

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

Status: Submitted

Last Updated: 11/24/2025 03:55 PM

Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: United Way of West Central Mississippi (S411B250076)

Reader #1: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	15
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	35	33
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	20	20
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	68
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Returning Educ to States	10	0
Sub Total	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Expanding Educ Choice	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Total	115	73

Technical Review Form

Panel #7 - Midphase - 9: 84.411B

Reader #1: *****

Applicant: United Way of West Central Mississippi (S411B250076)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

1. The extent to which the proposed project introduces an innovative approach, such as a modification of an evidence-based project component to serve different populations, an extension of an existing evidence-based project component, a unique composition of various project components to explore combined effects, or development of an emerging project component that needs further testing.

Strengths:

The applicant provided a well-developed and exhaustive description of the proposed innovative project approach, the selected evidence-based model, and identified the populations to be served. The description expertly documented the critical need for the approach, SOAR United (Serving Others by Accelerating Reading) (p. e10, pp. e14-e17). The proposed project will serve 3,600 students in rural Mississippi who are reading below grade-level based on Star Reading test results (p. e10, p. e13).

To address the reading deficits, the five-year mid-phase project will enhance, scale, and evaluate SOAR United—an evidence-based high-impact literacy tutoring program (p. e10, pp. e13-e16). The project has three overall goals: 1) scale SOAR United program to include five regional United Way hubs in 21 rural counties; 2) train and support 885 reading tutors to implement high-impact evidence-based reading instruction; and 3) collect data to create a national model for effective literacy tutoring in rural communities (p. e13).

Well-defined innovation strategies merge community-based out-of-school learning, high-impact tutoring, and evidence-based instruction. The data-driven infrastructure will create a replicable statewide innovation that will uniquely address the needs of struggling readers. Project strategies will build upon established components and will be incorporated within after-school centers that are managed by community-based partners. Project activities will improve the literacy and reading skills of high-needs students residing in rural Mississippi (p. e10, pp. e14-e16).

The evidence-based model is a signature program specifically developed for the Mississippi United Way Association. The literacy-specific initiative is based on the science of teaching reading, founded on research from expert ecosystem professionals. The model implements evidence-based practices that will provide high quality reading instruction for students in grades K-5. The well-defined innovation strategies will merge community-based out-of-school learning, high-impact tutoring, evidence-based reading instruction, and proven infrastructure systems with the expected outcome to improve student literacy skills (p. e10).

Significant components of the proposed model include partnerships with state agencies, nonprofit organizations, researchers, and community-based afterschool programs. These intentional and structured collaborations will

Sub

support successful project outcomes. A rigorous evaluation will assist in determining project feasibility to create a replicable statewide innovation to meet the unmet needs of rural high-needs students (p. e10, pp. e16-e17).

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

- 1. The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to effectively scale the proposed project for recipients, community members and partners. In determining the applicant's strategy to effectively scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 33

Sub

- 1. (1) The extent to which there is unmet demand for broader implementation of the project that is aligned with the proposed level of scale.**

Strengths:

The proposed project directly addresses a critical unmet need by providing community-based out of school learning, high-impact tutoring, and evidence-based reading instruction to address the needs of reading deficits of rural students in grades K-5 (p. e10). The proposed project addresses significant factors that affect the access to intensive afterschool literacy intervention in rural school districts. Implementation strategies are aligned with the proposed scale level-expansion to 21 rural Mississippi counties (p. e10, pp. e20-e22).

The well-developed strategies address factors that traditionally impede access to intensive literacy intervention due to isolated geographic location and lack of reliable public transportation for parents of high-needs students (p. e21). Additional obstacles to high quality literacy services in rural areas include socioeconomic challenges. For example, limited financial resources and competing family responsibilities all limit access to quality tutorial services for rural families. Providing high quality tutorial services in the community will support the ability of families to participate in intensive literacy services.

The proposed project will also address barriers to reaching scale by providing an intensive, individualized educational opportunity with trained tutors who will implement an evidence-based literacy program. Delivery in real-time, community-based afterschool settings in the target rural communities will facilitate accessibility to project services and facilitate successful project outcomes.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 10

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

Sub

Strengths:

The application outlined an effective and achievable management plan that included milestones and partner responsibilities for tasks that will facilitate achievement of goals and objectives (pp. e22-e23). The plan also identified the project partners who will be responsible for each milestone. For example, the applicant will be responsible for tasks that include responsibility for the needs assessment, action plan and recruitment of childcare and afterschool facilities (p. e22). The research partner will be responsible for tasks that include preparation, testing, and refinement of data tools and project impact measurement (pp. e22-e23).

