

# I. Executive Summary: girlsBEST IV -Year 1, May 2014

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**BACKGROUND:** This evaluation report summarizes online surveys completed by 19 programs/projects that were awarded grants from the girlsBEST (Girls Building Economic Success Together) Fund in 2013. The survey was administered by WFM and asks 41 questions about the girls the programs/projects serve, girls' awareness and leadership, program activities, and overall performance. GrayHall LLP, an independent research firm in St. Paul, completed the data ordering and analysis for this summary report, which represents Year 1 of a multi-year grant for some of the programs/projects.

The programs/projects that received grant awards in 2013 are: Bagosendaan, Big Buddies of Western Community Action/Generation Next II: Building Young Women of Excellence, Casa de Esperanza/Youth Leaders-Peer Education Initiative, Casa Guadalupe Multicultural Communities/La Potencia Latina: Academic and Career Empowerment (PLACE), Dakota Wicohan/Wikoska/Wicyanna, Fusion Life & Leadership/Surge Leadership Program, Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys/Girl Scouts ConnectZ, Hmong American Partnership/Ascend, Lake Superior School District/Girls Industrial Technology, Life-Work Planning Center/Project Succeed, Men As Peacemakers/Girls Restorative Program, Minnesota African Women's Association (MAWA)/African Girls Initiative for Leadership & Empowerment (AGILE), Minnesota Urban Debate League Program of Augsburg College/girlsBEST Debate Team, New Horizons Crisis Center/girlsBEST, Peacemaker Resources/Girls Lead, Pillsbury United Communities/Sisterhood of the Traveling Scarf, Project FINE/Girls Reaching Above and Beyond, Willmar Community Education and Recreation Department, Public School District #347/Girl Talk, and Women's Initiative for Self Empowerment (WISE) Inc./Girls Getting Ahead in Leadership (GGAL).

The Women's Foundation of Minnesota (WFM) established the girlsBEST Fund in 2001 to make grants to girl-led programs across the state with a focus on underserved and underrepresented girls. The fund makes multi-year grants, typically for a period of three years, renewable each year based on evidence of satisfactory progress toward goals. Programs must serve girls between the ages of 10 and 18 and demonstrate how girls are involved in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. This summary report documents and quantifies the outcomes of the current girlsBEST programs as they relate to the fund's goal of increasing "the readiness of girls to achieve future economic well being."

**KEY FINDINGS:** All programs/projects provided attendance data; the number of program/project participants avoiding teen pregnancy; the level of girls' awareness and leadership related to economic readiness such as girls' knowledge about post-secondary education options, including STEM education and employment requirements; and data on activities that helped girls make smart choices and avoid risky behaviors. Information was also provided on the types of activities that: help girls graduate from high school, prepare for post-secondary education and careers, and assist girls in building strong identities and financial literacy.

**A. Program Enrollment and Participation:** More than a thousand (1,018) girls attended the 19 programs/projects on a regularly basis and another 688 attended occasionally, bringing the total number of girls served by the programs/projects to 1,706. Program/project participants are in middle school or high school and are African American (362 or 35%), Asian Pacific Islander (71 or 6%), Hispanic (323 or 31%), Native American (84 or 8%), and Caucasian/White (215 or 21%). Most (873 or 86%) girls are from low-income families and program/project participants include girls with disabilities (37 or 4%);

those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (26 or 3%); and immigrants and refugees (311 or 30%). Of the girls served in 2013-2014, approximately 39% are from the Twin Cities area, about 51% call Greater Minnesota home, and less than one percent is from American Indian nations.

