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EmpowerED Chattanooga
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March 6, 2024

Social Change Foundation
United States of America
1234 Social Worker Ave,
Chattanooga, TN 37402

Dear Social Change Foundation,

EmpowerED Chattanooga would like to present our proposal for your Social Change Grant. We are a non-profit organization dedicated to tackling educational disparities to empower and uplift minority children in local schools. The impact of educational inequities on minority children extends beyond the classroom, affecting their prospects and overall well-being. Through our organization, we hope to ultimately combat this by ensuring equal access to quality education and creating inclusive learning environments.

Through thorough research and consultations with individuals from the Hamilton County Department of Education, we have observed a lack of literacy resources, programs, and assistance within multiple Hamilton County schools. We have henceforth formulated specific changes to address these issues. To implement these changes we are requesting \$50,000 to fund training for teachers, parent/community partnerships, and increases in accessible and applicable literature for designated schools.

Thank you for considering our proposal,

The team at EmpowerED Chattanooga.

Agency Description

The mission of EmpowerED Chattanooga is to empower and uplift minority children in schools, ensuring equal access to quality education and creating an inclusive learning environment. Our target populations are schools with prominent minority students that exhibit a need for resources and academic improvement. Our pilot program will take place at Orchard Knob Elementary School. Primary services include teacher training, parent and community partnerships, and resource funding.

Background and Needs Statement

Within Hamilton County, the need for improved literacy throughout elementary schools is quite apparent, with nearly 65% of elementary students testing below the proficiency level for reading. Elementary schools account for over 50% of the 79 schools available within Hamilton County and comprise relatively diverse student body populations (US News, N.D.). Literacy at this age is vital. The U.S. Department of Education highlights that children should learn to read by the age of 8, as this is when a lack of reading abilities may begin to affect their progress in learning other subjects (Rosenkrantz, 2021).

The impact of educational inequities on minority children extends beyond the classroom, affecting their prospects and overall well-being. Research by the Learning Policy Institute (2019) emphasizes the detrimental effects of poverty, race, and cultural bias on educational equity, with minority students facing systemic barriers that limit their access to quality education and impede their social and economic mobility. With a closer look into the elementary schools throughout Hamilton County, one stands out in particular regarding literacy concerns. Orchard Knob Elementary, located in Chattanooga TN, maintains test scores indicating that 97% of their 460 students are not proficient in reading. This percentage is concerning even though the

school has an excellent student-to-teacher ratio of 10:1. The student body population at Orchard Knob is predominantly African American and Hispanic (US News, N.D.). The community feeding into the school is comprised of lower-income households, with single-mother households containing 26.0% of the community. Orchard Knob Elementary School is in the bottom half of all Tennessee schools in both reading and mathematics (Public School Review, 2022). The scores of mathematics proficiency are between 10-15 percent. While reading proficiency only reaches a mark of five percent of the students tested at Orchard Knob. This school also ranks 895 out of 923 statewide in their reading proficiency. Whereas in mathematics they rank 712 out of a possible 923 schools in Tennessee (U.S. News, 2022).

EmpowerED Chattanooga addresses the systemic inequity in educational opportunities faced by minority children in Hamilton County schools. This includes disparities in resources, support, and access to quality education, perpetuating social and economic inequalities. By focusing on Orchard Knob Elementary, EmpowerED Chattanooga aims to identify and address the gaps in literacy resources, thereby providing the necessary support and funding to improve educational outcomes for these students.

Goals and Objectives

The overarching goal of EmpowerED Chattanooga is to improve literacy rates and reading comprehension for minority students and low-income students within Hamilton County. We plan to obtain this goal through the three following objectives: 1) finding the best learning tools available to teachers at Orchard Knob Elementary and develop a training plan to teach these learning tools; 2) partnering with parents at Orchard Knob Elementary and the community as a whole to improve at home learning process so that students are retaining information taught at school; and 3) providing appropriate and appealing literature in the library to increase interest in reading for students.

Project Narrative

To achieve this objective one, we will utilize Dr. Cheryl from Hamilton County Schools. Her insight and experience will be an asset to our team because she knows the gaps that are present in the school system and at Orchard Knob Elementary specifically. There are specific strategies outlined by Waterford.com for implementing gamification. Those include implementing games/team building activities such as Jeopardy. Another strategy is to have a point system that can motivate students. Another resource is UC Berkeley, where students are able to “fail safely” meaning that peer activities are implemented, students are able to resubmit assignments, and multiple attempts to tests. Core Knowledge is another resource that has been implemented in schools. These schools have seen an increase in knowledge-based learning which builds strong foundations of understanding the broad society. This also relates to scaffolding, which requires students to use prior knowledge, as well as studying vocabulary and discussing what was read.

