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

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: YouthForce NOLA (S411C200059)
Reader #1:   **********

		Points Possible	**Points Scored**
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Quality of Project Design			
1. Quality of Project Design		40	33
	Sub Total	40	33
Resources and Quality of Management Plan			
Resources and Quality of Management Plan			
1. Resources and Management		35	31
	Sub Total	35	31
Selection Criteria			
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		25	24
	Sub Total	25	24
Priority Questions			
CPP			
Competitive Preference Priority 1			
1. Computer Science		5	5
	Sub Total	5	5
	Total	105	93

Technical Review Form

Reader #1:　　　**********

Applicant:　YouthForce NOLA (S411C200059)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project based on the following factors:

Reader's Score:　　33

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.

Strengths:

Their goal is to enroll students at an average rate of 100 (ranging from 60-118) students in the span of 5 years (e15, e22). Most outcomes are stated in a manner that they are achievable and measurable (e16). An example that demonstrates the ambitiousness of project goals is that they state that 80% of students will pass an industry exam (e21, e23).

Weaknesses:

It is unclear what the baseline will be for the outcomes that state students will show increased readiness for promising or good jobs and that more students will acquire promising or good jobs and/or attend a college or university (e16). If the applicants meant to state that, as the grant is carried out, more students will achieve these outcomes in comparison to prior years, then this should have been clearly stated. Or, if their baseline is the total number of students in New Orleans who achieved these outcomes, prior to the grant being implemented, then this also should have been clearly explained. Another weakness is that, from their description, it seems as if there will only be one social worker working with at least a couple hundred students at a time. They state that this individual will meet monthly with every student (e22-23), which seems like an unrealistic case load for one individual. Next, the process through which students will be placed into internships and thereafter advised with additional workplace training and coaching is not sufficiently described (e22). The Soft Skills component is also very unclear and needs much more detail. For example, the applicants do not explain which teachers will participate (e24). If it is all the teachers in all the partner schools then they should have specified this. This component of the program is simply lacking a lot of detail.

Reader's Score:　　6

2. (2) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.

Strengths:

The project is designed to serve the unique needs of students who are economically disadvantaged in New Orleans. The applicants note that this mostly Black group of students do not have as much access to jobs in computer science and cybersecurity as other students. They also discuss income disparities and gaps in

transitioning to post-secondary education and careers (e25-26). They also highlight that employers report entry level employees lack soft skills and that the region has a significant demand for STEM workers (e26), thereby marrying a market need with student needs. By partnering with organizations who have experience providing these services, as well as partnerships with over 250 local employers (e23). The idea that, upon completion, students will be prepared immediately for full-time computer science employment is commendable as this is a really important need right now in the United States, considering the high unemployment due to COVID-19, which is also something the applicants discuss (e26).

Weaknesses:

It is unclear why only 1 of every 2 students who receive the service are expected to acquire a job upon graduation or go to college. It leaves an unopened question as to what the applicants expect the other 50% of students' outcomes will be (e15).

Reader's Score: 9

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project reflects up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice.**

    Strengths:

    The review of the literature is mostly thorough and clearly links the project goals and objectives to the outcomes. The design reflects not only best practice but also published research that demonstrates CTE, computer science training, and soft skills education can have an impact on outcomes such as high school graduation and employment outcomes, and others such as reasoning skills and self-efficacy (e27). The applicants also cite a good amount of literature regarding the effectiveness of YouthForce's program (e28).

    Weaknesses:

    Though a minor flaw, this project does not address the fact that pairing students with mentors will probably not be sufficient to remove all barriers to employment for this particular group of students (e23) as they do not discuss other related factors such as segregation and access to wealth. In fact, they themselves acknowledge the myriad of additional barriers this population faces (e25).

