

## Program Summary:

This grant is requested to support Community Development Programs designed and conducted by the Pioneers students to address critical local community needs. In each of the participating 13 rural schools, students design, develop and implement projects to meet community needs identified by the students. In previous years, those projects included a community meeting to educate the citizens on the effects of the drought and the impact on local water supplies, tutoring and mentoring programs for elementary students, youth education on the impact of teen pregnancy, and painting over blight on community structures, among others.

The amount requested is \$9,000, which is \$750 for each of the 11 high schools, and \$375 for each of the 2 middle schools.

Pioneers Youth Leadership is a single or multi-year leadership and community development program for middle and high school students in rural Texas. The program year runs from August to May and includes:

- Leadership Camp
- Water Awareness Program
- Educational Awareness Program
- Health Awareness Program
- Career & Professional Development Workshop
- State Leadership Forum
- College and Career Planning
- *Community Development Program*
- Cultural Studies Project
- Rural Entrepreneurship Scholarship Competition

Now in our fourth year, we have 180 high school students in the program in 11 rural high schools: Uvalde, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Hubbard, Rocksprings, Mason, Burnet, Johnson City, Somerville, and Karnes City; and 130 middle school students in 2 rural middle schools: Poth and Junction.

Each school's Pioneers program is made up of 10-60 students in grades 6-12. There is an open enrollment process for each year's Pioneers class. The Pioneers are selected for the program based on merit and projected benefit of leadership training. There is no cost to any Pioneer participant for the program.

Our expected outcome with the Pioneers' student-led Community Development Programs is that the students will:

- Gain a greater understanding of their community's needs;
- Develop the skills to organize and conduct a community development program;
- Increase their engagement with their community; and
- Realize the significance of community development in strengthening rural communities.

After participating in the 2014-15 Pioneers program, 78% of Pioneers students said they were more interested in community and world problems, 71% said they felt a stronger connection to their community, and 74% said they felt more important to their community. Another 74% reported they spend more time looking for opportunities to help in the community and 71% said they actually spend more time volunteering and helping others. Specifically related to the Community Development Program, 85% of Pioneers students reported that they had a better understanding of the key components of community development and how it can be sustainable. A large proportion of students, 88% agreed that they feel more confident in planning a community development program. Finally, 62% of Pioneers students said that the experience of the Community Development Program taught them skills that they will use later in life.

## Section I: Contact Information

a. Contact person for grant:

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b. Name and address of organization:

Pioneers Youth Leadership, Inc.  
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[www.pioneersyouthleadership.org](http://www.pioneersyouthleadership.org)

## **Section II: Organizational Description**

Mission. The mission of Pioneers Youth Leadership is to help youth in rural Texas become ethical leaders with critical thinking skills, a commitment to protecting the environment and building sustainable communities, and the training and experience to be positive change agents in their communities and schools.

Purpose. Pioneers Youth Leadership was founded in 2012 by Real County Judge Garry Merritt and Travis Helm to meet a critical need for local leadership development in rural Texas communities. Pioneers is a learning-through-action high school leadership program that develops student leaders and community leaders. By giving high school students leadership training and experience with a focus on helping their own community, we help build strong local leadership, create a more capable and competent local workforce, and engage youth in making positive changes in their community.

Short History. In our first year in 2012, we had 19 students in the Pioneers program in Real County. In our second year, we had 100 students in the program in 10 counties – Real, Edwards, Kimble, Mason, Menard, Uvalde, Kinney, Dimmit, Zavala, and La Salle. In our third year, we had 130 students in the program in 8 school districts – Uvalde, Carrizo Springs, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Junction, Rocksprings and Mason ISDs. This year, our fourth, we have a total of 310 students in 13 rural schools – 180 high school students in 11 rural high schools: Uvalde, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Hubbard, Rocksprings, Mason, Burnet, Johnson City, Somerville, and Karnes City; and 130 middle school students in 2 rural middle schools: Poth and Junction..

Major Accomplishments. Our major accomplishments include:

- growing the program from 19 students in one county to 310 students in 13 school districts;
- moving the program from an after-school program into an elective class and school-sponsored student organization;
- expanding the program to middle schools;
- developing a Pioneers written curriculum and daily lesson plans; and
- training teachers to facilitate the Pioneers curriculum in schools.

## **Section III: Program Description**

a. What community and/or constituency needs will your program meet? How did you identify the need?

Pioneers Youth Leadership is a single or multi-year program for students in grades 6-12 in rural Texas communities. We have established the Pioneers program in counties and schools in which there are fewer educational and leadership training opportunities for students. We identified the need by asking the county judges, school administration, and business community in our program area if they would like to have the Pioneers program in their community.