Highly qualified staff will provide leadership for the proposed project. The key personnel are exceptionally well-suited to implementing the proposed project. A detailed summary described the successful performance history and capacity of the applicant and partners to implement the proposed project. The description was supported by curricula vitae from each key staff member (pp. e73-e92). For example, supporting qualifications of project staff include expertise in education, literacy, program evaluation, and program and grant administration. These skills will support effective project management.

Weaknesses:

Timelines to implement and monitor project progress were unclear and stated in broad terms. For example, the milestone to measure implementation and cost was stated in annual increments (pp. e23). Timelines were also identified for four years rather than five years of the official project period (pp. e22-e23). This may affect the ability to accurately and regularly monitor project strategies to ensure successful outcomes.

Reader's Score: 8

3. (3) The relevance and demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project to the implementation and success of the project.

Strengths:

The dedication and commitment of each partner to successful project implementation was well-documented through official letters of support (pp. e55-e71). Key letters of support were included from the Mississippi Departments of Education and Human Services and superintendents of the target school districts. Essential letters of support from United Way hubs throughout Mississippi also document commitment to the success of the proposed project (pp. e55-e71).

Each partner is committed to integrating the proposed project strategies into established organization processes following completion of the five-year funding period. This continued collaboration will facilitate the replication and scaling of the project to address the needs of high-needs rural students with reading deficits (pp. e22-e27).

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

4. (4) The quality of the plan to deliver project services more efficiently at scale and maintain effectiveness.

Sub

Strengths:

The applicant described a high-quality, well-defined plan to efficiently implement project strategies while maintaining effectiveness. The comprehensive plan involves specific strategies for partners that leverage partner expertise to enhance project service delivery at scale and maintain project success (pp. e27-e28).

A key scaling strategy includes leveraging a relationship with the research partner to disseminate findings by submitting project results to peer reviewed publications and journals. The partner also regularly attends related local, regional, and national practitioner conferences to share information. Partner organizations regularly disseminate findings from research projects through targeted emails to fellow researchers, practitioners, and policymakers (pp. e27-e28). These strategies will facilitate the ability of the application to deliver quality services at-scale while maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of project services.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

5. (5) **The quality of the mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information and resources on its project to support further development, adaptation, or replication by other entities to implement project components in additional settings or with other populations.**

Strengths:

The application included a detailed description of the high-quality techniques that will be used to disseminate information and resources to support project development. The strategies also support a thorough and feasible approach to support replication of project outcomes. Key dissemination mechanisms include development of an integrated communication toolkit. The kit will enhance the communication between parents and project partners by sharing presentations, policy briefs, and social media posts (p. e27).

A project website and establishment of a United Way resource hub will also support sharing information. The website will provide unrestricted access to project information and includes program design elements, parent engagement strategies, staff/tutor training resources, and success stories (pp. e27-e28). The strategies will facilitate sharing implementation strategies and outcomes to expand project awareness and encourage replication of SOAR United (p. e27).

Project partners will also facilitate dissemination through specifically assigned roles. For example, the applicant will oversee the dissemination strategy and ensure brand consistency. Designated project partners will prepare evaluation briefs and research reports, provide data, project transparency, and promote resources through established networks. All partners will leverage state and regional networks to share resources via presentations and newsletters (pp. e17-e18). These strategies will facilitate dissemination of project information to support adaptation and replication.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 20

Sub

1. (1) The quality of the logic model or other conceptual framework underlying the proposed project, including how inputs are related to outcomes.

Strengths:

The applicant provided a detailed, comprehensive logic model that identified the conceptual framework and relationship between inputs and outcomes. The high-impact tutoring model identified inputs and resources, activities, outputs, and short-term and long-term outcomes (pp. e29-e30). The well-defined model also identified intensive intervention strategies to facilitate project outcomes. For example, the Pearl Tutoring Platform (input) will implement and scale the high-impact tutoring program. This will facilitate training 855 tutors (output) and reduce literacy gaps for rural students (long-term outcome) (p. e29).

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 15

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and ambitious yet achievable within the project period, and aligned with the purposes of the grant program.

