

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/24/2011 10:22 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Meriden Children First Initiative, Inc. (U215P110170)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Need for Project		
1. Need for Project	15	15
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	20	19
Quality of Project Services		
1. Qual. of Project Services	20	20
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Qual. of Management Plan	45	44
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
CPP4 Early Learning		
1. CPP4 Early Learning	2	2
CPP5 Internet Access		
1. CPP5 Internet Access	1	1
CPP6 Arts and Humanities		
1. CPP6 Arts and Humanities	1	0
Competitive Preference Priorities		
CPP7 Affordable Housing		
1. CPP7 Affordable Housing	1	0
Invitational Priority		
Adult Education		
1. Adult Education	0	0
Total	105	101

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel - 1: 84.215P

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: Meriden Children First Initiative, Inc. (U215P110170)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Need for Project

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Need for Project.

Reader's Score: 15

Sub Question

1. The magnitude or severity of the problems to be addressed by the proposed project as described by indicators of need and other relevant indicators identified in part by the needs assessment and segmentation analysis.

Strengths:

Excellent outline and description of the needs.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 10

2. The extent to which the geographically defined area has been described.

Strengths:

Good map, interesting discussion of daylighting the brook to create green space.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of Project Design.

Reader's Score: 19

Sub Question

Sub Question

- 1. The extent to which the continuum of solutions will be aligned with an ambitious, rigorous, and comprehensive strategy for improvement of schools in the neighborhood.**

Strengths:

This process is clearly already well underway - good that the core team has been in place since 2009. The continuum is comprehensive and appropriate.

Weaknesses:

This is an enormous undertaking- it is not clearly noted that leadership will fully ensure that all partners remain active and engaged.

Reader's Score: 9

- 2. The extent to which the applicant describes a proposal to plan to create a complete continuum of solutions, including early learning through grade 12, college- and career-readiness, and family and community supports, without time and resource gaps that will prepare all children in the neighborhood to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.**

Strengths:

Excellent continuum as well as integrated data and communication system.

Weaknesses:

none noted.

Reader's Score: 5

- 3. The extent to which solutions leverage existing neighborhood assets and coordinate with other efforts, including programs supported by Federal, State, local, and private funds.**

Strengths:

The assets include in-kind contributions, new monies, alignment with similar goals and resources, and the potential for "unlocking" new dollars.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Services

- 1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of Project Services.**

Reader's Score: 20

Sub Question

- 1. The extent to which the applicant describes how the needs assessment and segmentation analysis, including identifying and describing indicators, will be used during the planning phase to determine each solution within the continuum.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

The process appears solid. Table III-1 is a good use of information to show indicator, source and results.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 10

2. **The extent to which the applicant describes how it will determine that solutions are based on the best available evidence including, where available, strong or moderate evidence, and ensure that solutions drive results and lead to changes on indicators.**

Strengths:

The team appears to have been gathering data to integrate into the plan since 2009. The evidence is solid and appropriate.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. **Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of the Management Plan.**

Reader's Score: 44

Sub Question

1. **Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of the applicant's management team and project director in working with the neighborhood and its residents; the schools described in paragraph (2) (b) of Absolute Priority 1; the LEA in which those schools are located; Federal, State, and local government leaders; and other service providers.**

Strengths:

Communication with families is a central part of the proposal. On p. 44 the proposal details to what lengths the team goes to in order to include families (arrange for childcare, provide transportation, stipends, meals, translation). Table IV-1 shows recent successes to demonstrate a track record of engaging hard-to-reach parents.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 10

2. **Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in collecting, analyzing, and using data for decision-making, learning, continuous improvement, and accountability.**

Sub Question

Strengths:

Communications team will ensure that a diverse audience is informed. Good use of parents as peer leaders. Good use of external evaluators. Excellent plan for a report card on progress.

Weaknesses:

The project director's specific experience in collecting, analyzing and use data is unclear (hence the external evaluators).

Reader's Score: 14

- 3. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in creating formal and informal partnerships, including the alignment of the visions, theories of action, and theories of change described in its memorandum of understanding, and creating a system for holding partners accountable for performance in accordance with the memorandum of understanding.**

Strengths:

Throughout the proposal, mentioned is how the team seeks highly engaged leadership and demonstrates how to build on human/social capital to make this project work (motivation is as important as need).