An implementation committee will be needed. This committee will be responsible for finding research informed games that enhance learning and engagement. We will need a committee that specifically works with Core Knowledge. This committee will be in charge of working with the program and ensuring that it is being implemented in the classroom. Another committee can be one that works with the LEAD Tool with staff and faculty at the school.

To establish objective two we will help to fund the previously established PTA/PTO at Orchard Knob Elementary - The school has an organized PTO that meets monthly. Parents are encouraged to attend board meetings and participate in Parent Conference Days. Parents receive a weekly phone message and newsletter with information about opportunities to become involved with the school.

We will also establish partnerships with community churches to incorporate volunteers to conduct reading times with kids who need additional assistance. Prior to volunteering, these individuals will need to conduct a background check. They will then be added to a list. When a teacher notices a child who is in need of one-on-one reading assistance, they will connect with a volunteer to schedule reading assistance during class time.

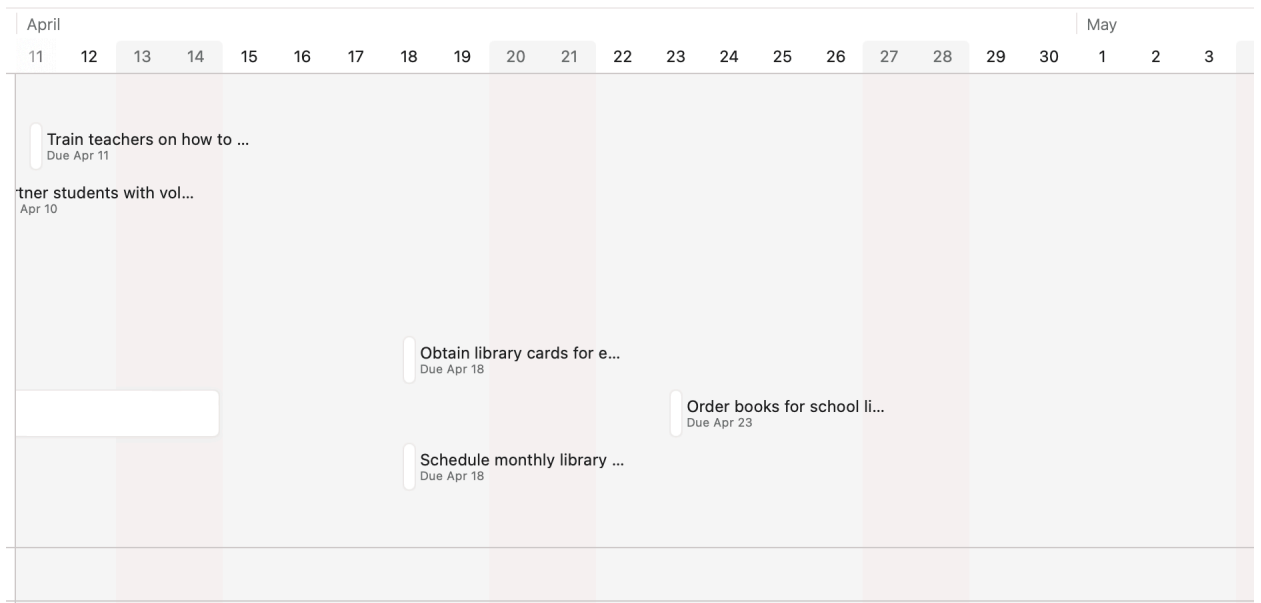
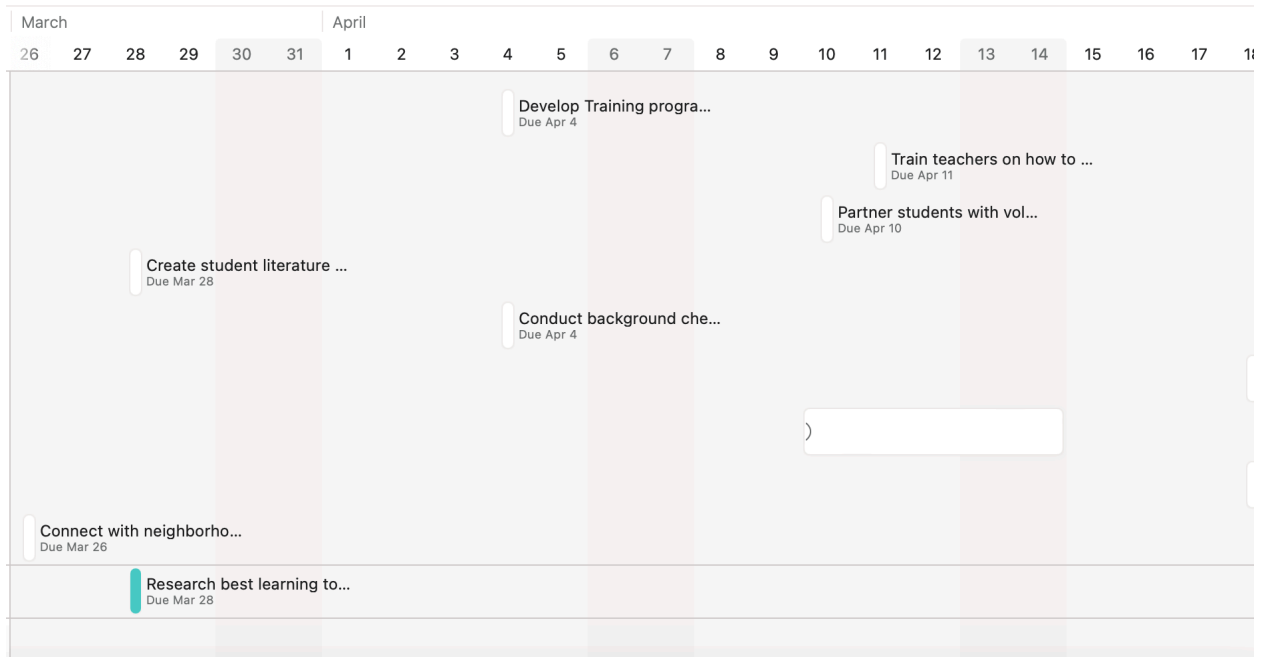
To achieve this objective, we will take a student-wide survey of possible literature interests at the beginning of each school year. We will utilize this information to order applicable books, magazines, etc. to add to the school library while simultaneously removing books of lesser interest. These books will then be donated to the community to promote literacy resources within homes.