    Reader's Score: 8

4. **(4) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

    Strengths:

    The program will equip students with industry-based credentials, such as Javascript, which combines the needs of the current job market with identified gaps in offerings for primarily Black economically disadvantaged high school students in New Orleans. The partners seem to have vast knowledge in delivering the services (e15). This is a unique collaboration that should result in an increased understanding of how to leverage existing relationships with external organizations to equip students with real-world skills, especially in a charter school system (e15). It should also inform the existing understanding of soft skills training and academic and job market outcomes.

    Weaknesses:

    There are no weaknesses.

    Reader's Score: 10

Resources and Quality of Management Plan - Resources and Quality of Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 31

   Sub

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

   Strengths:

   The project is divided into four phases - Planning, Formative, Summative, and Scaling – each of which is clearly described and seems well ideated (e30). The timeline, though broad is designed to achieve the objectives within a reasonable time frame. It is sufficiently detailed but broad enough to allow for minor necessary changes along the way.

   Weaknesses:

   There are many people assigned to be responsible for milestones that likely do not require many people to accomplish them. This brings into question whether each person has a clearly defined role or not. For example, the executive vice president, the social worker, and the provider directors are all in charge of pairing students with coaches and mentors each year (e31). It is not immediately clear why, for example, the social worker could not be solely responsible for this task, with only the responsibility of reporting out to the executive vice president and the provider directors. There is a lot of overlap in responsibility, too, in most other milestones. Alternately, it is open to question whether the social worker would be able to handle the case load of 500 students, especially because the person who is the social worker also has graphic designer responsibilities for YouthForce, and will only contribute 50% of their time to the project (e145). The project would be better served with more than one social worker. This responsibility should not be something the executive vice president should responsible for doing.

   Reader's Score: 6

   2. **(2) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

   Strengths:

   Because of the significant expected gains in employment outcomes as well as salary, the per-pupil cost of this project, though perhaps high in comparison to other educational programs, is reasonable. Factors that make the program so costly include the one-on-one support students will receive and collaborative planning (e32).

   Weaknesses:

   There are no weaknesses.

   Reader's Score: 5

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

   Strengths:

   The qualifications of the partners, YouthForce and Operation Spark, are strong. They are based on years of experience offering the services proposed in the application. They also have a track record of delivering positive results, such as multiplying the number of high school students who complete meaningful work experience, earn

industry-based credentials, and place in jobs (e33). MDRC, too, is a well-regarded evaluation organization with a strong track record for quality work. The staff themselves also demonstrate relevant training and experience as it relates to their job function. For many, their experience spans both educational, non-profit, and corporate work. Altogether, they have impressive credentials. What is more, most have worked in New Orleans for collective decades and are therefore acutely aware and proficient in the unique needs of the City. The evaluator has more than enough experience to conduct the external evaluation (e20, e35).

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

The applicants will hold quarterly and monthly meetings with the full team to evaluate progress toward goals and monitor spending as well as make any plans for necessary changes (e35). The project will employ a previous plan for continuous improvement and feedback utilized in for a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant (e36). The data they will use includes real-time student data including grades, retention, and job support as well as survey responses after every training. The applicants assert that they will use that data to make any necessary changes (e36-37). Other aspects that will be monitored include usability, feasibility, and fidelity, all of which will be captured during a specifically-chosen phase in the project to maximize their use and impact (e37). Semi-structured phone interviews with program and school staff will also inform continuous improvement efforts (e40).

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 10

5. **(5) The extent to which the results of the proposed project are to be disseminated in ways that will enable others to use the information or strategies.**

Strengths:

The dissemination plan includes annual lessons learned through national networks, sharing updates with stakeholders, including students and parents, teachers and schools, and policymakers, via their email list, social media channels, and a partnership with a local news webpage. YouthForce will also have the support of a Communications Director and will present at two conferences annually. Finally, they plan to publish an impact study in collaboration with their evaluator (e38). Altogether this is a very holistic and robust plan to disseminate findings and share results with others.

Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 24

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice).**

   Strengths:

   The applicants propose a student-level matched comparison group design. Because there is no random assignment, this study would not be eligible to receive the rating of Meets Standards Without Reservations. The applicants' description of matching, as well as propensity scores based on variables that tend to be highly correlated with project outcomes such as IBC and STEM credits (e41), as well as demographic characteristics, are thorough. Student records will be used to this end (e42). There is also a discussion regarding the tolerable difference for baseline equivalence, which follows WWC standards (e43). Therefore, baseline equivalence, which is a requirement for studies to meet WWC standards with reservations is feasible to establish.

   Weaknesses:

   There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: 15

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

   Strengths:

   The applicants plan to have a formative and a summative phase of evaluation. The formative phase includes design and piloting of the newly developed soft skill integration (e39). During the first three cycles, they will use field data and feedback to improve this aspect of the project. Methods employed during this phase will also include focus groups and surveys. Some of the outcomes of interest include readiness for computer science and STEM careers, and academic success (e39). There are many others, measured at different points in time, which are well defined and measurable and should allow the applicants to gauge the impact of their project (e40). Moderators and mediators are explicitly discussed and they are presented on Table G and in the narrative (e40, e43).

   Weaknesses:

   Fidelity of implementation should be measured via observation and ratings gathered by 2-3 objective observers, not just program records, teacher and student surveys, or usage data for online tools (e39-40). These latter factors do not, on their own, measure fidelity.

Reader's Score: 4

3. **(3) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data on relevant outcomes.**

   Strengths:

   There is no question as to the validity and reliability of the main outcome measures, which are IBCs, credits earned in computer science, and success in high school. These will be derived from academic records (e44). They are straightforward and directly related to the goals of the project.

Sub

    Weaknesses:

There are no weaknesses.

    Reader's Score: **5**

Priority Questions

CPP - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1: Computer Science**

   Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).

   Strengths:

   This project fully meets this criterion as computer science is a core component of their program. Because of the nature of the demographic profile of the student population in New Orleans, most of the students it will serve are racial minorities who tend to be economically disadvantaged.

   Weaknesses:

   There are no weaknesses.

Reader's Score: **5**

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/26/2020 09:27 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: YouthForce NOLA (S411C200059)
Reader #2:   **********

		Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Quality of Project Design			
1. Quality of Project Design		40	36
	Sub Total	40	36
Resources and Quality of Management Plan			
Resources and Quality of Management Plan			
1. Resources and Management		35	32
	Sub Total	35	32
Selection Criteria			
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		25	25
	Sub Total	25	25
Priority Questions			
CPP			
Competitive Preference Priority 1			
1. Computer Science		5	5
	Sub Total	5	5
	Total	105	98

Technical Review Form

Reader #2: ＊＊＊＊＊＊＊＊＊＊

Applicant: YouthForce NOLA (S411C200059)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 36

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.**

    Strengths:

    The application provided clear and complete program components, outputs, and outcomes in Table A (pg. e14-15) which include specific and measurable objectives relative to Soft Skills in Computer Science Pathways enrolling 500 students over the program period, having 80% of students who sit for a computer science industry-based IBC exam pass, and also demonstrate proficiency in at least three of the six Soft Skills Building Blocks. The application further notes annual training and information sessions to in the areas of student support and recruitment to increase student readiness for computer science and STEM jobs. The applicant will achieve these components through their strong relationships with every open enrollment high school in New Orleans. YouthForce teachers and administrators will also integrate student instruction in the Building Blocks into their curriculum and program materials to evaluate student success by measuring proficiency on pre and post evaluations using tools aligned to the Building Blocks.

    Weaknesses:

    The application did not present a clear set of objectives that could be evaluated to determine whether the project outcomes could be properly measured.

