

**A Proposal to the XYZ Endowment**

**from the National Urban League**

**for Project Ready**

**Executive Summary**

The National Urban League (NUL), a leading civil rights and direct service nonprofit, has implemented for many years effective education and college preparatory programs to ensure that low-income urban youth reap the full benefits of education through robust interventions designed to build the skills, habits, and attitudes needed for college and life success. Building on this past experience in the field of education, the NUL has designed, developed, and rolled out Project Ready, an evidenced-based, replicable model program that provides enhanced academic and social support to high school students in preparation for post-secondary success.

The NUL respectfully requests from the XYZ Endowment a three-year grant of $750,000 to expand Project Ready in Indianapolis and to develop and implement Project Ready in Fort Wayne, Indiana. This project would have a clear focus on out of school time and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning with a particular emphasis on summer learning. Two Indiana affiliates would serve a total of 70 youth from grades 6 to 12 through a 12-month program period. In Indianapolis, we would expand the current Project Ready program to serve additional students and a robust summer component, while in Fort Wayne we would implement a new Project Ready STEM program for middle and high school students that would include an emphasis on combating summer learning loss.

In addition, grant funding would support travel costs of 20 Project Ready youth and their chaperones to attend NUL”s annual Youth Summit where young people are immersed in a residential college setting and learn to navigate the college life experience, and chaperones are provided an opportunity for professional development.

**Project Ready Overiew**

Components of Project Ready are designed to develop individual student’s knowledge and attitudes towards, and capacity for, success after high school. Students are expected to make academic progress, benefit from cultural enrichment opportunities and develop important skills, attitudes and aptitudes. Over a two-year implementation period, starting in July 2006, the NUL piloted a set of services based on the Pathways to College Network’s Conceptual Framework for Action, refined a college readiness model, and proposed best practices in three affiliate sites. Initially, Project Ready only targeted freshmen and sophomores (9th and 10th graders), and worked with students and their families to:

* Increase college awareness;
* Improve life skills;
* Raise confidence and self awareness around decision making;
* Gain greater understanding and appreciation for one’s own cultural identity and cultural diversity; and
* Understand the correlation between higher education and income.

Project Ready currently enrolls middle and high school students in 21 urban communities across the country. Participants receive academic, social and cultural supports and opportunities designed to more fully develop “college knowledge”, or the information and perspective necessary for success beyond academic preparation. In the next evolution of Project Ready, Project Ready 2.0, the curriculum and program model will create additional supports and opportunities that run throughout middle and high school.

NUL is currently piloting both a Middle School Transitions Project as a part of Project Ready in order to provide critical activities and supports for 8th grade students and a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) for middle and high school aged youth. We recognize the need to begin post secondary success strategies, supports and outreach earlier in adolescence in order to smooth the transition from middle school to high school and maximize the impact of the program.

The Project Ready curriculum explicitly integrates academic preparation in areas such as STEM, Entrepreneurship and Service Learning with youth development and out of school time learning principles and activities to better prepare students for post secondary success.

NUL currently boasts more than 50 affiliates already operating college access, information and preparation programs. Our expectation is to replicate Project Ready standards in all related Urban League affiliate to improve their capacity to deliver high-quality and high-impact program services. The purpose of the Project Ready User’s Guide is to provide organizations adopting the Project Ready Curriculum with a “one-stop-shop” of resources and tips to developing, implementing, running and sustaining a successful Project Ready Program. In other words, this guide is designed to help an organization set up, or perhaps further enhance, the program scaffolding, supports and capacities needed to effectively implement and grow the Project Ready program.

The National Urban League recognizes that young people grow and develop in the context of their families and communities, and has also developed a strong parent education and engagement component to Project Ready in order to better support children and youth along the developmental spectrum.

**Project Ready Curriculum Components**

NUL’s *Project Ready* *Curriculum* is a unique and comprehensive approach for building the myriad academic, personal and social assets of African American youth. As with many college preparation programs, greater emphasis is placed on academic skill building for college, often at the expense of other equally important concerns such as students’ personal and social maturity for college. This results in a crucial skills gap for African American students, many of whom are the first in their family to attend college or who do not come from communities where higher education is a norm. In order to achieve this successful integration of skill-building, the *Project Ready Curriculum* is comprised of three key components: 1) Academic Development; 2) Social Development; and, 3) Cultural and Global Awareness. Each component is guided by an Individual College Development Plan (ICDP), a set of explicit, personalized student outcomes for achievement. A student’s progress through the *Project Ready* curriculum is closely monitored by an advisor through the ICDP. This approach provides each student with a clear, incremental and understandable plan of action and mentoring to help assure they succeed.