The reader appreciates that the CFI board is half parents, half community leaders.

Weaknesses:

none noted.

Reader's Score: 10

- 4. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in integrating funding streams from multiple public and private sources, including its proposal to leverage and integrate high-quality programs in the neighborhood into the continuum of solutions.**

Strengths:

Excellent creation of the Parent Trust Fund to underwrite programming. There are "ambitious plans" to scale up the already successful demonstration of diverse funding sources.

Weaknesses:

none noted

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP4 Early Learning

- 1. To meet this priority, an applicant must propose in its plan to expand, enhance, or modify, an existing network of early learning programs and services to ensure they are high-quality and comprehensive for children from birth through the third grade.**

Strengths:

This proposal does an excellent job of building on existing programs in order to enhance in a high-quality way, services for early learning.

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP5 Internet Access

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must ensure that almost all students in the geographic area proposed to be served have broadband Internet access at home and at school, the knowledge and skills to use broadband internet access effectively, and a connected computing device to support schoolwork.

Strengths:

This proposal adequately addresses broadband and internet access at schools and home.

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP6 Arts and Humanities

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must include in its plan opportunities for children and youth to experience and participate actively in the arts and humanities in their community so as to broaden, enrich, and enliven the educational, cultural, and civic experiences available in the neighborhood.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priorities - CPP7 Affordable Housing

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must propose to serve geographic areas that were the subject of an affordable housing transformation pursuant to a Choice Neighborhoods or HOPE VI grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during FY2009 or later years.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 0

Invitational Priority - Adult Education

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must include a plan that is coordinated with adult education providers serving neighborhood residents, such as those funded through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, as amended. Coordinated services may include adult basic and secondary education and programs that provide training and opportunities for family members and other members of the community to support student learning and establish high expectations for student educational achievement. Examples of services and programs include preparation for the General Education Development (GED) test; English literacy, family literacy, and work-based literacy training; or other training that prepares adults for postsecondary education and careers, or supports adult engagement in the educational success of children and youth in the neighborhood.

Yes

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/24/2011 10:22 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/27/2011 12:41 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Meriden Children First Initiative, Inc. (U215P110170)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Need for Project		
1. Need for Project	15	14
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	20	20
Quality of Project Services		
1. Qual. of Project Services	20	19
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Qual. of Management Plan	45	44
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
CPP4 Early Learning		
1. CPP4 Early Learning	2	1
CPP5 Internet Access		
1. CPP5 Internet Access	1	1
CPP6 Arts and Humanities		
1. CPP6 Arts and Humanities	1	0
Competitive Preference Priorities		
CPP7 Affordable Housing		
1. CPP7 Affordable Housing	1	0
Invitational Priority		
Adult Education		
1. Adult Education	0	0
Total	105	99

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel - 1: 84.215P

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: Meriden Children First Initiative, Inc. (U215P110170)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Need for Project

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Need for Project.

Reader's Score: 14

Sub Question

1. The magnitude or severity of the problems to be addressed by the proposed project as described by indicators of need and other relevant indicators identified in part by the needs assessment and segmentation analysis.

Strengths:

S: On the first page of the proposal, the applicant describes itself as a "mid-size city with big-city" societal ills. It goes on to speak to the severity of some of the problems in Meriden later (e.g. 57% single-parent homes, 66% of 4 year old fail the kindergarten entrance inventory, inadequate space for infant and toddlers, etc.). There seems to be a real need for an early learning strategy since the city lacks enough pre-k classes (only one in ten students benefit from a full-day of kindergarten as well).

Weaknesses:

W: On pages 3 and 4, the tables do not match the narrative of the problem statement. It is not clear who "other" represents or stands for.

Reader's Score: 9

2. The extent to which the geographically defined area has been described.

Strengths:

S: The applicant describes the area it plans to create the PN with 6 census tracts (40 blocks). With this specificity of the geographic area, it might make the data collection more accurate. The applicant gives the reader a sense of the mid-size of the area. The applicant gives thick description of the neighborhood on page 9 when discussing the Mills housing development and the rest of the zone. Lastly, the map on page 10 helps the reader understand where the schools, partners, and some services are located in Meriden.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of Project Design.

