

Corporation for National and Community Service

2010 Social Innovation Fund

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Reviewer Comments – Phase 2

SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND 2010 EVALUATION CONSENSUS FORM

PROGRAM DESIGN (45%)

Provide a panel assessment of the application's PROGRAM DESIGN as follows:

- Write a brief Narrative Assessment;
 - List the Significant Strengths and Weaknesses (annotate your comments by referencing the applicable Eligibility or Application Review Criteria); and
 - Select a Rating for this section.
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Panel Narrative Assessment

The applicant proposes a major expansion of a program model, Financial Opportunity Centers, which is designed to improve the financial bottom line for low- to moderate-income families through three key strategies: employment placement, increasing access to income supports, and financial coaching to help families with debt, credit issues and asset building. The model is operating in four cities and the application is to support expansion to five additional cities around the country. They supported the initial pilot and have already supported successful replication in three additional cities and now have a five-year track record of implementing, evaluating and improving the model – and achieving notable results. The applicant's subgranting process is strong, and subgrantees are provided with substantial training, TA, and learning supports and are held accountable for their performance. The use of data, research and evaluation is sophisticated and embedded in the program design.

Significant Strengths

- + The applicant's program model – Financial Opportunity Centers (FOC) – and theory of change are research based and clearly articulated. Measurable outcomes for improvement, both short- and long-term, are clearly specified (e.g., long-term outcomes measured over 1-3 years include job retention and changes in net income and credit scores). (*Program Design, A.ii*).
- + The proposed impact evaluation is highly rigorous and methodologically sound, involving a quasi-experimental design with two comparison components (comparing FOC clients to similar employment seekers and to data from the Survey of Income and Program Participation). The research design will allow for causal inference. (*Program Design, B.i*).
- + Criteria for selecting subgrantees are designed to identify organizations that are committed to the program model, have strong capacity for collection and use of data, and have the ability to quickly address performance issues. Continued funding of subgrantees hinges on compliance (two subgrantees were defunded for failing to meet target outcomes), so there is a high degree of accountability (*Program Design, D.i*).

- + The applicant provides substantial TA and training to each new subgrantee to help ensure that they fully understand the FOC model and services as well as performance expectations. Training (webinars, on-site), technology (e.g., ETO), and ongoing support are used to ensure collection of high-quality data for measuring client outcomes, monitoring program implementation, and making mid-course corrections. Subgrantees report quarterly on outcomes, and applicant staff help them use these data to inform program management. All of these practices, along with opportunities for cross-subgrantee learning, help preserve model integrity and improve program quality, which in turn facilitate successful replication and expansion. (*Program Design, D.i. and D.ii*).
- + Beyond program direction, evaluation, and learning, the applicant provides comprehensive high-touch capacity building through the Family Income & Wealth Building program, which has the experience and tools to address all operational needs to replicate and expand the FOC (i.e., training, coaching, data support and fundraising). (*Program Design, D.ii*)

Significant Weaknesses

None.

Select a Rating for PROGRAM DESIGN (double-click in the applicable box and select "checked")

- Excellent Strong Satisfactory Weak/Non-responsive

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY (35%)

Provide a panel assessment of the application's ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY as follows:

- Write a brief Narrative Assessment;
- List the Significant Strengths and Weaknesses (annotate your comments by referencing the applicable Eligibility or Application Review Criteria); and
- Select a Rating for this section.

Panel Narrative Assessment

The applicant's overall organizational capacity is quite strong: the organization has deep and long-standing experience with evaluation, both internally and externally, as well as experience with scaling up model programs. They use data in a sophisticated way for everything from impact measurement to subgrantee monitoring and organizational assessment. The applicant clearly has the capacity to carry out the proposed program expansion.

Significant Strengths

- + The applicant has 17 years of experience with federal grants management and a proven track record in replication and expansion of model programs, including FOCs. After supporting

multiple pilot FOC sites in one city in 2005 and refining the model over two years, the applicant successfully supported replication in three additional cities. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)

- + Applicant has robust evaluation capacity and experience. For five years, the applicant has had an internal division responsible for incorporating research and evaluation into all program development and implementation. The organization also works with top notch research providers. (*Organizational Capacity, A.i.*)
- + The applicant has a history of using sophisticated systems, processes, and tools for training and supporting multiple sites and partners, as well as concrete and explicit criteria and mechanisms for holding grantees accountable. (*Organizational Capacity, A.ii.*)
- + The applicant's overall collection, management, and use of data, nationally and locally, is impressive. The use of data, technology (e.g., ETO software), training, capacity building, and convenings of subgrantees all contribute to a learning environment that is both cost effective and efficient: learning is ongoing and used to continually refine the model and improve implementation. (*Organizational Capacity, A.ii.*)

Significant Weaknesses

None.

Select a Rating for ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY (double-click in the applicable box and select "checked")

- Excellent Strong Satisfactory Weak/Non-responsive

COST EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY (20%)

Provide a panel assessment of the application's COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY as follows:

- Write a brief Narrative Assessment;
- List the Significant Strengths and Weaknesses (annotate your comments by referencing the applicable Eligibility or Application Review Criteria); and
- Select a Rating for this section.

Panel Narrative Assessment

The overall budget appears cost-effective and adequate. The budget allocation for evaluation via the Economic Mobility Corporation is sizable but necessary for the rigorous evaluation proposed. Significant resources are allocated for training and technical assistance for subgrantees, but this is key to the model's success.

Significant Strengths

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- + The applicant has budgeted adequately for evaluation as well as for training, TA, and ongoing support for grantees. (*Cost-Effectiveness and Budget Adequacy, A.ii.*)

Significant Weaknesses

None.

Select a Rating for COST-EFFECTIVENESS AND BUDGET ADEQUACY (double-click in the applicable box and select "checked")

Excellent

Strong

Satisfactory

Weak/Non-responsive

OVERALL APPRAISAL

The applicant has provided a compelling proposal to expand a program model that has already yielded strong evidence of success. The FOC model combines employment placement, increased access to income supports, and financial coaching to help families with debt, credit issues and asset building. The strengths of this model are many: (1) it successfully combines three research-based strategies into a single model, (2) evaluation research has demonstrated that combining the three strategies is much more powerful for increasing family economic security than the additive effects of the strategies individually, (3) the outcomes for improvement are clearly specified and measurable. In short, this model has a strong potential for high, demonstrable impact. Not only is the model itself replicable, the applicant has already demonstrated their capacity to replicate and expand it, giving great confidence that they have the capacity to carry out the proposed expansion. The applicant's criteria and process for selecting subgrantees are strong as are their use of training, TA, data, learning supports and accountability provisions to ensure program integrity and quality, which are the necessary ingredients for program expansion. Their experience with and use of evaluation and more general use of data (e.g., to inform program management and make mid-course corrections) instill confidence that the applicant is well-positioned to implement what they have proposed; select high-quality subgrantees and hold them accountable; evaluate the effectiveness of their own organization and subgrantee program implementation; and ultimately, to show success on the proposed measurable outcomes regarding improved family economic security.

- Band I (Excellent):** A comprehensive and thorough application of excellent merit with very significant strengths and no/minimal significant weaknesses.
- Band II (Strong):** An application that demonstrates overall competence and is worthy of support, where the value of the significant strengths outweigh the identified weaknesses.
- Band III (Satisfactory):** An application with potential, where strengths and weaknesses are approximately equal. However, some fundamental weaknesses have been identified.

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- Band IV (Weak/Non-Responsive):** An application with very significant weaknesses and no/minimal significant strengths that have been identified. This option may also include an application that is non-responsive to the published criteria.