    Reader's Score: 8

2. **(2) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**

    Strengths:

    The application appropriately addresses the target population in New Orleans based on data from the Louisiana Department of Education (pg. e25-27), which notes that students face a range of barriers to their success, including shelter and food insecurity, high levels of community unemployment, exposure to trauma in high-poverty neighborhoods, lack of transportation, and lack of connections to local employers and networks, as well as historical challenges advancing in high-wage pathways relative to their white peers. YouthForce and its experienced evaluator, MDRC, seek to learn how industry-specific career and technical education (CTE), when paired with soft skills training, can help train high-needs students for high-paying jobs.

The application further clearly notes that YouthForce will connect students directly to employers for internships through the existing YouthForce Internship program and full-time positions as part of YouthForce's existing employer engagement programs with more than 250 employers. Through a fully remote learning model, the program is well-positioned to succeed even amidst the uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Weaknesses:

The application presented unclear information as to the outcomes that would be achieved through the project and the baseline data relative to employment. The narrative did not address what would be done if there were academic challenges.

Reader's Score: 8

3. **(3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project reflects up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice.**

Strengths:

The application comprehensively describes the project's design as being grounded in research literature on the positive effects of CTE on academic and life outcomes, along with evidence from effective practice that shows concrete learning gains and improved self-perception for students (pg. e27-28). Appropriate citations of research are provided to show the impact of CTE and employment on a range of youth outcomes, and evidence of students who take multiple CTE courses in the same pathway who were 20+ percentage points more likely to graduate from high school, from Kemple (2008) and Dougherty (2016), respectively.

Research in practice from a 2019 MIT randomized controlled trial showed that soft skills training made employees 20% more productive. Trained employees reported higher wages and greater desire to receive more education, which is consistent with the goals and objectives of the program.

Weaknesses:
None noted

Reader's Score: 10

4. **(4) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

Strengths:

The application describes YouthForce's proposal for Soft Skills in Computer Science Pathways as has the potential to increase the evidence base for skills-based approaches to CTE, effective methods for integrating computer science training in charter schools and portfolio school systems (pg. e28-29). This is based on results from the America's 2019 "What Works in Career and Technical Education" report that career readiness and skills training programs still need a larger evidence basis to show impact on student outcomes. The applicant notes effectively that this project will help build that evidence base. It is further detailed that computer science training in New Orleans's all-charter school system can help increase the field's understanding of provider-decentralized school partnerships, in that coordinating technical training in computer science and student support across a range of charter management organizations and charter schools presents unique challenges. It is further noted that through publicizing program progress, and then by authoring an impact study, the project team will increase the national understanding of combining soft skills with computer science training (pg. e29).

Sub

    Weaknesses:

None noted

    Reader's Score: **10**

Resources and Quality of Management Plan - Resources and Quality of Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: **32**

    Sub

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

    Strengths:

The application provides Tables E and F, which clearly describe the procedures for ensuring continuous improvement through a defined Project Management Plan and timeline (pg. e29-31). The management plan includes the planning phase during which YouthForce will hire staff, finalize partnerships and work with providers to finalize the soft skills offerings and a measurement tool. The attached timeline includes key program activities and 4 phases with reasonable dates for planning, developing and testing interventions, implementation and evaluation, and scaling to plan for adjustments and improvements. The application effectively describes the key milestones involved in accomplishing project tasks namely, student recruitment, the implementation of appropriate computer science courses, and developing soft skills training tools. All milestones have reasonable timeframes and appropriate responsible parties listed.

    Weaknesses:

The application did not present a clear detailing of time and resource allocation relative to project staff and their commitments to the program, there were no distinct partnership agreements noted.

    Reader's Score: **7**

2. **(2) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

    Strengths:

The application comprehensively details program costs outlined in the budget as reasonable in its service to serve 500 students with a new combination of strategies that can lead to improved student outcomes. With evaluation costs removed, this program costs $12,800 per student and will help participants more than double their annual salary from $31,720 to $73,660, on average showing a $41,940 increase in median salary for a $12,800 investment. These costs reflect several lessons learned from implementation of individual program components such as: YouthForce's flagship YouthForce Internship program, which has seen increased retention, and satisfaction numbers by improving case management for students and LAUNCH, the bridge year program that provides college courses and technical training for new high school graduates. These resources will result in initial evidence of effectiveness that supports others to implement similar interventions (pp. e33).