Reader's Score: 20

Sub Question

1. The extent to which the continuum of solutions will be aligned with an ambitious, rigorous, and comprehensive strategy for improvement of schools in the neighborhood.

Strengths:

S: The applicant plans to coordinate the school system, state department of education, and the CT Center for School Change to figure out how to dramatically change the district and school practices for the better. It plans to do so using Race to the Top turnaround models. It details the plans in Table II-I and Appendix H. The applicant puts forth a robust strategy to improve its schools including professional development for principals, targeted teacher recruitment and assessment, and partnerships with the local community college and workforce board.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

2. The extent to which the applicant describes a proposal to plan to create a complete continuum of solutions, including early learning through grade 12, college- and career-readiness, and family and community supports, without time and resource gaps that will prepare all children in the neighborhood to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.

Strengths:

S: Leveraging the Meriden Children First Initiative as a partner organization to improve disparate social and health outcomes in additional educational outcomes seems to be a solid plan aligned with the PN goal to have a complete continuum of solutions. Table II-3 on page 23 displays the partners involved that will work on the health and parental aspects of the continuum. The roles and responsibilities seem to be laid out pretty clear.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 5

3. The extent to which solutions leverage existing neighborhood assets and coordinate with other efforts, including programs supported by Federal, State, local, and private funds.

Strengths:

S: On page 9, the applicant identifies the Meriden Public Library and the main service agencies in the City as neighborhood assets, particularly since they are within walking distance of the Zone residences. On page 31, the applicant lists five churches and a community health center as a neighborhood asset, too.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Services

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of Project Services.

Reader's Score: 19

Sub Question

1. The extent to which the applicant describes how the needs assessment and segmentation analysis, including identifying and describing indicators, will be used during the planning phase to determine each solution within the continuum.

Strengths:

S: The applicant contends that elements of the preliminary continuum already exist in Meriden and Connecticut so its goal is to use the needs assessment to identify gaps in services and to identify additional evidence-based interventions already being used in the targeted area. The applicant intends to build on the needs assessment conducted for Early Childhood Blueprint which should provide a robust set of data. The data collection and use plan flow chart illustrates the work plan.

Weaknesses:

W: The applicant provides several health, family, and community indicators yet it is difficult to see many education indicators. Even though it is aligned with the school district's improvement plan, it would still be helpful to see a more thorough education data set.

Reader's Score: 9

2. The extent to which the applicant describes how it will determine that solutions are based on the best available evidence including, where available, strong or moderate evidence, and ensure that solutions drive results and lead to changes on indicators.

Strengths:

S: The applicant plans to work with the CT Center for School Change, the CT Commission on Children, and the University of CT Center for Applied Research to define the basis for the proposed continuum of solutions. The applicant also plans to use a continuous quality improvement process with the hopes that resident feedback, staff feedback, and data will inform the best use of solutions in the MFZ.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of the Management Plan.

Reader's Score: 44

Sub Question

1. **Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of the applicant's management team and project director in working with the neighborhood and its residents; the schools described in paragraph (2) (b) of Absolute Priority 1; the LEA in which those schools are located; Federal, State, and local government leaders; and other service providers.**

Strengths:

S: Since the applicant launched a pilot PN in 2010, it seems to have demonstrated an ability to work with the Meriden Family Zone before; it can draw on the experiences and lessons learned in order to elevate the planning grant workplan and fidelity. On page 6, the applicant boasts relationships with three engaged, elementary school principals in addition to active Parent Teacher Organizations in the zone. On page 17, the applicant boasts a core of a dozen Zone parents already taking on leadership roles in the MFZ.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

2. **Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in collecting, analyzing, and using data for decision-making, learning, continuous improvement, and accountability.**

Strengths:

S: Throughout the application, the applicant utilized tables and charts to illustrate both the demographics and the challenges of the MFZ. For example, on page 5, the applicant plans to use truancy data from the needs assessment in order to set goals for truancy reduction and to create/target interventions in MFZ.