Individual College Development Plan (ICDP)

Research indicates that the fundamental component of successful out of school time programs is a useful method to pre-assess student’s skills, interests and commitment as they enter a program, reinforced by a system for monitoring students’ academic and social development as they progress[[1]](#footnote-2). Coupled with this approach is a need for a well-informed advisor to ensure that a student is on track to graduate from high school and gain admission to a college of his or her choice[[2]](#footnote-3). The nexus between an efficient intake procedure and an advising system in a post-secondary success program is of critical importance*.* The Individual College Development Plan (ICDP) is a comprehensive tool used by every Project Ready student during admissions and throughout the entire program to monitor progress against a set of specific, attainable, and individualized goals.

The ICDP serves as a “personal compass” directing a student’s academic work and development that provides benchmarks for them to chart their progress and successes. Cumulative data garnered from all students’ ICDPs is also a valuable tool for long term program evaluation

Component 1: Academic Achievement

While academic preparation and standardized test scores are key, strong predictors of college success, African American students, particularly from under-resourced school communities, tend to have less access to or be underrepresented in advance placement courses at high schools around the country. This may not be a result of students’ lack of interest, but a byproduct of years of systemic tracking of students of color into lower-level academic courses. Given this phenomena, there is a need for more guidance and preparation of African American students for the rigors of college coursework.

The Project Ready Academic Achievement Component has one main goal: provide academic support for students attempting to take more advanced coursework during the school day. Project Ready takes an individualized approach to a student’s academic work, focusing on strategies and varied approaches to help each student achieve based on his/her own capabilities. When students enroll in Project Ready, they must take pre- and post- minimum basic skills competency tests. Through academic tutorial and formal test preparation, emphasizing test taking strategies, students will be able to enhance their academic skills in a variety of areas and receive comprehensive preparation for college. Moreover, the strengthening of students academic and test taking skills provides a foundation for taking more advanced placement courses during the school day.

Component 2: Social Development

The level of social development and maturity of a student is also a crucial indicator of readiness for college, work and life. The reality is that a majority of academically talented African American students tend to drop out of college due to personal challenges and/or financial hardships, not simply because of academics[[3]](#footnote-4). Students of color entering college *must be* equipped with not only the academic skill set to achieve, but also emotional and life skills necessary to successfully navigate college life. *Project Ready’s* Social Development Component centers on helping students develop important aptitudes such as resilience and persistence, necessary for success in high school, college and the world of work. For students who are the first in their family to go to college, there may be profound pressure to succeed, yet limited tangible guidance on *how* to succeed in higher education[[4]](#footnote-5).

The Social Development Component has two goals: 1) to enable students to learn more about their own capabilities; and, 2) to enable students to develop age-appropriate life skills. The Social Development Component validates and acknowledges a student’s prior knowledge and abilities, integrates these experiences into the curriculum and then enhance that knowledge with tangible strategies to address social stresses that result, for instance, from peer pressure. Just as in the academic component, an approach to developing a student’s social resiliency must be individualized, given students varied backgrounds, gender and life experiences. Among other topics, students learn about various types of peer pressure, fundamentals of financial literacy, and leadership skills.

Component 3: Cultural and Global Awareness

For some African American students, college may be the first major experience away from home and/or interacting with individuals from different class, race or ethnic backgrounds. Whether they attend a traditional liberal arts college, a community college in their city or a historically black college or university, they will encounter persons quite different from themselves. As Cuyjet (1997) notes, African Americans from lower socio-economic backgrounds find that class disparities, and race to a lesser extent, are one of the biggest challenges to adjusting to college life[[5]](#footnote-6). In *Yearning: Race, gender and cultural politics,* author Bell Hooks writes that her experience as a black women, raised in a working class family in segregated rural Kentucky, and attending wealthy Stanford University was not an easy one[[6]](#footnote-7). A strong feeling of alienation deriving from racial and class differences from her more-privileged white peers was a key factor in her decision to drop out. The Cultural and Global Awareness exposes students to the culture and functions of college life as well as to a variety of institutions and individuals they may encounter in their academic career.

This Cultural Component has two goals: 1) to expose students to the culture of college life and 2) to expose students to various peoples and histories in the United States and abroad. These are facilitated through campus visits, museum trips, college admissions workshops, and enrichment activities over the course of the program. Through strategic partnerships with colleges and universities, as well as other community and civic institutions, students engage in experiential learning exercises that facilitate their development into well-rounded individuals who are prepared for academic success.

Taken together, the three core components of the Project Ready initiative utilize evidence-based strategies to map out a continuum of activities, exercises and strategies designed to enable students to successfully pursue a post-secondary education. NUL is committed to replicating the Project Ready program in *all* Urban League college access affiliate programs.

**Summer Learning**

According to the National Summer Learning Association, low-income youth are disproportionately impacted by losses in reading (2-3 months loss) during summers; and cumulative summer learning losses may explain as much as 50%-67%of the widening of the achievement gap.

