

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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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. This year, our third, we will have 130 students in the program in 8 school districts -- Uvalde, Carrizo Springs, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Junction, Rocksprings and Mason ISDs. Pioneers is an elective course in 6 of the schools and a school-sponsored student organization in the other 2. The students in the elective course meet daily and the students in the student organizations meet weekly.

Major Accomplishments. Our major accomplishments include growing the program from 19 students in one county to 130 students in 8 school districts, moving the program from an after-school program to an accredited elective class and school-sponsored student organization, developing a Pioneers written curriculum and daily lesson plans, and training teachers to teach the Pioneers curriculum in schools.

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 the 8 schools in our program area, the 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, and youth education on the impact of teen pregnancy, among others.

The amount requested is \$8,000, which is \$1,000 for each of the 8 schools.

Pioneers Youth Leadership is a one-year leadership and community development program for high school students in rural Texas. Our program year runs from June to May and includes a summer leadership camp, college readiness advising, a Career and Professional Development Workshop and High School Rural Business Plan Competition at which the students compete for \$24,000 in scholarships and cash awards, our State Leadership Forum in Austin, student-led community development programs designed to address critical local needs, and graduation from the Pioneers program in May.

This year, our third, we have 130 students in the program in 8 school districts – Uvalde, Carrizo Springs, Knippa, Sabinas, Leakey, Junction, Rocksprings and Mason ISDs.

Each school's Pioneers program is made up of 10-24 students in grades 10-12. There is an open application process for each year's Pioneers class. The Pioneers are selected for the program based on merit and projected benefit of leadership training. We consider a written application and personal recommendations. There is no cost to any Pioneer participant for the program. Pioneers Youth Leadership, Inc. is a nonprofit Texas corporation with 501(c)(3) status.

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

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

In Pioneers Youth Leadership programming, the students' competency has increased from 30-50% based on pre-program and post-program surveys we conducted with the students. For example, after the completion of the students' 2013 community development projects, the Pioneers students showed a 46% increase in knowledge of planning an effective program and a 32% increase in knowledge of strategies to facilitate groups. After our 2013 State Leadership Forum, our students showed a 37% increase in knowledge of state legislation and how legislation affects their community.

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 one-year program for students in grades 10-12 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 these 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 students' community development projects, the students follow a similar track to identify local community needs – they ask local officials and community members for their view of community needs and then conduct their own community needs assessment. The students then 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, and youth education on the impact of teen pregnancy, 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 year runs from June to May and includes 6 major components:

- 1) A summer leadership camp at which we focus on our 7 core leadership characteristics: Attitude, Persistence, Respect, Passion, Character, Teamwork and Service.
- 2) College readiness advising during the fall semester, including review and feedback on application essays and assistance with letters of recommendation.
- 3) A Career and Professional Development Workshop and High School Rural Business Plan Competition hosted for Pioneers by the Rural Business Program at the

UTSA Institute for Economic Development, followed by the finals of the High School Rural Business Plan Competition hosted by San Antonio Stock Show & Rodeo in February at which the students compete for \$24,000 in scholarships and cash awards.

4) The Pioneers State Leadership Forum in Austin in January with workshops with the Texas Water Development Board on water conservation programs conducted by the students in their schools, the Texas Department of Agriculture on rural economic development, and the Texas Education Agency on leadership training conducted by the students in their schools.

5) From February through May, the students identify critical local community needs and then develop and conduct community development programs designed to address those needs.

6) Graduation from the Pioneers program in May.

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

The Pioneers program serves high school students in grades 10-12 in rural Texas communities. This year, we have 130 students in the program in 8 school districts – Uvalde, Carrizo Springs, Knippa, Sabinal, Leakey, Junction, Rocksprings and Mason ISDs.

d. Describe the aspects of the program that are unique or innovative. Is the program a model for other communities? How will we 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.

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. 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 we 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 we measure these outcomes?

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

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

We measure our students' understanding and competency of our program areas with pre-program and post-program surveys. After the completion of the students' 2013 community development projects, the Pioneers students showed a 46% increase in knowledge of planning an effective program and a 32% increase in knowledge of strategies to facilitate groups. We expect similar results with this year's projects.

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

February 2015 to May 2015

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.

We have not received an award from the TRC previously.

Attachments:

- a. List of Board of Directors
- b. Current fiscal year budget, balance sheet, profit/loss statement