For the Pioneers Community Development Program, the students follow a similar method to identify local community needs. First they ask local officials and citizens for their view of community needs. They then conduct their own community needs assessment in which they identify and prioritize local needs. From that, the students design and implement programs to meet the identified community needs. In previous years, those projects included a community meeting to educate the citizens on the effects of the drought and the impact on local water supplies, tutoring and mentoring programs for elementary students, youth education on the

impact of teen pregnancy, and painting over blight on community structures, among others.

b. Give a brief description of your program. What are its primary goals? How will you accomplish them?

Pioneers Youth Leadership was founded to meet a critical need for local leadership development in rural communities in Texas. Our mission is to help youth become positive change agents in their communities. We accomplish our mission by giving high school students leadership training and experience with a focus on helping their community and by having the students take an active role in land and water conservation, rural entrepreneurship, education, and community development.

Each element of the year-long Pioneers program emphasizes ethical leadership and the development of critical thinking skills so the students are better equipped to meet the challenges of the rapidly changing population, economic base, and political landscape of our state. Pioneers is a learning-through-action program.

The Pioneers program year runs from August to May with several major components:

### **Fall Semester**

Leadership Camp: In September, the Pioneers students participate in a two-day leadership camp at which they focus on seven core leadership characteristics: Attitude, Persistence, Respect, Passion, Character, Teamwork, and Service. Students are introduced to and begin to discuss the program content and learn that they share common interests and their communities share common needs with others around the State.

Water Conservation Awareness Program: Pioneers students research the source of drinking water in their community and how the community uses water. The students then learn individual and community-level water conservation practices and develop and conduct a Water Conservation Awareness Program in their school and/or community.

Educational Awareness Program: Pioneers students research their school's academic performance, design programs to improve school performance, and conduct a mentoring or leadership program for their school.

Health Awareness Program: Pioneers students research personal healthy practices, discuss how to turn those practices into habits, and educate others in their school and/or community about healthy habits through a Health Awareness Program.

Career & Professional Development Workshop: At the Pioneers Career and Professional Development Workshop in November, Pioneers students work on hard skills such as public speaking, job interviews, goal setting, time management, and financial literacy. During the workshop, the Pioneers students have the opportunity to practice and receive feedback for their business pitch in preparation for the upcoming Entrepreneurship Scholarship Competition.

### **Spring Semester**

State Leadership Forum: In January, Pioneers convene in Austin for the State Leadership Forum. To prepare for this event, Pioneers research, design, and implement programs in their schools and communities in water conservation, entrepreneurship, and educational awareness. In Austin, Pioneers students engage in workshops with the Texas Education Agency, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Water Development Board, and General Land Office discussing local issues and their programs as well as how legislation affects their community.

Entrepreneurship Scholarship Competition: Pioneers students inventory local businesses in their community, learn the benefits of local spending, and research and write a business plan for a new for-profit enterprise in their community. This year, the Pioneers students will compete for \$36,000 in scholarships and cash awards at the San Antonio Livestock Show and Rodeo.

College and Career Planning: Pioneers build a Career & College Readiness Plan by identifying colleges that are a match for their career interests and academics and doing extensive career research. They learn about college applications, practice self-advocacy by creating a resume and writing college application essays, and begin preparing for the cost of college by applying for scholarships.

Community Development Program: Pioneers students identify and prioritize issues within their community and design and implement a community development program as a class. While completing the program, students, school staff, and local community members learn to work together for the improvement of the community.

Cultural Studies: In partnership with the Nobility Project, Pioneers students research various cultures and issues around the world. They then apply what they've learned throughout the course to design an international community development project.

c. Describe the program participants or beneficiaries. Are you planning to serve a people of a particular age group, ethnic background or income level? How many people will your program serve?

The Pioneers program serves students in grades 6-12 in rural Texas communities. This year, we have a total 310 students in the program in 13 school districts. There are 180 high school students in the program in 11 rural high schools – Uvalde, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Hubbard, Rocksprings, Mason, Burnet, Johnson City, Somerville, Karnes City ISDs; and 130 middle school students in 2 rural middle schools: Poth and Junction ISDs. The demographics of the students are generally representative of the schools' demographics.

d. Describe the aspects of the program that are unique or innovative. Is the program a model for other communities? How will you communicate the program's success to other communities?