Weaknesses:

W: It is unclear how extensive of an experience the project director has in data collection and analysis.

Reader's Score: 14

3. **Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in creating formal and informal partnerships, including the alignment of the visions, theories of action, and theories of change described in its memorandum of understanding, and creating a system for holding partners accountable for performance in accordance with the memorandum of understanding.**

Strengths:

S: It is telling that the applicant acknowledges the difficult challenge to match interventions to the target population, especially when working across programs and organizations. On page 12, the applicant speaks to its goal to refine protocols, refine data collection, and build stronger connections among its partners during the planning process in an effort to make a more coordinated, seamless operation for MFZ, if a planning grant is awarded.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

- 4. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in integrating funding streams from multiple public and private sources, including its proposal to leverage and integrate high-quality programs in the neighborhood into the continuum of solutions.**

Strengths:

S: On page 31, the applicant explains that its committed partners are seeking funding opportunities from federal, state, and private sources. The reader finds it impressive that the funder community is already engaged with \$100,000 committed from private sources. Local foundations are already involved.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP4 Early Learning

- 1. To meet this priority, an applicant must propose in its plan to expand, enhance, or modify, an existing network of early learning programs and services to ensure they are high-quality and comprehensive for children from birth through the third grade.**

Strengths:

The applicant states, on page 13, that having high-quality early learning programs sit at the core of its four continuum solutions. The applicant speaks to how it will enhance existing programs.

Weaknesses:

This criteria was discussed by all panel members. But, full points were not awarded by the reviewer because while the applicant aims to enhance early learning programs, it does not detail how it plans to do so or in what time frame.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP5 Internet Access

- 1. To meet this priority, an applicant must ensure that almost all students in the geographic area proposed to be served have broadband Internet access at home and at school, the knowledge and skills to use broadband internet access effectively, and a connected computing device to support schoolwork.**

Strengths:

S: The applicant plans to put computers with broadband in the hands of 40 parents and will bring it to scale, if an award is granted.

Weaknesses:

W: There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP6 Arts and Humanities

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must include in its plan opportunities for children and youth to experience and participate actively in the arts and humanities in their community so as to broaden, enrich, and enliven the educational, cultural, and civic experiences available in the neighborhood.

Strengths:

The applicant does not address this.

Weaknesses:

The applicant does not address this.

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priorities - CPP7 Affordable Housing

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must propose to serve geographic areas that were the subject of an affordable housing transformation pursuant to a Choice Neighborhoods or HOPE VI grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during FY2009 or later years.

Strengths:

S: The applicant does not address this.

Weaknesses:

W: The applicant does not address this.

Reader's Score: 0

Invitational Priority - Adult Education

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must include a plan that is coordinated with adult education providers serving neighborhood residents, such as those funded through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, as amended. Coordinated services may include adult basic and secondary education and programs that provide training and opportunities for family members and other members of the community to support student learning and establish high expectations for student educational achievement. Examples of services and programs include preparation for the General Education Development (GED) test; English literacy, family literacy, and work-based literacy training; or other training that prepares adults for postsecondary education and careers, or supports adult engagement in the educational success of children and youth in the neighborhood.

No

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/27/2011 12:41 PM

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 10/24/2011 10:30 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: Meriden Children First Initiative, Inc. (U215P110170)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Need for Project		
1. Need for Project	15	14
Quality of Project Design		
1. Quality of Project Design	20	19
Quality of Project Services		
1. Qual. of Project Services	20	18
Quality of the Management Plan		
1. Qual. of Management Plan	45	45
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
CPP4 Early Learning		
1. CPP4 Early Learning	2	2
CPP5 Internet Access		
1. CPP5 Internet Access	1	1
CPP6 Arts and Humanities		
1. CPP6 Arts and Humanities	1	0
Competitive Preference Priorities		
CPP7 Affordable Housing		
1. CPP7 Affordable Housing	1	0
Invitational Priority		
Adult Education		
1. Adult Education	0	0
Total	105	99

Technical Review Form

Panel #1 - Panel - 1: 84.215P

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: Meriden Children First Initiative, Inc. (U215P110170)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Need for Project

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Need for Project.