We will also help each child obtain library cards for Chattanooga Public Library and incorporate monthly library field trips during which students are provided with transportation, given an hour to browse the library, and allowed to borrow 2-3 books which will be returned during the following month's library trip.

Evaluation

We hope to improve literacy rates for minority students within Hamilton County and will evaluate the program's success by measuring the participant outcomes of coursework, grades, and test scores statistics throughout this process. We plan to improve reading comprehension through culturally appropriate/ relevant content and evaluate this through focus group discussions, participation feedback, and see if it aligns with our original vision of objective.

Timeline



EmpowerED Chattanooga will run for 3 consecutive academic years. Figure 1 provides an overview of the program’s Gantt Chart. We start by providing evidence based training during the K-5 professional development week held for the teachers in early August. You can see that the teachers begin to implement what they have learned during training. The next step is to partner with the parents during the school's open house so that we can have literacy training. We will

then provide appropriate and applying literature and provide monthly library visits. In the middle of the academic year we will have an evaluation to see if the objectives we implemented are helping the students raise their literacy scores. After winter break we will partner with the parents to check in and see if they need more training or what we can do to help them out. At the end of the first academic year we will have our last evaluation and see where the students are at in the literacy spectrum. EmpowerED will take all of the input and scores of the teachers, parents, and students and see what we have done that works and what needs improvement so we are better prepared for the next academic year.

