

Mentoring Urban Students & Teens

M.U.S.T. Summer Success Program

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Applicants must submit the [Letter of Interest Submission Form](#) and upload to the form a Letter of Interest as a PDF attachment **no later than February 16, 2024 by 11:59PM Pacific Time**. To ensure formatting aligns with the below guidelines, we encourage applicants to make use of this Letter of Interest template.

A Letter of Interest must adhere to the following guidelines:

- No more than five pages in total length, excluding the cover page
- Cover page identifies:
 - o Partnership name (If applicable)
 - o Application point of contact
 - o Name of the organization that will act as fiscal agent
- All bolded questions are numbered and answered serially (see pgs. 6-8 in the Request for Letters of Interest)
- Responses are single spaced in Times New Roman 11-point font

Note: All LOIs submitted to WSAC will be publicly available on the WSAC website in advance of the recommendations made to Council (est. May 2024).

1. Why are the partner organizations that are or will be included in this work the ones that came together to address educational attainment through place-based work in your region?

Mentoring Urban Students & Teens (M.U.S.T.) Offers an unparalleled three-tier mentoring model that is guided by a holistic approach to the development of our Mentees and Mentors. Within the The M.U.S.T. community, every individual (Mentees, Mentors, and Coaches) are supported and encouraged to take control of their story as they realize their own unique mental, physical, emotional and spiritual potential through connection and brotherhood.

Mentees join the M.U.S.T. community during the summer leading up to their freshman year in high school. They are paired with relatable, emerging adult Mentors (young Black males ages 18-25) to help guide and inspire them over the course of their high school tenure as they form a vision for their future and discover their authentic path in life. Likewise, the Mentors are paired with volunteer adult Coaches committed to supporting them on their own path by assisting them in development of their leadership styles and life skills. The Mentee/Mentor relationship is cultivated through weekly breakfasts before school, as well as bi-weekly, weekend outings with their cohort. In addition to creating a space for Mentees, Mentors, and Coaches to liberate themselves via their relationships within the M.U.S.T. community, M.U.S.T. also provides support in the form of monetary compensation and transportation independence for Mentors, along with food assistance for participants and their families.

Since M.U.S.T.'s launch in 2012 Participant data has been tracked and assessed pre, during and post programming. Youth who participate in regular mentoring sessions and group outings have been shown to have significant growth and retention in school and life outcomes. School grade tracking shows a notable positive upward trend, while graduation rates and school completion, compared to those who do not receive mentoring services within similar demographics, are significantly higher. Similar outcomes are reflected in college and technical school enrollment after high school, and career placement and retention rates are elevated as well. All in all, participation in M.U.S.T. programming has shown significant positive outcomes for the youth it serves. These outcomes are similar to other mentoring models seen nation wide for underserved populations: Mentoring works.

M.U.S.T. focuses its programming in the South Seattle area and has a strong partnership with the Seattle Public School district allowing access to student information and the ability to work with counselors, teachers and administrators in recruitment and retention of Mentees. M.U.S.T. also relies heavily on its collaboration with parents and caregivers of the youth it serves, offering family support and communication help when needed as well and food security and resource connections. In addition to these important relationships, M.U.S.T. often works with local colleges, career placements and other community organizations to develop and implement wrap around services and be able to best support the youth and families M.U.S.T. serves.

Moving into 2024 M.U.S.T. is strengthening its partnership with Pacific Northwest colleges by collaborating on more opportunities for the youth in M.U.S.T. programming to not only tour colleges, but spend time on campus to experience what college life is like. This includes partnering with groups like The Brotherhood Initiative which provides opportunities for academic growth and leadership, exploration of intersecting identities, and support to underrepresented men of color at the University of Washington. M.U.S.T. participants will get to spend full days, and some overnights, shadowing members of groups like The Brotherhood Initiative, attending classes, exploring labs and facilities, and joining them in extracurricular activities, giving M.U.S.T. participants a true taste of what college life is like and nurturing seeds of curiosity and ambition. In addition to building relationships focused on college readiness, M.U.S.T. is also strengthening partnerships with local industry leaders to provide workshops and hands-on experience opportunities in career exploration with a focus on technology, trades and entrepreneurship.

M.U.S.T. and those partnering with M.U.S.T. in these endeavors strongly believe in the cultivation of the younger generation to prepare them for success as they grow into adulthood. Furthermore, these experiences serve M.U.S.T. Mentors (Black males ages 19-29) by offering inspiration and guidance as they continue to explore possibilities for, and work toward their own postsecondary education.