Reader's Score: 14

Sub Question

1. The magnitude or severity of the problems to be addressed by the proposed project as described by indicators of need and other relevant indicators identified in part by the needs assessment and segmentation analysis.

Strengths:

The applicant presents very strong data to support the magnitude of problems to be addressed by the project. The educational data portrays a school system and community that has numerous challenges from early childhood education through post-secondary education and career placement and success. The applicant cites data for the targeted area (Meriden Family Zone or MFZ) and compares it to city and state data, as possible. For family and community needs, the applicant cites significant poverty issues, with 59% of families with children having incomes below the federal poverty level, and health and safety issues.

Weaknesses:

The Tables I-2 and I-3 do not seem to fit the narrative provided. In the tables, it is not clear what category "other" means. This reviewer assumes that it means State of Connecticut; however, the narrative for both tables does not fit that assumption. For example, Table I-2 shows that 28.0% of All Students in the MFZ zone scored at or above goal on the CMT rather than 25.5% as stated in the narrative. In the same table, it shows that 44.1% of All Students in "Other" scored at or above goal on the CMT; however, the narrative states that the number is 58.4% statewide.

Reader's Score: 9

2. The extent to which the geographically defined area has been described.

Strengths:

The application clearly defines the geographic area that will be targeted for the project. Called the Meriden Family Zone (MFZ), it encompasses a 40-block area in the center city of Meriden, Connecticut, and includes Census Tracts 1701-03, 1709-10, 1714. A detailed map that identifies the target community with zone boundaries and community assets is provided (pg 10).

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of Project Design.

Reader's Score: 19

Sub Question

1. The extent to which the continuum of solutions will be aligned with an ambitious, rigorous, and comprehensive strategy for improvement of schools in the neighborhood.

Strengths:

The applicant describes significant, comprehensive and ambitious district reform efforts underway by Meriden Public Schools (MPS) through their District Improvement Plan. The application identifies the specific reform measures with which MFZ will be closely aligned in Table II-1, pgs 16-17. As stated, the MPS reform efforts are being advanced in the context of landmark changes adopted by the Connecticut General Assembly as a part of the State's Race to the Top initiative.

Weaknesses:

It appears that the applicant's continuum of solutions for education for MCZ is comprised of the components of the District's improvement plan, but it is not clear if they are essentially one and the same.

Reader's Score: 9

2. The extent to which the applicant describes a proposal to plan to create a complete continuum of solutions, including early learning through grade 12, college- and career-readiness, and family and community supports, without time and resource gaps that will prepare all children in the neighborhood to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to college and a career.

Strengths:

The applicant presents a preliminary cradle-to-career plan that has been developed and refined by the Meriden Children First Initiative (CFI) with collaborative partners in the community over the last fifteen years (pgs 11-12). CFI will lead the effort during the planning period to "develop a comprehensive action plan that updates and refines the continuum, assigns roles to partners, and identifies stronger mechanisms for collaboration, accountability, and financing to ensure that it will achieve the results we are seeking for children in the Zone" (pg. 12) The preliminary continuum outlined in the application is in-depth, comprehensive, and innovative. The centerpiece of the plan is a Family Partnership Initiative (FPI). The FPI "seeks to engage each MFZ family in their children's education and to help them address any social, health and economic issues or needs which might interfere with their children's educational success" (pg 19). In addition to the educational solutions, other continuum components include: Early Intervention, Early Learning and Kindergarten Readiness, Family Support, Health, Enrichment, Parental Support for Economic Success, Neighborhood Environmental Initiatives.

The applicant provides a detailed planning process with a timeline (pg 29) as well as a planning year

Sub Question

logic model (pg. 30). With the continuum so well developed, the applicant states that the planning year will be used to create the Meriden Family Zone Implementation Plan and will be led by the MFZ Planning Team, the core of which has been in place since 2009 (pg 27). The logic model outlines the four Year 1 objectives.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

3. The extent to which solutions leverage existing neighborhood assets and coordinate with other efforts, including programs supported by Federal, State, local, and private funds.