Sub

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

The application completely notes the qualifications, relevant training and experience needed to function in program leadership. YouthForce is led by Cate Swinburn, President, a career educator, convener of system-level collaboratives, cross-sector thinker, and strategic leader. She will serve as the Principal Investigator on this project. Likewise, the training and experience of the Executive VP, VP of Programs, lead evaluator and other project personnel. Additional support will be provided by YouthForce staff, including the Director of Learning Design, Soft Skills Program Manager, Social Worker and Community Engagement Manager/Recruiter. Resumes for all existing staff, and job description for the new position (Recruiter) are provided in Appendix B (pp. e34-35).

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

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

Strengths:

Regarding feedback anf continuous improvement, the application provides a clear description of their experience and capacity to address continuous improvement in the operation of the proposed project. YouthForce details their financial management capacity, which includes clean annual audits and effective management of federal multi-year, multi-provider grants (21st Century and Carl Perkins), to address grant management and program operation (pg. e35). Key personnel will implement continuous program improvements with an immediate feedback loop that helps address student needs and a programmatic feedback loop that uses summative data to make program changes for future cohorts. The application further provides comprehensive procedures for collecting formative data pp. e36-37) regarding the usability and implementation of the curricula, feasibility (whether staff feel that it is possible to teach the curriculum with a reasonable amount of effort with available tools), and fidelity (whether staff are able to deliver the training as intended).

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 10

5. **(5) The extent to which the results of the proposed project are to be disseminated in ways that will enable others to use the information or strategies.**

Strengths:

The application provides an appropriate description of its plans to disseminate program updates throughout the grant period, and share the broader impact of the program's work as the grant funding period ends. YouthForce currently has active
relationships with several national networks through which it will share its lessons annually, including Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeships supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Equitable Futures career pathways intermediary grantee network, and Pathways to Tomorrow (pg.

e37). YouthForce also regularly reaches the broader community through its email list of 5,000 subscribers, its social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, over 1,100 followers) to provide program specific updates to key audiences.

YouthForce has plans to hire a Director of Communications in early 2021. While not directly a part of this project, this hire will expand YouthForce's dissemination capacity. In addition, YouthForce will participate in at least two conferences per year to share the program results. YouthForce and MDRC also will share the broader impacts of the strategies via publication of an impact study (pg. e38).

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 25

Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice).**

   Strengths:

   The application adequately describes how the Evaluation Will Meet What Works Clearinghouse Standards through using a matched comparison group design. Students taking program courses ("Program students") will be matched to similar comparison students using the process described below. The evaluation will meet WWC standards with reservations, the highest level for a quasi-experimental study design (pp. e40).

   For each program student, the pool of comparison students will include other 11th/12th graders attending the same high school. This will make it possible to identify the effect of the program over and above the typical high school experience, including any other YouthForce or STEM/CTE programming provided. MDRC will further evaluate the impact of program courses on the subset of students in the study sample for whom outcomes data are available. Outcomes for the impact study will come from school records, so attrition is expected to be low based on WWC standards (pg. e42).

   Weaknesses:

   None noted

Reader's Score: 15

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

Strengths:

The application effectively notes the planned components of the program interventions (soft skills infused computer science training, student supports, and job placement) which are outlined in the attached logic model (pg. 25). The formative phase will be used to refine the logic model and inform the development of a framework for measuring fidelity. The application further provides indicators that measure adherence to activities in the logic model and appropriate benchmarks for acceptable implementation of each program component. Regarding program mediators, MDRC will use subgroup analyses to explore whether the effect of program courses on career readiness differs by two mediating characteristics: (1) dosage; and (2) soft skills, these subgroup analyses will be based on program students in these subgroups and their matched counterparts in the comparison group (pg. e44).