Strengths:

The applicant identified seven project goals with clearly defined specific, measurable, and achievable objectives aligned with the purpose of the project. The goals and objectives were also related to the project's outcomes and evaluation plan milestones, timelines, and measures. The goals were supported by measurable objectives, defined measures, and short-term and long-term outcomes. The detailed information will facilitate successful project outcomes (p. e10, pp. e29-e32). For example, measurable objectives support Goal1: students participate in tutoring sessions. Objective 1.2 states that 90% of tutoring sessions are 45-minutes long (p. e31). Short-term and long-term outcomes are also aligned with the purpose of the project to improve the literacy and reading skills of high-needs, rural students. For example, "improved student reading and literacy achievement" is identified as the short-term outcome for Goal 1 (p. e31).

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation or other evidence-building of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation or other evidence-building, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the effectiveness of the project on relevant outcomes that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations, as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbooks.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing and potential implementation in other settings.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

3. (3) The quality of the evaluation plan for measuring fidelity of implementation, including thresholds for acceptable implementation, to inform how implementation is associated with outcomes.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

4. (4) The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including valid and reliable information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project.

Strengths:

Sub

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: Returning Education to the States (up to 10 points).

Project or proposals that will be carried out by one or more of the following entities:

(a) State educational agencies (as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7801(49))

(b) An Indian Tribe (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304(e)), Tribal organization (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304(l)), or Tribal educational agency (as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7452(b)(3))

(c) Consortia of the entities identified under this priority.

Strengths:

Not Addressed

Weaknesses:

Not Addressed

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: Expanding Education Choice (High-Impact Tutoring) (up to 5 points).

Projects or proposals that will expand access to education services that accelerate learning such as high-impact tutoring.

Note: Applicants are encouraged to review the evidence related to education services that accelerate learning, including high-impact tutoring, and to cite the highest-level of evidence supporting their response to the competitive preference priority in their application.

Strengths:

A comprehensive summary identified the specific strategies that will expand access to education services and accelerate learning. The proposed project supports the LBPA, the premier source of focused in-depth literacy instruction for the State of Mississippi. The enhanced learning supports are facilitated by community stakeholders who collaborate with local education agencies to ensure students have the needed resources to improve reading proficiency. Project strategies include high-impact tutoring in after-school centers led by community-based partners (p. e20). This collaboration will expand access to literacy and reading skills for the targeted high-needs students.

Weaknesses:

None

Reader's Score: 5

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: United Way of West Central Mississippi (S411B250076)

Reader #2: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	15
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	35	33
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	20	19
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	0
Sub Total	100	67
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Returning Educ to States	10	0
Sub Total	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Expanding Educ Choice	5	5
Sub Total	5	5
Total	115	72

Technical Review Form

Panel #7 - Midphase - 9: 84.411B

Reader #2: *****

Applicant: United Way of West Central Mississippi (S411B250076)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 15

Sub

1. The extent to which the proposed project introduces an innovative approach, such as a modification of an evidence-based project component to serve different populations, an extension of an existing evidence-based project component, a unique composition of various project components to explore combined effects, or development of an emerging project component that needs further testing.

Strengths:

The applicant proposed a good plan to expand their existing high-impact tutoring program, SOAR United, by combining it with a structured community-based after-school program, SPARK, which has shown positive effects on student metrics. One innovative aspect of the combined program is its plan to compensate for the teacher shortage and high number of uncertified teaching personnel currently in the rural schools (pp. e16-17). Another innovation is the use of an evidence-based curriculum, Voyager Passport, which provides personalized literacy instruction for struggling readers matched to the student's interest, grade, and Lexile® reading level at supportive after-school centers. This curriculum integrates the five components essential to reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension) into the after-school program (p. e15; p. e19).

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 15

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

1. The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to effectively scale the proposed project for recipients, community members and partners. In determining the applicant's strategy to effectively scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 33

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which there is unmet demand for broader implementation of the project that is aligned with the proposed level of scale.

Strengths:

The applicant adequately described the scaling of a high-impact tutoring program, SOAR United. The plan is to establish five regional hubs in 21 counties. The program plans to train 885 tutors who will serve as reading instructors, thus increasing the number of students in the program (pp. e19-e20). A map is included to show the hub locations throughout the state (p. e49). The applicant also presents a summary of reading readiness scores for the targeted areas. It shows that a majority of students did not score above the readiness baseline when they entered kindergarten, and subsequently, only a small percentage of the now 3rd grade students are reading proficiently, thus demonstrating an unmet demand (p. e50).