- *High School Graduation Rates:* Of the 19 programs, 14 included 155 girls who were eligible to graduate from high school. Seventy-seven percent (77% or 120) of the girls were on track for graduation. In some instances survey questions about graduation were difficult for grantees to answer because the survey completion date precedes graduation. They opted instead to use “on track for graduation.” High school graduation rates for the state are 65% to 93% for girls statewide.
- *Rate of Post-Secondary Enrollment:* Twelve of the 19 programs/projects reported a total of 110 girls enrolled or planning to enroll in post-secondary schools/institutions during Year 1. As with high school graduation, several grantees were not comfortable reporting college enrollment, as the survey completion date preceded enrollment. Most (48 or 44%) girls reportedly chose four-year colleges/universities and 41 (37%) selected two-year colleges. The statewide post-secondary enrollment rate is 34% to 54%.
- *Making Smart Choices:* The number of core program participants (1,037) avoiding teen pregnancy during Year one was 1,035 (99.8%) or one per 1,000. Only two of the 1,037 core program participants became pregnant which is less than 1%. The girlsBEST teen pregnancy rate was lower than the statewide range of 32 and 132 per 1,000 and lower than the rate of Caucasian/White girls, which at 17 per 1,000 is the lowest in the state. Two program activities that rated highest in helping girls avoid risky behavior were “Leadership development” and “Mentoring,” each noted by 17 or 89% of grantees.
- *Parent Engagement:* For the first time, the evaluation survey asked if programs/projects engaged parents/other family members in activities and 74% of the 19 grantees indicated they did. Engagement activities included decision making related to children (59%), services for parents (41%), input/expertise/guidance in program planning or policy (29%) and organizing/leading family/community activities (18%).

**B. Girls’ Awareness and Leadership:** More than half of the grantees (11 or 58%) rated girls awareness of “the value of problem solving and goal setting” as high. Also receiving high or medium rating by 9 or 47% of grantees was girls’ awareness of “high paying careers (e.g., STEM careers),” “the consequences of risky behavior,” and “the value of displaying leadership and self-advocacy.” Additional awareness-building activities girls participated in that grantees rated high were “planning and organizing program activities,” “recruiting program participants” (9 or 47% respectively), and “exploring college,” including such activities as college tours, college fairs, admissions and financial aid workshops (9 or 47%). Eleven (58%) grantees also rated “recruiting program participants” as an activity girls did well. Six (32%) grantees rated girls low in their awareness of “entrepreneurial opportunities.” These did not appear to be part of most grantees programs/projects.

**C. Program Performance:** Sixteen (84%) of the 19 programs use an Academic Program Track as the foundation of their girlsBEST program/project. One uses the Entrepreneurial Track and two others use the Public Education and Advocacy Track. Slightly more than half (53% or 10) were beginning to meet their program goals, 42% (8) met their goals, and one (5%) exceeded goals. “Mentoring” and “cultural

and community awareness” (e.g., identity development activities, participation in community building activities, participation in special events) were said by 15 (79%) grantees respectively to be most effective in helping girls build strong identities and make smart choices. The activity identified by 14 grantees (73%) as effective in building girls awareness, agency, and activism during this first year was girls’ abilities to “display leadership and self-advocacy.” Activities rated lowest by grantees in helping girls build strong identities and make smart choices were “collaboration with diverse groups” (5 or 26%) and “financial literacy” training (6 or 32%).

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:** The results of this analysis indicate that the 19 grantee programs/project are engaged in a wide range of activities that are helping girls increase their economic readiness to achieve future economic well being. The programs/projects reported multiple examples and measures of girls personal and collective growth, including high school graduation, post-secondary enrollment, leadership activities, and connections to culture and community. A few areas (e.g., financial literacy training, speaking out on political and community issues, and collaboration with diverse groups) stand out as needing attention if they are viewed as foundational elements of girlsBEST programs. These can be addressed by providing additional financial literacy, political/community issues, and collaboration resources to grantees attending WFM events.

Based on this summary analysis, it is recommended that Women’s Foundation of Minnesota take the following actions:

- Maintain the current process and standards for granting girlsBEST funding (e.g., programs that are able to provide effective economic readiness activities).
- Continue to review and align the evaluation survey for the purpose of creating question and section continuity—thus improving the time it takes to complete the survey.
- Assist grantees in gaining additional knowledge about evaluation to aid their completion of the survey.