold for acceptable implementation.

Strengths:

No comments are given.

Weaknesses:

No comments are given.

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/18/2013 02:12 PM

Status: Submitted

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Reader #4: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Summary Statement		
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	0	
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	0
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	0
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	0
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Personnel	10	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	15	13
Total	100	13

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #4: *****

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Questions

Summary Statement - Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement (Optional)

General:

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project would implement a novel approach as compared with what has been previously attempted nationally.

(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to the development and advancement of theory, knowledge, and practices in the field of study.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project will substantially improve on the outcomes achieved by other practices, such as through better student outcomes, lower cost, or accelerated results.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

(2) The clarity and coherence of the project goals, including the extent to which the proposed project articulates an explicit plan or actions to achieve its goals (e.g., a fully developed logic model of the proposed project).

(3) The clarity, completeness, and coherence of the project goals, and whether the application includes a description of project activities that constitute a complete plan for achieving those goals, including the identification of potential risks to project success and strategies to mitigate those risks.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the management plan articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, including the timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities, the metrics that will be used to assess progress on an ongoing basis, and annual performance targets the applicant will use to monitor whether the project is achieving its goals.

(2) The extent of the demonstrated commitment of any key partners or evidence of broad support from stakeholders whose participation is critical to the project's long-term success.

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

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. In determining the quality and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(1) The adequacy of the project's staffing plan, particularly for the first year of the project, including the identification of the project director and, in the case of projects with unfilled key personnel positions at the beginning of the project, that the staffing plan identifies how critical work will proceed.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan includes a clear and credible analysis plan, including a proposed sample size and minimum detectable effect size that aligns with the expected project impact, and an analytic approach for addressing the research questions.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key components and outcomes of the project, as well as a measureable threshold for acceptable implementation.

Strengths:

The goal of Middle-Grades Leadership Development (MLD) to increase student achievement (page e24) is addressed by the first confirmatory research question (page e39). The timeline (pages e145-e147) includes regular and appropriately timed data collection activities. The second confirmatory question (page e39) addresses the project goal of improving principal effectiveness. The confirmatory questions are clearly stated and are important to evaluate the impact of the overall project. The proposal includes data collection to determine if project objectives (pages e24-e25) have been met (pages e28-e29). Components of the theory of change (page e34), including positive impacts on school culture and climate, collaboration, and teaching efficacy, are evaluated using the Center for Prevention Research and Development's School Improvement Self-Study Teacher Survey (page e37). The evaluation consists of three separate studies: a formative evaluation, a fidelity assessment, and a summative evaluation (page e34). The evaluation includes a quasi-experimental design to compare treatment and control schools (page e34). Control schools will be matched on several variables in a multi-step process (pages e35-e36) to ensure that comparison schools are equivalent at baseline on observable characteristics (page e35). The evaluation plan includes a proposed sample size (page e35) and minimum detectable effect size expressed in standard deviations (page e39). The evaluation plan addresses the issue of the impact of data collection on comparison schools (page e36). Formative evaluation will be conducted using two evaluation tools, Vanderbilt's Assessment of Leadership in Education and the Schools to Watch (STW) Rating Rubric. These data will be used to address the second confirmatory research question (page e39). Summative assessment will use student-level standardized achievement tests (page e38). These data will be used to address the first confirmatory research question (page e39), as well as the project's theory of change. The evaluation plan indicates that hierarchical linear models (HLMs) will be used to assess the impact of the project (page e39). While HLMs encompass a wide variety of statistical methods, the evaluation plan provides sufficient detail (e.g., treatment/control indicator variable, planned covariates) to indicate how the models will be used (pages e40-e41).

Weaknesses:

The separate impacts of the five project objectives (distributed leadership, training school leadership, assisting school leadership, building collaborative relationships, and engaging school leadership teams in the STW network - pages e24-e25) are not evaluated. The impacts of the separate implementation strategies/interventions (page e25 and e93) are not evaluated. The evaluation plan does not include an assessment of the on-going, job-embedded professional development actions to take place in Years 2 and 3 (page e27).