We have expanded the Pioneers program to communities that have requested the program because their students do not otherwise receive the intensive, focused, and year-long leadership and community development training that we provide. Furthermore, to our knowledge, Pioneers is the only program in which high school students engage in workshops with the staff of the Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Water Development Board and Texas Education Agency, in addition to our other programming.

To increase success and sustainability of community projects, within the curriculum we purposefully focus on *development of community* rather than merely community service. While students do serve their community through their programs, the expected *overall* goal for students is that they engage various sectors of the community together around that service. This thereby develops the community, helps the students and community members develop real skills in group facilitation and collaboration, and increases the chance that the project will become "owned" by the community and carried on into the future.

The increase in the number of students in the Pioneers program has occurred because of

communication between Pioneers management and board members and the county judges, school administration, and business community in area communities. The program is easily replicated from community to community and it is our goal to continue to bring the Pioneers program to new communities that would benefit from the program.

e. Include a one-page profit/loss statement and budget for the program, including the total budget for each line item and how TRC funds will be used. If TRC were unable to fund the total amount requested, would you accept a smaller grant?

See attached profit/loss statement and budget.

If TRC were unable to fund the total amount requested, we would accept and appreciate a smaller grant.

f. Describe the expected outcomes or accomplishments for the program. How will you measure these outcomes?

Our expected outcome with the Pioneers' students' community development programs is that the students will:

- Gain a greater understanding of their community's needs;
- Develop the skills to organize and conduct a community development program;
- Increase their engagement with their community; and
- Realize the significance of community development in strengthening rural communities.

We annually measure our students' understanding and competency of our program areas with pre-program and post-program surveys.

g. Give a timeline for the project or program and expenditure of proposed grant funds.

February 2016 to May 2016

The amount requested is \$9,000, which is \$750 for each of the 11 high schools, and \$375 for each of the 2 middle schools.

h. If the organization has received a grant award from TRC in the two preceding years, report the timeline, outcomes and financial expenditures related to the award.

Timeline: Using TRC funds awarded last year, Pioneers students designed and completed their Community Development Program approximately between March 9 and April 10, 2015.

Outcomes: Listed below are outcomes measured during the 2014-2015 year directly related to the Pioneers Community Development Program.

- 84% and 85% respectively of Pioneers students reported that they had a better comprehension of the key components of a community development program and how a community development program can be sustainable.
- 88% of Pioneers students agreed that they feel more confident in planning a community development program.

- 62% of Pioneers students agreed that the experience of the community development program taught them skills that they will need later.
- Regarding community attachment, 71% of Pioneers students said that they felt a stronger connection to their community and 74% said they felt more important to their community.
- Service was also greatly impacted among Pioneers students: 74% of students said that they spend more time looking for opportunities to help in the community and 71% said they spend more time volunteering and helping others.

Financial expenditures: TRC funds received for the 2014-2015 program year were equally made available and distributed to each participating school's Pioneers class (Uvalde, Carrizo Springs, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Junction, Rocksprings and Mason ISDs) to be used for materials and resources needed for each respective Pioneers Community Development Program.

#### 2014-2015 Pioneers Community Development Programs:

- Community Beautification: Pioneers students painted over blight on underpasses and other structures in collaboration with leaders and organizations in the community. Unexpected impacts included recognition of the effort by local community members and restoration of community pride.
- Water Footprints: Pioneers students hosted an interactive educational program for elementary students who learned kinesthetically, visually, and auditorily about personal, local, and global water use and conservation. This message was further communicated to parents in the community.
- Water Conservation Education: Pioneers students designed and constructed a real-life working rainwater harvesting system as well as a working model and used them in an interactive educational program about water conservation for elementary, middle, high school students, and the local community. The program regularly continues this year.
- Leadership Education Program: Pioneers students taught junior high students about leadership and its importance in school and in life in an engaged educational Leadership Fair where they brought in people from the community as examples. They feel that leadership development is necessary for upcoming high school students especially related to school spirit and the impact of moral on academic, career, and community success.
- Incentivized Action: Using the school as their community, Pioneers students created, proposed, and implemented a merit-based disciplinary system that incentivized good behavior on and off campus. The program continues this school year.
- Tutoring and Mentoring Program: In partnership with an existing community organization, Pioneers students formed an in-school organization that continues to provide tutoring and mentoring services for junior high students.
- Job Opportunity Seminar: Pioneers students coordinated with the high school to host a job opportunity seminar for local students. There is limited opportunity for high school students to find employment in the county so the Pioneers brought in local employers to offer information about part and full-time employment.

#### Attachments:

- a. List of Board of Directors
- b. Current fiscal year budget, balance sheet, and previous program year profit/loss statement
- c. Letters of Recommendation