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

3. **(3) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data on relevant outcomes.**

Strengths:

The application notes appropriate short and medium term outcomes through an impact study which will focus on students' readiness for jobs in computer science and STEM fields, outcome data will be reliably measured because they will come from administrative records obtained reliably measured because they will come from administrative records obtained
from NOLA Public Schools (pg. e44). The application completely describes obtaining records for both program and matched comparison students to measure outcomes through fall 2024, the summative phase's follow-up period. The formative phase will be used to pilot two research-based self-report tools of soft skills with program students, to identify a tool that can be reliably used for program monitoring. An example is the Social and Emotional Competency Assessment.

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

CPP - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1: Computer Science**

Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).

Strengths:

The application demonstrates a rationale for projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science through serving high-needs students in New Orleans public high schools. By providing black students access to high-paying jobs in the growing STEM and computer science industry, YouthForce and its experienced evaluator, MDRC, seek to learn how industry-specific career and technical education (CTE), when paired with soft skills training, can help train high-needs students for high-paying jobs (pg. e14)

Weaknesses:

None noted

Reader's Score: 5

Status: Submitted
Last Updated: 10/26/2020 09:27 AM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: YouthForce NOLA (S411C200059)
Reader #3: **********

		Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions			
Selection Criteria			
Quality of Project Design			
1. Quality of Project Design		40	33
	Sub Total	40	33
Resources and Quality of Management Plan			
Resources and Quality of Management Plan			
1. Resources and Management		35	30
	Sub Total	35	30
Selection Criteria			
Quality of the Project Evaluation			
1. Project Evaluation		25	25
	Sub Total	25	25
Priority Questions			
CPP			
Competitive Preference Priority 1			
1. Computer Science		5	5
	Sub Total	5	5
	Total	105	93

Technical Review Form

Reader #3:   * * * * * * * * * *

Applicant: YouthForce NOLA (S411C200059)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the design of the proposed project based on the following factors:

Reader's Score: 33

> **Sub**

> **1. (1) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified and measurable.**
>
> **Strengths:**
>
> The applicant lists objectives and outcomes for the proposed project (e15).
>
> **Weaknesses:**
>
> The applicant presents unclear goals and baseline data for the proposed project. For example, the proposed objectives do not address the significance for improvement of academic achievement for the high-needs students, especially potentially students with disabilities (e15).
>
> **Reader's Score:**   6

> **2. (2) The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to, and will successfully address, the needs of the target population or other identified needs.**
>
> **Strengths:**
>
> The applicant addresses the geographical economic hardships by integrating a remote learning model and career pathways to support underserved students to academically complete education that leads to a STEM-driven profession (e20; e25-e27).
>
> **Weaknesses:**
>
> The applicant does not adequately specify the characteristics of the charter high schools and how it supports the students' academic achievement gaps to make a clear determination of high need. The applicant presents insufficient information on how the proposed project includes new strategies for a rural context for high-needs students, especially for students with disabilities and unmet needs (e15-e20).
>
> **Reader's Score:**   7

> **3. (3) The extent to which the design of the proposed project reflects up-to-date knowledge from research and effective practice.**

Strengths:

The applicant presents strong grounded research demonstrating positive effects of career technical education on academic and life outcomes. The applicant provides evidence of up-to-date knowledge of how career technical education supports computer science training and soft skills education. For example, the applicant introduces Massachusetts Institute of Technology randomized controlled trial and the Fordham Institute study showing the productivity impact of soft skills training that is proposed for this project (e27-e28).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

4. **(4) The potential contribution of the proposed project to increased knowledge or understanding of educational problems, issues, or effective strategies.**

Strengths:

The application proposal clearly demonstrates evidence-based methods for integrating computer science training in charter schools and portfolio school systems. The applicant cites recent what works in career and technical education study as an opportunity to contribute students outcomes evidence to the charter school system and the education field (e28-e29).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 10

Resources and Quality of Management Plan - Resources and Quality of Management Plan

1. **The Secretary considers the adequacy of resources and the quality of the management plan for the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 30

Sub

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

Strengths:

The applicant presents some management perspectives that include listing of timeline and milestones in Table E. The applicant provides information on proposed activities that support the objectives and budget of the proposed project (e29-e30).

