

Evaluation Report Brief

Greater Twin Cities United Way: College Possible College Program

What is the community challenge?

There are several barriers to college readiness, access, and success particularly for first generation college students, low SES students, and other at-risk populations. These barriers typically fall into three main areas: academic, financial, and social/cultural.

What is the promising solution?

College Possible is a college-readiness, access, and success organization that supports and coaches low-income college students through ACT and SAT test preparation, college application assistance, financial aid consulting, guidance during the transition from high school to college, and ongoing support toward degree completion.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: College Possible College Program

Grantee: Greater Twin Cities United Way

Subgrantee: College Possible

Focus Area: Youth Development

Focus Population: Minneapolis and St. Paul high school graduates attending six local colleges.

Community Served: Minneapolis and St. Paul

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of College Possible included both implementation and impact evaluation components. The impact study was designed to evaluate with a moderate level of evidence whether College Possible participants have greater persistence and graduation rates than a similar cohort of non-participants. The impact study included three cohorts of students. The implementation study was designed to measure the program's fidelity of implementation, identify areas where the program could be strengthened, and measure the intensity and content of the coaching that students in the 2013 cohort received during each year of the study.

What did the evaluation find?

As a grantee of CNCS Programs Greater Twin Cities United Way, in collaboration with subgrantee College Possible, engaged an independent evaluator, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI), to evaluate the College Possible College Program. An implementation study, and an impact study found:

- The College Possible students in the 2013 cohort had greater graduation rates than students in the comparison group. There was a positive program effect on graduation rates with rates of 46.4 percent among College Possible students and 27.2 percent for the comparison ($p < .008$). This implies that a student in College Possible is, on average, 1.74 times more likely to graduate after four years than a student in the comparison group.
- College Possible students and students in the comparison group had no difference in grades or credits earned. These null findings were consistent for the three combined College Possible cohorts and when the 2013 cohort was analyzed separately.

- The implementation study found that the program model encourages coaches to adapt the program to students' individual needs, therefore fidelity of program implementation was not assessed. However, the report notes that future studies could look at other aspects of the coaching (e.g.- frequency of contact with students) to assess program implementation in the future.

Notes on the evaluation

The initial study was of the 2013 cohort of College Possible College Program participants. There were several null findings in that study which were thought to be a result of the small sample size. The study added two more cohorts of similar size in 2014 and 2015 in an attempt to add more statistical power to the study. The statistical power was increased, but the null results continued when the three cohorts were combined.

Because analysis with the combined cohorts found no evidence of an impact of College Possible on the study outcomes during students' first and second years of college, even with the increase in statistical power, this suggests there may be other explanations for the lack of statistically significant effects. Because the analyses of data from the combined cohorts were limited to outcomes in students' first and second years of college, future research should examine the effects of College Possible on students' outcomes beyond the second year of college with a larger sample size to determine if the positive effect on graduation rates for the 2013 cohort can be replicated. The evaluation did, however, reveal several demographic characteristics that were associated with program outcomes such as race/ethnicity and gender.

How is College Possible using the evaluation findings to improve?

The results of the implementation evaluation generated several recommendations for how the college program might be strengthened.

1. Increase the coaches' understanding of College Possible's expectations for the coaches' role in the college program, specifically regarding the emphasis on meeting College Possible benchmarks.
2. Prepare coaches to better meet the College Possible benchmarks when some portfolios might include significant numbers of students who are unresponsive or more difficult to engage.
3. Prepare coaches to develop a meaningful relationship with students, which the coaches believe is critical for the effectiveness of their coaching.
4. Prepare coaches on how they can become familiar with the resources available to students at each institution.
5. Prepare coaches to support students attending community colleges.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: PSM

Study Population: High school graduates from Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Evaluator: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI)

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Moderate

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.