Budget

Year 1 Budget

Project Budget Needs	Total
A. Literacy and Books	\$21,900
Books: \$5,000 eBooks: \$5,000 Software: \$11,900	
B. Education/ BSW Interns	
The interns for this grant will be each awarded a \$2,500 stipend at the end of each school semester (Dec. & May).	\$15,000
C. Child Care Program/ Meals Provided	
Given the emphasis on the PTA/PTO for this grant, child care must be covered per meeting. Meals will be also provided for each meeting of PTA/PTO.	\$10,000
D. Transportation	
Transportation will be provided by school bus drives once per month to the Chattanooga	\$1,500

Public Library. Bus drivers will be given an additional.	
E. Volunteer Screening	
A total of 20 volunteers will be needed for the implementation of this grant. They will be required to have a background check and drug tested.	\$1,600
Grand Total Requested	\$50,000

Budget Narratives

Literacy and Books

Literacy and books are directly related to the services that we provide. The essential duties of this are to incorporate books that are appropriate to not only this age group but also to the demographics surrounding this population. Providing literature that is more relevant for this population at Orchard Knob Elementary is an essential duty. The addition of incorporating gaming software that pertains to literacy games on the student’s Chromebook will also be added. For this, we are planning to use \$21,900 for this to be accomplished out of our total budget of \$50,000.

Of the allocated \$21,900, we will be dividing this cost into the following categories: books, ebooks, and Chromebook software. For books, we will use \$5,000 to provide physical copies of literature to all students (grades K-5) at Orchard Knob Elementary. An additional \$5,000 will be used to purchase eBooks and online literature for all students. The remaining \$11,900 will be used to purchase and provide software containing literacy games for all students with a Chromebook (grades 3-5).

Education/BSW Interns

Interns are a positive way to increase productivity and drive innovation and success. We believe in the importance of empowering future professionals to use their skills to meet our mission. Three interns will be utilized-a social work intern as well as two education interns. Education interns will be in charge of teaching literacy lessons/lesson planning. Social work interns will be used to case manage those who participate in the program. We desire to pay interns for their work, and will offer them a \$5,000 stipend over a nine month period. Social work interns will ensure that assessments are being conducted for each participant, measuring the program being implemented. They will be utilized during the library trips, PTO meetings, as well as assisting teachers during literacy lessons. Social workers will also be present at PTO meetings quarterly to update parents on the progress of their child’s literacy.

Child Care Program/ Meals Provided

Child care and meals provided are an essential part of our program. We want to be able to provide parents with reliable childcare during PTA/PTO meeting so they do not have to worry about providing food to them or finding someone to care for their children at the time. Given the emphasis on the PTA/PTO for this grant, child care must be covered per meeting. We are using \$10,000 of our \$50,000 to provide child care, along with meals provided every PTA/PTO meeting. Our social work and elementary education interns will be providing the childcare, and this will go toward their \$5,000 stipend. The majority of the \$10,000 will be toward ordering food and picking up the food before every meeting.

Transportation

Our transportation portion of our budget will be using \$1,500 of our \$50,000 request total. The way we plan to utilize transportation funds within our program is by using this money to pay one retired bus driver from the time they transport the K-5 students to the library, the time they are waiting on the kids to finish in the library, and then their return route to bring the kids back. We plan to use the school bus that was donated to us prior to starting our program. We will use that bus to take 3 trips during that one day per month, the first being K-2, the second being dropping off K-2, and picking up the grades 3-5, and the third trip will be returning the grades 3-5 students. We estimate this being a 5 hour job for the bus driver. This program will only run for the 9 month school year. The hourly wage will be \$20 an hour for the driver. That comes out to \$900 total, and we left \$600 for gas and any extra expenses transportation may cause. Transportation is crucial to our project for a few reasons. The first being the ability to get to the library. The second being to make sure the students have access to safe and reliable transportation each time. The required qualifications are a retired bus driver, who still holds a valid license with no recent or major traffic violations, a background check, and a safety screening. The interns will also be able to ride on the buses and help with maintaining the students.

Volunteer Screening

To ensure the safety and well-being of the students participating in our program, EmpowerED Chattanooga will implement thorough volunteer screening procedures. A total of 20 volunteers will be recruited to support the implementation of our grant initiatives, particularly in providing one-on-one reading assistance and conducting literacy activities.

Each volunteer will be required to undergo a comprehensive background check to assess any past criminal history or offenses. This background check will include scrutiny of state and federal criminal records, as well as sex offender registries, ensuring that individuals with potentially harmful backgrounds are not permitted to interact with students.

In adherence to our commitment to student safety, volunteers will also be subject to drug testing. This additional measure aims to prevent any potential risks associated with substance abuse and ensures that volunteers maintain a safe and conducive environment for student learning.

EmpowerED Chattanooga understands the importance of maintaining the highest standards of safety and professionalism when engaging volunteers in educational settings. By implementing rigorous screening procedures, we aim to provide students with the support they need while prioritizing their safety and well-being at all times.

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