Weaknesses:

The applicant provides an unclear description of the key personnel coordinated responsibilities across services in working with designated provider directors for alignment of each phase of the proposed project (e29-e30)

   Reader's Score: 5

2. **(2) The extent to which the costs are reasonable in relation to the objectives, design, and potential significance of the proposed project.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant proposes budget costs that are reasonable based on clear itemization description of the budget narrative. The applicant proposed target objectives that represent sufficient cost per student for the grant. For example, the applicant shares a competitive cost analysis of program cost of $12,800 per students based on participants' needs (e32).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 5

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

   Strengths:

   The applicant presents a solid description of key personnel qualifications along with training and experience that mirrors the proposed project scope of work. For example, the president brings experience across system-level collaborations, cross-sector work, and strategic leadership for high needs populations. The director displays expertise in financial management and management of federal multi-year grants (e33-34).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 5

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

   Strengths:

   The applicant provides clearly demonstrated experience and capacity to ensure feedback and continuous improvement in the operations of the proposed project. The applicant presents sufficient improvement and feedback loop of quarterly meetings to examine progress towards goals, spending against budget goals, and plans for improvement (e35-e36).

   Weaknesses:

   No weaknesses noted.

   Reader's Score: 10

5. **(5) The extent to which the results of the proposed project are to be disseminated in ways that will enable others to use the information or strategies.**

   Strengths:

   The applicant presents clear dissemination across programs. For example, the applicant shares the broader impact of the work through national networks of partnership to advance youth apprenticeship and equitable career pathways such as the Casey and Gates Foundations (e37).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. **The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation to be conducted of the proposed project based on the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 25

    Sub

1. **(1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the project's effectiveness that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards with or without reservations as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbook (as defined in this notice).**

    Strengths:

The applicant demonstrates strong methods of evaluation that meets what works clearinghouse standards with reservations for a quasi-experimental design. The applicant shares information on components of fidelity thresholds to inform the evaluation framework for measuring fidelity of the proposed project. For example, the applicant presents fidelity measures with program records, surveys, and usage online data (e43-e44).

    Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

    Reader's Score: 15

2. **(2) The extent to which the evaluation plan clearly articulates the key project components, mediators, and outcomes, as well as a measurable threshold for acceptable implementation.**

    Strengths:

The applicant presents a clear plan for the proposed evaluation design. The application proposal demonstrates clearly articulated plans to work closely with an experienced evaluator. The applicant shares table G on e40 highlighting the evaluation of how the impact of industry-specific career and technical education and training effects soft skills skills with target student population. For example, the applicant presents evaluative questions, outcomes and the data sources for both formative and summative evaluation (e20; e40-e41).

    Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

    Reader's Score: 5

3. **(3) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide valid and reliable performance data on relevant outcomes.**

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant presents reliable methods of evaluation for relevant outcomes. The applicant solicits an independent evaluator to collect formative data in the formative phase on usability, feasibility, and fidelity of the proposed evaluation design (e37).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

CPP - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: Computer Science

Projects designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science (as defined in this notice). These projects must address the following priority area: Expanding access to and participation in rigorous computer science coursework for traditionally underrepresented students such as racial or ethnic minorities, women, students in communities served by rural local educational agencies (as defined in this notice), children or students with disabilities (as defined in this notice), or low-income individuals (as defined under section 312(g) of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended).

Strengths:

The applicant presents clear information on project designed to improve student achievement or other educational outcomes in computer science projects. The application proposal demonstrates mindset and rigorous coursework with full credit computer science courses as part of regular school day schedule. The applicant expands access and participation of earning an industry-based credential in computer science (e21-e22).

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

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