2. How is or will the partnership be structured?

M.U.S.T. is developing these partnership structures serving as the lead organizer for collaborations. M.U.S.T. works with each partner to establish a plan of action including dates, times, itineraries and goals for the events and activities M.U.S.T. participants will engage in. Partners contribute by offering ideas and suggestions for activities based on their expertise, leading the events and activities that take place at their location or with their organization and helping collect and organize data from each event. While M.U.S.T. will rely on its partners to serve as the lead during hosting events and activities, M.U.S.T. staff will be present to observe, and help where needed at all events.

3. How have or will the partner organizations learn from each other and the communities served, and how does or will the partnership incorporate this learning into ongoing work?

M.U.S.T. has experienced how effective partnerships contribute to the success of its participants in many ways. From providing opportunities for its participants through structured collaboration, participants get to access resources, network and gain insight into their future college and career goals, to allowing M.U.S.T. and its partners to learn about ways they can collaborate with each other to provide wrap around services to the youth and young adults they serve collectively. Collaboration and communication within these partnerships help shape programming and offerings as societal changes take place over time.

One example of successful partnership M.U.S.T. has been a part of for many years, is the collaboration with Seattle Public Schools. As middle and high school administrators, counselors and staff help identify and recommend students to M.U.S.T. programming, the support and opportunities those students get through their participation with M.U.S.T. bolsters their academic achievement in high school. This symbiotic relationship between M.U.S.T. and Seattle Public Schools helped shaped ideas and planned outcomes in new partnerships M.U.S.T. is making with colleges and industry leaders where M.U.S.T. participants get to explore and learn about opportunities available to them after high school which leads to college matriculation, trade school enrollment and internships. It is M.U.S.T.'s plan and hope that these new partnerships will continue to grow and develop into long lasting, mutually beneficial relationships that ultimately improve the lives of the youth and young adults M.U.S.T. serves.

4. Who are the focal population(s) in your partnership's work, and what assets do learners and families in these populations bring to their educational journeys?

M.U.S.T Supports the local Black community by providing culturally responsive programming in the form of mentoring to high school aged Black males, jobs to emerging adult Black male Mentors, and family support for participants' families. Our direct services impact the broader community and schools we serve by decreasing crime, increasing employment and attendance rates, and supporting the education and liberation of one of the most vulnerable demographics. The Black males M.U.S.T. serves come from all different backgrounds and socioeconomic positions, however they all share the experience of being a Black male in the Seattle area. This experience, combined with their own unique backgrounds, provides a robust, nurturing environment of brotherhood and community where participants share, learn from and

grow with each other. Older participants and M.U.S.T. Mentors offer support and guidance to younger participants, while also offering perspective, ideas and encouragement to each other. Likewise, M.U.S.T. Mentors are all paired with volunteer adult coaches who offer support and guidance as Mentors work toward their postsecondary and career goals.

M.U.S.T. believes that having strong support systems and community is of upmost importance in attaining success in high school, postsecondary education, career, and social emotional wellbeing. M.U.S.T. participants bring innumerable assets to their educational journeys including ambition, creativity, perspective, ingenuity, and so much more.

5. What is the geographic region where the focal population(s) that would be served by this investment live?

M.U.S.T. focuses its programming on the South Seattle area where the majority of its participants reside and go to school, however, M.U.S.T. programming is open to any Black male high school student in King County, and Mentorship positions are open to any Black male age 19-29 who can serve M.U.S.T. Mentees. Existing and new partnerships include colleges, organizations and industry leaders from all over Western Washington and spanning into central and Eastern Washington.

6. What are some of the systemic barriers that learners and families in your focal population(s) encounter?

Young Black males broadly, but especially in urban areas like Seattle, are subject to innumerable disadvantages, historical road-blocks to success and generational trauma. They possess the same desire, potential, curiosity, ability and creativity as their non-black counterparts, but due to inequity in opportunity, young Black males are less likely to realize their full potential as they grow into adulthood, and are more likely to engage in harmful and risky behaviors which lead to poor performance in school, barriers to obtaining postsecondary degrees and employment, and involvement in the justice system. It is a multi-dimensional and dynamic situation young Black males face, as the factors that contribute to the inequity they experience are seeded in generational disadvantages, historical discriminatory policies and societal exclusionary systems that are not easily changeable, and often difficult to pinpoint. However, the effects of the inequity young Black males face can be seen in statistical data such as the Seattle Public Schools Health Profile:

