

Abstract
Workforce Innovation Fund Application

Applicant Name: Riverside County Economic Development Agency

Applicant Category: Consortium of Three WIBs

Lead Applicant City/State: Riverside County Workforce Investment Board, Riverside,
California

Areas Served: Riverside County, San Bernardino County and Imperial County

Project Name: Linking Innovation, Knowledge and Employment (@LIKE)

Funding Level Requested: \$5,000,000 technical costs
\$1,000,000 evaluation costs

Project Type: B

Description of Proposed Project: The Riverside County Economic Development Agency (EDA) – Workforce Development Division will serve as the lead agency for the Linking Innovation, Knowledge and Employment (@LIKE) project. EDA is collaborating with the County of San Bernardino Department of Workforce Development and the Imperial County Workforce Development Board on the project (the Consortium). @LIKE will serve disconnected young adults, age 18 to 24 who are not in school, working or serving in the military. At the national and regional level, the numbers of disconnected young adults have grown over the past decade, due in part to the disappearance of so many jobs during the Great Recession so that it is nearly impossible for young people (age 16 to 24) to find work. The disconnected young adults @LIKE will serve are low-income, gang-involved, ex-offenders, on aid, recently separated veterans, unemployed and not attending school. The problem at the systems level is that the current way that services are delivered through Workforce Investment

Act (WIA) Youth and Adult Programs is a barrier to effectively reaching and serving this target group.

Riverside and San Bernardino counties form a Metropolitan Statistical Area east of Los Angeles County, covering nearly 27,263 square miles with a population of 4.2 million. The third partner, Imperial County, is located south of Riverside County's eastern portion. Imperial County, covering 4,176 square miles with 174,528 residents, stretches from San Diego County to Arizona and borders Mexico to the south. Unemployment stands at 12.5% in Riverside County, 12.3% in San Bernardino County and 26.4% in Imperial County (California Employment Development Department).

@LIKE has three broad goals. The participant goal is that the package of services offered moves disconnected young adults to positive education and/or employment outcomes. The partnership goal is that the Consortium builds a system where the three counties effectively collaborate to serve disconnected young adults. The program goal is that the Consortium creates a replicable service model at the program level that others can learn from and adapt.

The program consists of five core elements: standardized assessments, life coaches/mentors, career exploration, national work readiness certificate and support services. Participants are then offered a mix of services, based on the Individual Service Strategy, through small group contextual learning in employment or education camps.

@LIKE will be administered by a Project Director who has 28 years of experience in organizational development and change management. The Consortium's Steering Committee will develop a Strategic Plan for the consortia, a Communications Plan and complete the Performance Accountability framework, and provide guidance and leadership throughout the project, working closely with the independent third-party evaluator.

The Consortium will partner with education institutions, private sector business, regional workforce investment boards and youth-serving and community based-organizations.

Description of Proposed Evaluation Strategy: The evaluation plan is based on a project type B level of rigor. The research suggests that a holistic package of services that includes multiple pathways for disconnected young adults to enable them to access education and employment is needed. A similar package of services was provided and evaluated in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties from 2008 to 2011 through the James Irvine's College and Career Connections Fund project. The @LIKE project will expand the package of services and evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the program model in the three participating counties. In Riverside County, the model will be more rigorously tested through a comparison group study. The outcomes study will include two groups of disconnected youth ages 18-24: the first group will include individuals who participated in @LIKE and comprise the treatment group; the second group will include individuals who participated in the WIA program or the ABE program at EDA who will comprise the comparison group. Random selection of participants for the comparison group will minimize the selection bias in the evaluation and strengthen its design. The evaluation will use both simple mean differences and multivariate statistical techniques when comparing the two study groups. The evaluation will seek to identify and disseminate appropriate goals and effective practices in serving disconnected young people through integrated workforce development systems. The evaluation will also examine challenges that block the use of such practices and explore strategies to overcome these challenges.

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