Strengths:

The applicant outlines examples of how the project will leverage existing neighborhood assets and coordinate with other efforts supported by private and public funds. The three elementary schools in the Zone will align their investment of Title I and other state and federal education funding with the MFZ plan. The City of Meriden is supporting the MFZ through its Health Department, Economic Development, Planning, Parks, and Library programming. The project has also identified eight public and private MFZ project funders. The funders have committed over \$100,000 to the PN project.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Services

1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of Project Services.

Reader's Score: 18

Sub Question

1. The extent to which the applicant describes how the needs assessment and segmentation analysis, including identifying and describing indicators, will be used during the planning phase to determine each solution within the continuum.

Strengths:

The applicant states that the MFZ team will conduct a detailed needs assessment and segmentation analysis using data from the school system as well as public and private agencies involved in the project. The team will build on an extensive needs assessment conducted for the MPS District Improvement Plan. The team also will work with MPS and other partners to collect indicators (listed in Table III-1, pg 35-36), combine indicator data with other data from community surveys and outreach worker interactions to ascertain patterns of issues and needs by area and population group. To assist in analysis, the data will be presented in ways to identify trends and compare areas of need. The applicant also describes a segmentation analysis to identify children with the most pressing needs by population group and neighborhood location. Data analysis on the information from the segmentation will be used with a series of focus groups in the Zone and with service providers to determine trends and receive feedback on validity and determine what other data may be useful.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

Not all required academic indicators are included in Table III-1. Indicators required in the program announcement (see Table 1--Education Indicators), such as # and % of children from birth to K participating in early learning settings or programs and attendance rates of students in 6th-9th grades, are not included.

Reader's Score: 8

- 2. The extent to which the applicant describes how it will determine that solutions are based on the best available evidence including, where available, strong or moderate evidence, and ensure that solutions drive results and lead to changes on indicators.**

Strengths:

During the planning period, a key task will be for MFZ partners, contractors, and funders to ensure that each of the solutions can be implemented and brought to scale. The Meriden Team has visited Harlem Children's Zone to learn about best and promising practices. The applicant provides an extensive and detailed list of which indicator each proposed solution will address and another table that summarizes the evidence basis for each planned intervention. The tables presented are quite impressive with their comprehensiveness and exceptional research base.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 10

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Management Plan

- 1. Please respond to the sub-questions regarding the Quality of the Management Plan.**

Reader's Score: 45

Sub Question

- 1. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of the applicant's management team and project director in working with the neighborhood and its residents; the schools described in paragraph (2) (b) of Absolute Priority 1; the LEA in which those schools are located; Federal, State, and local government leaders; and other service providers.**

Strengths:

The MFZ Planning Team has been meeting since 2009 and includes a 30-member collaborative representing community leaders, parents, education experts, social service providers, government and business representatives. An organizational chart outlines roles and responsibilities of the two leadership teams and four area-focused task forces/teams (Continuum of Solutions, Resource Development, Advocacy & Communication, and Data/Reporting/Evaluation). Community residents are involved on the Executive Team. Two additional teams will be added for the planning year: Communications and Resource Development Team.

Sub Question

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 10

- 2. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in collecting, analyzing, and using data for decision-making, learning, continuous improvement, and accountability.**

Strengths:

The applicant supports its management team's ability to collect, analyze, and use data. Child First has been collecting and analyzing data on the status of children in Meriden for the last 7 years. In 2010, CFI began development of the Family Partnership Database to collect data on families and children in the MFZ to assess needs and report progress in meeting them. It will become the core of the longitudinal data management systems to track data on MFZ families and children. MPS has also implemented a student information system (SIS) to report all student information and selected assessments, which is the beginning of a longitudinal student data management system. MFZ plans to bring these two data systems together to integrate data at the individual child level from MPS and partner agencies. Also, the MFZ will assess team member training needs and develop a plan to train all participating agency staff on the data system.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 15

- 3. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in creating formal and informal partnerships, including the alignment of the visions, theories of action, and theories of change described in its memorandum of understanding, and creating a system for holding partners accountable for performance in accordance with the memorandum of understanding.**