Project Ready 2.0 expands the impact of the program into summer months in order to expand both the quantity and quality of summer developmental and learning opportunities. At the end of the summer program, young people will understand better: 1.) educational achievement; 2.) health and safety; 3.) social and emotional development; 4.) self sufficiency; and 5.) career exploration.

**Annual Youth Summit**

The National Urban League Incentives to Excel and Succeed (NULITES) Youth Leadership Summit focuses on preparing young people to be self-sufficient, competent and contributing members of society. Specifically the summit functions as an empowerment conference for youth involved in Urban League affiliates. Each year approximately 300 to 400 youth, ages 14-18 years old, and their chaperons gather in the host city and are immersed in a residential college setting designed to assist young people with gaining a “college” identity. During the four day summit young people learn to navigate the college life experience while chaperons are provided an opportunity for professional development.

The summit is used to reinforce the goals of the Education and Youth Development programs that young people experience on the local level while providing access to national presenters and initiatives that develop important skills. This grant would cover the expenses for up to 20 Project Ready participants to attend. They will receive specialized workshops and sessions designed to build on their experiences during the program year. General workshops include training and preparation for post secondary success, career exploration, financial literacy and critical thinking, presentation skills and service learning. The youth summit merges with the Annual Conference to provide youth further access to Urban League leaders, renowned speakers and celebrities, and a host of annual conference events such as the Keynote address and the Exhibit Hall and Career Fair.

**Program Oversight and Management**

The XYZ Endowment partnership will allow NUL to expand implementation of our college access model using evidence-based characteristics in additional Urban League affiliate cities and the development of our comprehensive evaluation of the model. With support from the XYZ Endowment, we will:

* Establish one new Project Ready site in Fort Wayne, IN and expand the number of young people served in Indianapolis, IN;
* Monitor selected site’s Letters of Agreements and work plans;
* Provide oversight on the implementation of Project Ready core curriculum modules;
* Design and implement affiliate site narrative and fiscal reporting requirements;
* Provide ongoing technical assistance to sites;
* Provide ongoing project review, assessment and redesign/readjustment;
* Provide additional related material to the more than 50 Urban League affiliates participating in servicing high school student as they transition to post secondary education;
* Development and maintain national partnerships; and
* Prepare cumulative project narrative, fiscal and evaluation reports to our funding partners.

Participating affiliates will be responsible for delivering an intervention model to 35 students participating in the program for a minimum of 20 hours per month and a minimum of 100 summer hours of instruction and support. Each affiliate site will identify a designated coordinator of the program who will provide direct oversight. This person will manage the project in accordance with the Letter of Agreement, customized work plan and budget approved by the national office. Each site will be required to collect data as determined by the cross-site evaluation and hold all files open for inspection by the national office and independent evaluator over the course of the grant for at least three years following the end of the grant period.

Additionally, each affiliate is expected to:

* Recruit and select students participating in the project in accordance with the national selection process;
* Orient students and their families to the project;
* Implement, manage, and coordinate activities in each of the core Project Ready areas (Academic Achievement, Social Development, and Cultural and Global Awareness);
* Work with each participating student to develop their Individual College Development Plan, (ICDP);
* Monitor students’ progress against their ICDPs;
* Maintain relationships with key school officials and other partners;
* Participate in mandatory trainings and cross-site evaluations; and
* Prepare and submit all required narrative progress and fiscal reports.

**Evaluation**

NUL has partnered with the Academy for Educational Development (AED) to evaluate the efficacy of the Project Ready curriculum. This approach includes consideration of the following:

* *Organizational Outcomes:* Examining the impact of adopting Project Ready at the school system level and efforts to institutionalize Project Ready concepts and adaptation of these concepts among core staff;
* *Program Outcomes:* Exploring direct impact on students, measuring efficacy with such indicators as attrition and retention; proportion of on-time graduates among participating high school students, and proportion of student participants who matriculate at post-secondary institutions; and
* *Student Outcomes:* Assessing individual student development and progress by exploring specific challenges and benefits of program participation and the impact of the program on their social status; peer pressures and out-of-school activities.

The many roles of NUL affiliates permeate each outcome level. For example, in the Phase I funding cycle (2005-2007), NUL affiliates strategically partnered with school systems to ascertain that appropriate school and eligible students were included, identify and enroll eligible students; and specifically recruit those most likely to benefit from the project. At the program level, NUL affiliates were expected to partner with local universities and create “modeling opportunities” for Project Ready students and with local communities and businesses to ensure sustainability of Project Ready. At the student level, NUL affiliates were expected to work for greater parent engagement as a key to increase student retention and enhance youth commitment to academic achievement and college attendance. In the Phase II funding cycle, the same rigorous commitment to each outcome level is expected of affiliates. AED’s evaluation of Phase II will utilizes quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure program effectiveness.