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 10

2. (2) The feasibility of the management plan to achieve project objectives and goals on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrated appropriate milestones, tasks, and a timeline for four program years. Each partner has well-described duties relating to the proposed program. The management plan is supported by the logic model and the details given in the measurable objectives (pp. e22-e32; pp. e52-53). The lists of tasks in the management plan, for example, support the program with a plan to recruit schools and tutors, train tutors, and pilot the program. They all align to the inputs and activities in the logic model (p. e29).

Weaknesses:

The management plan does not include all five funding years (pp. 22-23). The objectives lack specific targets for student performance on reading assessments (pp. e30-e 31).

Reader's Score: 8

3. (3) The relevance and demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project to the implementation and success of the project.

Strengths:

The applicant described several partner entities in the timeline of program milestones. The management plan contains tasks that are clear and feasible. Each partner's support is given in detail, and several key staff are noted. A system of data collection and analysis will be used to monitor students as well as scaling the program (pp. e22-23). Details on the data elements are stated (pp. e52-e53). Letters from partners, in Appendix E, state strong support for the proposed program.

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 5

Sub

4. (4) The quality of the plan to deliver project services more efficiently at scale and maintain effectiveness.

Strengths:

The partners each have a clear plan to deliver project services. Since a main component of the program is using qualified tutors, or academic guides, there will be a thrust to recruit students, teachers or retirees, and daycare staff into formal training. The training program is robust and structured to accommodate community volunteers (pp. e21-e22). As stated in Goal 7, two staff members from each partner will attend quarterly progress monitoring meetings (p. e32).

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 5

5. (5) The quality of the mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information and resources on its project to support further development, adaptation, or replication by other entities to implement project components in additional settings or with other populations.

Strengths:

The applicant presented sound methods for broad dissemination of program outcomes to inform the literacy community of the project's successes. A project toolkit will contain communication tools, graphics and presentations, and policy briefs. A project website will become a resource hub for items such as engagement strategies and training resources. Partners will author articles for journal publications. Findings also will be disseminated at research conferences in the field of literacy, such as the conference of the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness. Webinars for practitioners also will be part of the dissemination plan (pp. e27-e28).

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 5

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 19

Sub

1. (1) The quality of the logic model or other conceptual framework underlying the proposed project, including how inputs are related to outcomes.

Strengths:

The application presented a complete overview of the intervention program's conceptual framework as a logic model. Partner organizations are among the resources listed with their main roles. The activity of each partner is well detailed in the logic model and supports the educational components and activities. For example, partners provide resources to enable student assessment, tutor training, data collection, and student placement in 1-1 or small group tutoring. The outputs and outcomes are directly related to educational activities (p. e29).

Sub

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 15

- (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and ambitious yet achievable within the project period, and aligned with the purposes of the grant program.**

Strengths:

The applicant presents a series of clearly specified, measurable, and ambitious short-term and long-term goals for important program aspects, such as participation in training and an expected growth in student achievement (pp. e30-e31). Appropriate metrics are stated with most objectives.

Weaknesses:

Measurable changes in student growth are not given in sufficient detail. The long-term outcomes are stated in a general way without a specific baseline or target (pp. e31-e32).

Reader's Score: 4

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

- The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation or other evidence-building of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation or other evidence-building, the Secretary considers the following factors:**

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

- (1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the effectiveness of the project on relevant outcomes that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations, as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbooks.**

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

- (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing and potential implementation in other settings.**

Strengths:

Sub

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

3. (3) The quality of the evaluation plan for measuring fidelity of implementation, including thresholds for acceptable implementation, to inform how implementation is associated with outcomes.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

4. (4) The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including valid and reliable information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project.

Strengths:

Weaknesses:

Reader's Score:

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

1. Competitive Preference Priority 1: Returning Education to the States (up to 10 points).

Project or proposals that will be carried out by one or more of the following entities:

(a) State educational agencies (as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7801(49))

(b) An Indian Tribe (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304(e)), Tribal organization (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304(l)), or Tribal educational agency (as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7452(b)(3))

(c) Consortia of the entities identified under this priority.

Strengths:

N/A

Weaknesses:

N/A

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: Expanding Education Choice (High-Impact Tutoring) (up to 5 points).

Projects or proposals that will expand access to education services that accelerate learning such as high-impact tutoring.