(<https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/data/~-/media/depts/health/data/documents/schools/seattle-school-district-healthprofile.ashx>) In the above data, in every category, and almost every subcategory Black youth rank more at-risk than their white counterparts. This includes rates of obesity, mental health, violence and personal safety, and drug use. These risk factors all have a direct link to diminished success in school leading to lack of postsecondary education and/or employment. In addition to these, there are many more statistics and circumstances not included in this study, such as inadequate adult supervision and support, which is often the result of parents or guardians of Black youth needing to work more and/or farther from home than other demographics because of pay and higher education inequality. Statistics from DCYF Show that in 2019 (the most recent available data) in King county almost half of the youth incarcerated were Black, while Black youth only make up about 9% of the youth population in King county. This racial disparity is the social construct process rooted in the byproducts and complexities of systematic racism. (DCYF, 2021: <https://www.dcyf.wa.gov/practice/practice-improvement/ojj/racial-ethnic-disparities>) While M.U.S.T. aims to focus on the positive and empowerment of the youth it serves,

it would be amiss to not acknowledge its role in addressing the systematic social barriers that persists in the day-to-day lives of the Black youth it serves.

7. What work do you propose undertaking during the granting period?

While school year Mentoring is the foundation of M.U.S.T. programming and has historically followed a set schedule of weekly one on one mentoring sessions, bi-weekly outings, and quarterly life skills events, M.U.S.T. summer programming has continued to evolve and grow in response to participants' and their families' needs, as well as societal trends and data driven outcome objectives. In summer 2023 M.U.S.T. piloted a more focused, goal oriented, partner inclusive summer program that addressed past participant road blocks while at the same time creating a more robust, experience driven schedule of events and outings intended to better meet the needs of participants and their families while staying true to M.U.S.T.'s mission. In summer 2023 M.U.S.T. participants engaged in regular weekly outings and events with their cohort, Mentors and M.U.S.T. staff including college campus tours and engagements, career exploration events, trade school workshops, nature outings and leadership exercises. During this time M.U.S.T. participants were challenged to meet predetermined summer goals to earn a monetary stipend. Though Mentees acknowledge that M.U.S.T. programming is year round when they enroll, and are eager to participate in summer activities, they often find themselves with a need to cut back on their participation during summer because of financial and transportation roadblocks. Many choose to work summer jobs or find other ways of making money with the free time they have during summer break so that they can contribute to their families' financial needs. After looking at the success of other low income youth programs both locally and nationally, that offer participant's stipends for completing programming benchmarks, M.U.S.T. piloted a summer monetary stipend program in summer 2023. M.U.S.T. leadership has worked diligently on developing a strategic stipend program framework that supports M.U.S.T. participants while holding them accountable by giving them the responsibility to meet the stipend requirements which are:

- Intro and outro meeting with Parent, Mentor and AD.
- Complete 3 independent College, Career readiness activities.
- Participate in both overnight summer programming trips.
- Lead or assist a mentor in at least one group meeting, program or activity.
- Complete monthly reflection and reporting meetings with AD.
- Meet Productivity goals set by AD team. (80% attendance or programming including meals and outings)

This stipend program not only bolstered participants' excitement to be a part of M.U.S.T. summer programming, but had significant wider reaching effects in reducing stress on participants and their families, diverting participants from risky behaviors, producing a sense of pride and independence in participants, and improve mental health over summer and as they prepare for the coming school year.

The outcomes of M.U.S.T.'s 2023 summer pilot program were exceptional and data collected during this time solidified the idea that robust, experiential, continual summer programming for M.U.S.T. participants is necessary. A Regional Challenge Grant from the Washington Student Achievement Council in 2024 would allow for M.U.S.T. and its partners to implement this new, college and career readiness focused summer stipend program as a permanent core part of M.U.S.T. programming making M.U.S.T. programming a two part, full year experience for participants.

8. How will this proposed work contribute to increasing educational attainment for the focal population(s) in your region?

M.U.S.T. summer programming impacts participants in a distinctly important way. For new Mentees entering their freshman year in high school and their first year in the M.U.S.T. community, summer programming offers students the opportunity to make connections with their peers, understand what to expect going into their high school career, learn how to set goals and be successful in their classes, advocate for themselves, and start thinking about their futures. Similarly, for older students entering their second, third or fourth year of high school, summer programming allows them to maintain connections with their peers, learn life skills, explore college and career pathways and build on their social and emotional development. Summer programming engages participants in regular, structured events designed to expose them to new opportunities, college readiness activities including campus tours, college application, enrollment, financial aid and scholarship workshops, career exploration and leadership development experiences. A core focus in all M.U.S.T. programming is liberation, and that theme is maintained in everything the youth do within the M.U.S.T. community. Continued engagement with students through summer sets them up for success in the coming school year and beyond.