Reader's Score: 13

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/12/2013 03:57 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 09/15/2013 10:26 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Reader #5: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Summary Statement		
Summary Statement		
1. Summary Statement	0	
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	35	0
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	25	0
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Management Plan	15	0
Quality of Project Personnel		
1. Personnel	10	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	15	15
Total	100	15

Technical Review Form

Panel #2 - i3 Development - 2: 84.411C

Reader #5: *****

Applicant: National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform (U411C130028)

Questions

Summary Statement - Summary Statement

1. Summary Statement (Optional)

General:

Reader's Score:

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. In determining the significance of the project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project would implement a novel approach as compared with what has been previously attempted nationally.

(2) The potential contribution of the proposed project to the development and advancement of theory, knowledge, and practices in the field of study.

(3) The extent to which the proposed project will substantially improve on the outcomes achieved by other practices, such as through better student outcomes, lower cost, or accelerated results.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. In determining the quality of the proposed project design, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the proposed project addresses the absolute priority the applicant is seeking to meet.

(2) The clarity and coherence of the project goals, including the extent to which the proposed project articulates an explicit plan or actions to achieve its goals (e.g., a fully developed logic model of the proposed project).

(3) The clarity, completeness, and coherence of the project goals, and whether the application includes a description of project activities that constitute a complete plan for achieving those goals, including the identification of potential risks to project success and strategies to mitigate those risks.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. In determining the quality of the management plan and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The extent to which the management plan articulates key responsibilities and well-defined objectives, including the timelines and milestones for completion of major project activities, the metrics that will be used to assess progress on an ongoing basis, and annual performance targets the applicant will use to monitor whether the project is achieving its goals.

(2) The extent of the demonstrated commitment of any key partners or evidence of broad support from stakeholders whose participation is critical to the project's long-term success.

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

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Personnel

1. In determining the quality and personnel for the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factor:

(1) The adequacy of the project's staffing plan, particularly for the first year of the project, including the identification of the project director and, in the case of projects with unfilled key personnel positions at the beginning of the project, that the staffing plan identifies how critical work will proceed.

Strengths:

NA

Weaknesses:

NA

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. In determining the quality of the project evaluation to be conducted, the Secretary considers the following factors:

(1) The clarity and importance of the key questions to be addressed by the project evaluation, and the appropriateness of the methods for how each question will be addressed.

(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan includes a clear and credible analysis plan, including a proposed sample size and minimum detectable effect size that aligns with the expected project impact, and an analytic approach for addressing the research questions.

(3) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key components and outcomes of the project, as well as a measureable threshold for acceptable implementation.

Strengths:

The research questions to be addressed by the project evaluation are stated clearly on pages 23-24. The methods of how each question will be addressed is appropriate. The evaluation plan includes a robust quasi-experimental design with matched comparison schools. The evaluation plan states that it will show that matched schools are similar in regards to location, enrollment, demographics of students and achievement scores (pages 18-19). The methods for matching schools for the evaluation are detailed on page 20 and the issue of minimally invasive treatment is addressed. In addition, the evaluation will include mixed methods that consists of rubrics, focus groups, surveys, activity logs and student test data (page 19). The sample of students (approximately 17,000), teachers (600), and principals (24) from across 24 middle-grade schools in Kentucky and Michigan are large. The plan not only includes proposed sample size for the evaluation, but also includes the minimum detectable effect size (page 23 and in Appendix D) that aligns with the expected project impact.

Focus groups will be conducted every other year to collect information regarding the experiences of implementation and to assess the system of support related to leadership development (page 21) which addresses one of the research questions (question 2 on page 23).

The project has an independent external evaluator for the project which will ensure that the evaluation is not biased.

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses found.

Reader's Score: 15

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 09/15/2013 10:26 PM