Note: Applicants are encouraged to review the evidence related to education services that accelerate learning, including high-impact tutoring, and to cite the highest-level of evidence supporting their response to the competitive preference priority in their application.

Strengths:

The applicant demonstrated need for the expanded educational program through both student test scores and student demographics (p. e21). The intent to expand the instruction into more rural areas would increase access to high-quality tutoring; as well as improve literacy education in rural areas (p. e32).

Weaknesses:

No weakness.

Reader's Score: 5

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Technical Review Coversheet

Applicant: United Way of West Central Mississippi (S411B250076)

Reader #3: *****

	Points Possible	Points Scored
Questions		
Selection Criteria		
Significance		
1. Significance	15	0
Strategy to Scale		
1. Strategy to Scale	35	0
Quality of Project Design		
1. Project Design	20	0
Quality of the Project Evaluation		
1. Project Evaluation	30	26
Sub Total	100	26
Priority Questions		
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 1		
1. Returning Educ to States	10	0
Sub Total	10	0
Competitive Preference Priority		
Competitive Preference Priority 2		
1. Expanding Educ Choice	5	0
Sub Total	5	0
Total	115	26

Technical Review Form

Panel #7 - Midphase - 9: 84.411B

Reader #3: *****

Applicant: United Way of West Central Mississippi (S411B250076)

Questions

Selection Criteria - Significance

1. The Secretary considers the significance of the proposed project. In determining the significance of the proposed project, the Secretary considers:

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. The extent to which the proposed project introduces an innovative approach, such as a modification of an evidence-based project component to serve different populations, an extension of an existing evidence-based project component, a unique composition of various project components to explore combined effects, or development of an emerging project component that needs further testing.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Strategy to Scale

1. The Secretary considers the applicant's strategy to effectively scale the proposed project for recipients, community members and partners. In determining the applicant's strategy to effectively scale the proposed project, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which there is unmet demand for broader implementation of the project that is aligned with the proposed level of scale.

Strengths:

n/a

Sub

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

2. (2) The feasibility of the management plan to achieve project objectives and goals on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, timelines, and milestones for accomplishing project tasks.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

3. (3) The relevance and demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project to the implementation and success of the project.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

4. (4) The quality of the plan to deliver project services more efficiently at scale and maintain effectiveness.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

5. (5) The quality of the mechanisms the applicant will use to broadly disseminate information and resources on its project to support further development, adaptation, or replication by other entities to implement project components in additional settings or with other populations.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Sub

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of Project Design

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

Reader's Score: 0

Sub

1. (1) The quality of the logic model or other conceptual framework underlying the proposed project, including how inputs are related to outcomes.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

2. (2) The extent to which the goals, objectives, and outcomes to be achieved by the proposed project are clearly specified, measurable, and ambitious yet achievable within the project period, and aligned with the purposes of the grant program.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

Selection Criteria - Quality of the Project Evaluation

1. The Secretary considers the quality of the evaluation or other evidence-building of the proposed project. In determining the quality of the evaluation or other evidence-building, the Secretary considers the following factors:

Reader's Score: 26

Sub

1. (1) The extent to which the methods of evaluation will, if well implemented, produce evidence about the effectiveness of the project on relevant outcomes that would meet the What Works Clearinghouse standards without reservations, as described in the What Works Clearinghouse Handbooks.

Sub

Strengths:

The proposed effort seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of a high-impact tutoring program, SOAR United Tutoring, in improving the literacy and reading skills of high-need, rural students. The applicant developed SOAR United based on multiple What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) Practice Guides (e18) and leveraging a scripted curriculum, Voyager Sopris Learning's Voyager Passport, with Tier 1 strong evidence under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (e19).

The evaluation will utilize a blocked, cluster randomized control trial (RCT) that, if well implemented, is designed to produce evidence about the effectiveness of the project on relevant outcomes that would meet the WWC standards without reservations (e33-35). Research questions for the impact study include appropriate confirmatory, exploratory, and correlational question types (e33). Through five United Way hubs, in a thoughtful, three-phased strategy (e34), the project will ultimately involve 3,600 kindergarten through fifth grade students scoring below grade in reading in 130 community-based afterschool and childcare centers in 21 rural Mississippi counties (e10). Randomization will block on partner type to increase precision (e34).