A final, essential component to the long term success of the proposed Project Ready initiative will be NUL’s ability, in partnership with our affiliates, to leverage this opportunity by effectively and judiciously working with proven, time-honored and respected local and national partners to enhance service delivery, refine our model, and build a sustainable program that can replicated throughout NUL’s national network of affiliates in 36 states around the country.

The College Board, Pathways to College, America’s Promise, The Unviersity of Phoenix, the Campaign for High School Equity, Lumina Foundation’s Know How2Go website, National College Access Network and the Academy of Educational Development are just some examples of the types of national partners that have been engaged in our work. Each of which will prove to be an invaluable asset through its materials, proven strategies and on-the ground expertise as they pertain to college access, awareness and readiness.

**Organizational Capacity**

Founded in 1910, the National Urban League is the leading civil rights organization dedicated to empowering African Americans and other minorities to enter the social and economic mainstream. Through a network of 100 separate 501 (c ) (3) affiliates in 36 states and the District of Columbia, the NUL provides direct services to more than 2 million people annually and reaches millions more through its public policy and advocacy efforts, communications and publications.

In addition to our extensive network of local affiliates, we also partner with numerous organizations to advance the social justice movement. We work closely with the Black Leadership Forum, Congressional Black Caucus and other major civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the NAACP Legal and Educational Defense Fund, the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, the National Council of Negro Women, National Council of La Raza, and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights under Law. Through nearly 100 years of civil rights leadership and social service delivery, NUL has become a recognized—and trusted—name in the African-American community. We seek to empower African Americans to achieve equality in all aspects of American life, and are dedicated to developing innovative solutions to overcome the barriers that people and communities of color face throughout the nation.

The NUL and its local affiliates have compiled years of experience in the administration and implementation of education programs at both national and local service delivery levels, serving primarily African Americans and other minority populations. Our continuum of education programs include: early childhood literacy, preschool and day care, charter schools, after-school programs; parental involvement programs, youth development initiatives, cultural enrichment, career exploration, college preparation services, college mentoring, scholarship and volunteer programs.

The National Urban League Policy Institute is the research, policy, publications and advocacy arm of the National Urban League movement. The Policy Institute advances this mission through advocacy, research, policy analysis, legislative education and publications that create a favorable climate for the NUL’s programs and policy positions. We target a broad audience including: policymakers, government officials, community leaders, media, corporations and businesses, the policy community, voters, and the general public. With more than 60 years of experience, our policy office has a long history of attaining positive results that improve services, systems and conditions. We have a proven record of advocating for important urban issues that has led to new legislation, progressive policy reforms, and social change impact.

The NUL has long been and continues to be a highly respected and enormously influential voice for the education concerns and solutions of urban and minority communities. One of the reasons for our effectiveness is our unique combination of direct educational services and education policy and research. Our programmatic activity informs, focuses and strengthens our policy work and research, which ensures that our work is not merely an intellectual exercise, but reflects the real needs and experiences of the urban communities we serve. At the same time, our policy and research work enhances, supports and motivates our direct services by providing valuable, targeted research that supports our programmatic activity and helping to shape national policy that favorably impacts our ability to provide educational and other services in communities across the country.

The Policy Institute’s work provides a solid foundation from which to advocate on behalf of African American and urban communities. Through interactions with Members of Congress, the Senate, the executive branch, public leaders, and influential coalitions, the Policy Institute fosters dialogue about and raises the profile of the National Urban League’s initiatives and priorities in Washington and beyond. In addition, the Institute’s work supports and empowers the Urban League affiliates’ advocacy in their local communities and at the state level, further advancing the National Urban League’s Empowerment Agenda. We also push successfully for the development, adoption and implementation of policies that help millions of low- and middle-class Americans.

1. Adelman, C. (2002). Urbanicity and census division in the educational fate of disadvantaged students: Better targeting for outreach programs. In W.G. Tierney & L.S. Hagedorn (Eds.), *Increasing access to college: Extending possibilities for all students*. New York: SUNY Press [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Asher & Flaxman (1987). Students of color and school success. Demography, 42, 462-503 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. College Board (1999) Reaching the top: A report on the national task force on minority high achievement. New York: College Board. Cuyjet, M (1997). *Helping African american men succeed in college*. New York: Josey-Bass [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Fenn & Iwanicki (1986). An investigation of the relationship between student affective characteristics and student achievement within more or less effective school settings. *Journal of research and development in education, 19 (4), 10-18* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Cuyjet, M (1997). *Helping African American men succeed in college*. New York: Jossey-Bass. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Taken from Hooks, B (1990). *Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press [↑](#footnote-ref-7)