Strengths:

The lead organization, Children First, has an extensive history of building partnerships and has brought that to the development and establishment of the MFZ with 30 community partners. The Table on pg 52 provides information on partners and their roles, responsibilities, and commitments to matching funds. During the planning year, the Executive Team of MFZ will use the planning and deliverable schedule to hold all partners and consultants accountable as described in the MOU. The applicant cites a lesson learned concerning regular communication and reporting to help align partner visions, theories of action and change and to help maintain accountability. Web-based reporting tools will be used to ensure partner alignment and accountability as well as the use of the MFZ Report Card.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 10

- 4. Experience, lessons learned, and proposal to build capacity of applicant's management team and project director in integrating funding streams from multiple public and private sources, including its proposal to leverage and integrate high-quality programs in the neighborhood into the**

Sub Question

continuum of solutions.

Strengths:

The budget for the application identifies \$375,000 in local matching funds from multiple public and private sources. The MFZ Planning Team is looking to implement the full continuum of solutions and expand the Zone into other schools and neighborhoods in Meriden. The applicant cites additional examples identifying and integrating funding streams: securing new funding streams (Parent Trust Fund), leveraging federal government funds (Medicaid reimbursement to place full time mental health clinicians in Zone schools to work with children dealing with behavioral health issues), and securing private funding (six private funders providing \$10,000 or more each in support). In addition through the Early Childhood Blueprint planning team, Meriden completed a fiscal scan of all government levels and philanthropic community giving across 10 youth and family serving programs and identified over \$46 million in resources directed toward children. The study also found that these funding streams were not coordinated and there was significant overlap and inefficiencies in the use of funds. The planning process for MFZ will expand this study through high school and develop specific strategies to better coordinate and target investments to maximize returns on social and academic gains.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 10

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP4 Early Learning

- 1. To meet this priority, an applicant must propose in its plan to expand, enhance, or modify, an existing network of early learning programs and services to ensure they are high-quality and comprehensive for children from birth through the third grade.**

Strengths:

MFZ will work with the Meriden Early Childhood Council and the Meriden School Readiness Council to develop a plan to expand and enhance a network of early learning programs and services to extend services to more of the youngest children in the MFZ. This effort will be informed by and aligned with the work of the State's Early Childhood Education Cabinet which is preparing its application for Race to the Top Early Education Challenge.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 2

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP5 Internet Access

- 1. To meet this priority, an applicant must ensure that almost all students in the geographic area proposed to be served have broadband Internet access at home and at school, the knowledge and skills to use broadband internet access effectively, and a connected computing device to support schoolwork.**

Strengths:

A program to put computers with Broadband Internet Access in the hands of MFZ parents was initiated in September 2011. The pilot program will work initially with 40 parents. During the planning year, the Planning Team will determine the process to bring it to scale, providing a functional computer and high-speed internet access to all MFZ children and households.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 1

Competitive Preference Priority - CPP6 Arts and Humanities

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must include in its plan opportunities for children and youth to experience and participate actively in the arts and humanities in their community so as to broaden, enrich, and enliven the educational, cultural, and civic experiences available in the neighborhood.

Strengths:

The applicant did not identify this as a competitive priority under which it was applying.

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priorities - CPP7 Affordable Housing

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must propose to serve geographic areas that were the subject of an affordable housing transformation pursuant to a Choice Neighborhoods or HOPE VI grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development during FY2009 or later years.

Strengths:

The applicant did not identify this as a competitive priority under which it was applying.

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score: 0

Invitational Priority - Adult Education

1. To meet this priority, an applicant must include a plan that is coordinated with adult education providers serving neighborhood residents, such as those funded through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, as amended. Coordinated services may include adult basic and secondary education and programs that provide training and opportunities for family members and other members of the community to support student learning and establish high expectations for student educational achievement. Examples of services and programs include preparation for the General Education Development (GED) test; English literacy, family literacy, and work-based literacy training; or other training that prepares adults for postsecondary education and careers, or supports adult engagement in the educational success of children and youth in the neighborhood.

No

Reader's Score: 0

Status: Submitted

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