Condition membership and attrition will be addressed in accordance with best practices and WWC standards. The power analysis conducted indicates sufficient power to detect the anticipated effect size (e36-38). RAND Research Services will serve as the independent evaluator and is well-qualified, having deep experience successfully implementing large-scale randomized control trails (RCTs) for various funders, including the U.S. Department of Education's Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, that have met WWC Standards Without Reservations (e26-e27).

Weaknesses:

Recruitment is not explicitly addressed.

Reader's Score: 13

2. (2) The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing and potential implementation in other settings.

Strengths:

The SOAR Conceptual Framework (Figure 1; e29) mirrors the replication and scaling of the SPARK intervention (Jones and Christian, 2021). Tutoring sessions attendance, group size, and platform use will be aggregated by the independent evaluator and correlated with the outcomes of interest to inform analyses of effective strategies and inform replication or testing and potential implementation in other settings (e36).

Weaknesses:

The SOAR Conceptual Framework (Figure 1; e29) lacks inclusion of mediators or moderators to aid in providing guidance about conditions and contextual factors important for guiding effective strategies suitable for replication or testing and potential implementation in other settings.

Reader's Score: 3

3. (3) The quality of the evaluation plan for measuring fidelity of implementation, including thresholds for acceptable implementation, to inform how implementation is associated with outcomes.

Strengths:

Specific, measurable, multi-faceted objectives are included under each goal (Table 2; e30-e32) and include thresholds for acceptable implementation. For example, under Goal 1.2: 90% of tutoring sessions are 45 minutes long; 1.3: 90% of centers hold four tutoring sessions per week; 1.4: 90% of centers hold tutoring sessions for 40

Sub

weeks per year; 1.5: 80% of tutoring sessions include no more than four students.

The evaluation includes a comprehensive implementation study. The study includes (1) examining the extent to which key SOAR United components are implemented with fidelity (RQ7), (2) the relationship of fidelity of implementation of SOAR United to students' overall reading scores and student engagement in reading (RQ8), (3) the extent to which SOAR United produces the desired positive outcomes in contrast to the control condition (RQ9), and (4) identifying facilitators and challenges to fidelity of implementation, scale, and replication (RQ10) (e33; e38). There is a wide-ranging list of implementation study elements contained in Appendix D (352-353). The SOAR Conceptual Framework's key components inform the evaluation plan's fidelity foci (e40-e41). Regarding association with outcomes (e41), the plan notes: "We will perform correlations of fidelity indicators with student outcomes, descriptively examine how they vary across program context, and perform simple hypothesis tests to compare across subgroups (e39). We will analyze the surveys, interviews and focus groups to qualitatively describe perceptions of the relationship between fidelity and outcomes."

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

- 4. (4) **The extent to which the design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project will result in information to guide possible replication of project activities or strategies, including valid and reliable information about the effectiveness of the approach or strategies employed by the project.**

Strengths:

Consistent with WWC standards, sufficient validity and reliability information for data sources relevant for research questions 1-5 is provided (Table 4; e36) and are third party measures not overly aligned to the intervention (e42). Costs of inputs into both SOAR United and control groups will be identified to inform policymakers and guide possible replication of project activities or strategies (e39-e40). The intervention's design includes elements intentionally crafted with replication and scaling in mind (e41-e42). These include coordinating existing community resources, training designed to improve for effectiveness and retention likelihood, leveraging a partnership with Pearl to reduce the burden of data collection and analysis, and attention to building trust and fostering parent engagement as a conditions associated with multiple positive outcomes

Weaknesses:

No weaknesses noted.

Reader's Score: 5

Priority Questions

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 1

- 1. **Competitive Preference Priority 1: Returning Education to the States (up to 10 points).**

Project or proposals that will be carried out by one or more of the following entities:

(a) State educational agencies (as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7801(49))

(b) An Indian Tribe (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304(e)), Tribal organization (as defined in 25 U.S.C. 5304(l)), or Tribal educational agency (as defined in 20 U.S.C. 7452(b)(3))

(c) Consortia of the entities identified under this priority.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

Competitive Preference Priority - Competitive Preference Priority 2

1. Competitive Preference Priority 2: Expanding Education Choice (High-Impact Tutoring) (up to 5 points).

Projects or proposals that will expand access to education services that accelerate learning such as high-impact tutoring.

Note: Applicants are encouraged to review the evidence related to education services that accelerate learning, including high-impact tutoring, and to cite the highest-level of evidence supporting their response to the competitive preference priority in their application.

Strengths:

n/a

Weaknesses:

n/a

Reader's Score: 0

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