CoBro Strategies for Evaluation of GEAR UP

**• The extent to which the methods of evaluation are thorough, feasible, and appropriate to the goals, objectives, and outcomes of the proposed project;**

The GEAR UP evaluation plan is structured around methods and strategies proven successful in GEAR UP project evaluation. Our comprehensive evaluation plan is based on rigorous quasi-experimental and experimental research methodology, and leverages the substantial skills and experience of our project team and program evaluators, in the evaluation design, implementation, and reporting processes.

We frame program objectives, indicators, and input/output variables within the context of a logic model (presented as Exhibit XX in the Project Design section), to ensure that program efforts, resources, and intended outcomes are clearly linked. Our multi-method approach incorporates formative and summative assessment to monitor achievement of the project's short-term and long-term objectives. Structuring the proposed evaluation plan within a logic model helps ensure our plan is comprehensive and our methods correspond to core essential program elements. The model affirms there is seamless alignment between our proposed service components, evaluation methods and metrics, and project goals, objectives, and indicators.

<If using a comparison group>

The evaluation will incorporate a comparative change model, which includes baseline measures as well as a comparison group derived from similar students based on pre-defined characteristics. This will guard against confounding factors such as history/maturational effects, thus maximizing the internal validity of our analyses. The comparison group will be selected according to baseline equivalence to GEAR UP students. When needed and feasible, baseline scores will be included in analyses as a covariate in order to help attribute the impact of particular program components as well as overall program impact, while accounting for selection effects.

<If using a retrospective comparison group>

Use of a retrospective comparison group, or a group of students prior to GEAR UP students at the same schools, benefits from many of the advantages of a matched comparison group design in terms of school location, culture and climate, educational policies, teachers, and regional demographics, as well as the availability of data from the proposed schools (see T. Walser, Quasi-Experiments in Schools: The Case for Historical Cohort Control Groups, Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, June 2015, v.19:6). Within this comparison group of students, additional methods to ensure comparability to GEAR UP students may be applied, such as selecting a propensity matched subset of the comparison group. Such decisions will be based on initial analyses of baseline equivalence.

<If using a comparison group of students from similar non-GEAR UP schools, e.g., matched schools>

Comparison groups may be defined as students from schools in the same grade levels as GEAR UP students but from different <state, district> schools which are demographically similar to the proposed GEAR UP schools. These matched schools would be identified and selected based on school-level characteristics of student demographics and achievement. This method benefits from mimicking the cohort model of the GEAR UP program, tracking classes of students as a whole, and allowing for the similar natural movement of students and staff in and out of the schools over time as occurs within the GEAR UP program cohort model.

**• The extent to which the methods of evaluation include the use of objective performance measures that are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project and will produce quantitative and qualitative data to the extent possible**

Program evaluation will be conducted by our designated external evaluator, CoBro Consulting, who will incorporate methods of evaluation which complement the premises underlying our logic model. Progress will be assessed based on clearly defined measures of achievement, which correspond to components of the objectives. This ensures that efforts directly align with project goals, providing a roadmap toward the project's success. The logic model supports evaluation of progress, by information about service linkages that are intended to impact particular objectives.

Our data collection processes are structured to provide relevant data elements for each of these measures, including course enrollment and outcomes, standardized assessment scores, FAFSA completion, and college enrollment data. Analyses of this information will enable us to examine our performance indicators in Exhibit X, and understand our progress in achieving the program’s objectives. Targets were determined using baseline data available for proposed and comparable schools at the time of proposal. We will gather additional baseline data in Year 1 and revise the targets accordingly if needed.

Exhibit X. <Insert Objectives Table Here>

**• The extent to which the methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and permit periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes**

Evaluation will be embedded in program processes, with ongoing, formative examination of data pertaining to program services (content and delivery), communication, organizational culture/climate, processes, service impact and effectiveness, and sustainability. The plan involves a wide array of data for analysis and decision-making, including, as mentioned earlier, student academic data and student and parent GEAR UP service participation data.

CoBro evaluation staff will generate various types of reports in addition to pre-programmed reports available within the Compass system. On an annual basis, in preparation for APR reporting, as well as every other year in response to biennial report requirements, CoBro will examine progress toward the program's objectives, examining data pertaining to the measures specified for each objective as well as any interim related data that may indicate progress. Longitudinal data will accrue as the program matures and multiple years of data are available, for examination of long-term trends and/or evidence of sustainability.

In addition to these mandated reports, CoBro Consulting will also provide an evaluation report during the years in which no biennial report is mandated. CoBro staff will work with GEAR UP administrators to determine useful topics for these reports, which may include, for example, additional information or data exploration pertaining to specific objectives, in depth examination of a particular intervention, or further analysis of a question arising from previous reports. Such reporting will ensure that our evaluation remains current to our needs and provides an opportunity for ad hoc analysis and formative evaluation, examining pertinent issues as they arise.

**• The extent to which the evaluation will provide guidance about effective strategies suitable for replication or testing in other settings**

Use of the proposed performance indicators, data sources, and evaluation strategies within the framework illustrated in the logic model will allow GEAR UP to routinely determine the efficacy of individual program components. Our methodology, employing a quasi-experimental approach, will demonstrate overall program impact, and will also reveal the effects of particular services and/or the impacts on student subgroups. Moreover, we will be able to determine optimal levels of service performance by examining dosage effects upon student outcomes. As successful strategies and their best conditions of application are identified, we will use such findings to expand on, and replicate, best practices, thus effecting continuous program improvement. We will routinely share these evaluation outcomes with staff/personnel, and our key stakeholders.

Beyond our GEAR UP project team and program stakeholders, we will also disseminate our evaluation outcomes externally. We will document our best practices and results within our GEAR UP APRs and biennial evaluation results reports to ED. We will present our findings in …. GEAR UP and CoBro staff will deliver presentations and workshops at regional and national conferences, so that others may benefit from our evaluation findings and determination of GEAR UP practices that are proven effective and replicable. Likewise, CoBro consultants have a documented history of presenting key findings from evaluations with the GEAR UP community, in order to further the library of evidence of promise pertaining to GEAR UP, and they have delivered over 50 such presentations/workshops at GEAR UP conferences since 2004.

<If currently have a successful GEAR UP program>

Additionally, this project will benefit from our past experience with GEAR UP, such that we already will be replicating and/or improving upon effective strategies for a similar population, and therefore demonstrating how such replication can be conducted. This ongoing cycle of evaluation, improvement, and replication allows for continuous advancement of college access strategies.