



## School Redesign Request for Information

### Organization:

Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation

### **Partner Background**

*Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation*

Propeller: A Force for Social Innovation drives social, environmental, and economic impact in New Orleans by accelerating ventures that have the potential to solve our region's most pressing issues. Our vision is to build a critical mass of entrepreneurs tackling key challenges in our issue areas of food access, water management, health, and educational equity in order to make significant change for underserved individuals.

Propeller seeks to facilitate collaboration between top-down problem solvers and ground-up innovators, combining the creativity of entrepreneurs, the influence of local policymakers, and the talents and strategy acumen of Propeller's own networks to accelerate change and progress in our city.

At the heart of Propeller's mission lies our Impact Accelerator which provides executive-level mentorship, access to networks and financing, co-working space, and focused curriculum to connect local innovators with the resources they need to impact our city and build sustainable businesses. In addition to individual business acceleration, Propeller convenes entrepreneurs, policymakers, potential funders, and other players within the sector to build a critical mass of entrepreneurs addressing issues crucial to our community and building the strength of our cluster assets.

For the past 5 years, Propeller has been a leader in social entrepreneurship in New Orleans and beyond. Highlighted as "...part of a growing national movement that is catalyzing change at the local scale" by Politico, we offer a range of services and resources to community members to support their innovative ideas to better our city.



*Entrepreneurs solving local challenges in the Propeller Incubator space.*

### *Propeller's Mission*

Propeller's education strategy aligns with Louisiana's plan for struggling schools by generating a network of organizations that create a comprehensive, holistic support system to close the gap in educational achievement in New Orleans and beyond. Within our Education Sector, Propeller supports a variety of ventures with viable solutions to improve educational outcomes and to close the achievement gap for youth aged 0-24. We pursue a system-wide approach that will:

- Reduce the effects of trauma on student leading to a decrease in expulsion and suspension rates.
- Increase in high quality and affordable early child care seats particularly in communities where few currently exist;
- Increase in alternative pathways to education and workforce development for 'opportunity youth';
- Support the creation of a partnership between schools and the Regional Transit Authority to lessen the burden of transportation costs for schools and improve access to transportation for the students;
- Increase access to healthy foods and healthy behaviors in schools.

Propeller's mission compliments the Department of Education's belief that the redesign of persistently struggling schools is an issue of civil rights and racial equity. We recognize that access to quality educational experiences and opportunities has long been denied to marginalized groups, and while we have made progress, our state and districts have a long way to go. In recent months, Propeller has begun the hard work of reassessing and expanding our programming - not only to reflect the demographic diversity of our city, but also to correct injustices to groups that have been disadvantaged and socially, politically, and economically under resourced and excluded.



*Students at ReNEW Cultural Arts Academy enjoy their healthy lunch provided by Health School Food Collaborative (Propeller '13).*

## **Evidence of Track Record of Student and School Outcomes**

Since 2011, Propeller has accelerated 135 social ventures that have generated \$62 million in financing and revenue, and created over 270 full- and part-time jobs. While we highlight the impact our ventures have had within our four sectors, proven success in areas such as job creation and economic growth are equally important to the stability of communities that surround each industry. Tackling issues from all sides, our education ventures have dramatically improved school systems, school performance, and student success through innovative ideas addressing the triggers of low school performance.

We know that issues of health disparities and healthy food access affect the performance and wellbeing of students in New Orleans schools. Two ventures in particular have been working to address these social issues. Healthy School Food Collaborative (Propeller '13) has generated \$9.8 million in revenue to serve fresh, locally-sourced, healthy meals to 43% of all New Orleans public schools. High Level Hearing (Propeller '15) has treated more than 1,000 patients and contracted with 18 schools to conduct hearing screenings and fit students for hearing aids. As a determinant of educational success, issues of health need to be resolved.

School health is equally as critical as student health for educational outcomes. To achieve educational equity we must ensure that schools are a safe and supportive environment for ALL students. One venture in particular has found success in reducing discipline through conflict mitigation, violence reduction, and leadership development programs. The Center for Restorative Approaches (Propeller '15) has completed 87 restorative circles and trained 560 staff to reduce school suspensions and break the school to prison pipeline.

Additionally, our ventures build strong professional development and support for teachers. Whetstone Education (Propeller '16) creates technology

to drive teacher growth that is used in 300 schools across the country by 11,500 teachers impacting over 250,000 students. TrueSchool (Propeller '14) has collaborated with more than 513 educators to prototype and pilot innovations to drive student achievement, collectively impacting more than 20,000 students.



*Teachers participate in a training session by The Center of Restorative Approach (Propeller '15) at Livaudais Middle School.*

As we support students through school, we also think about the opportunities they are afforded beyond their grade school years. College Beyond (Propeller '16) supports the post secondary transition by providing counselor training and mentoring programs reaching over 1,000 students to increase college admission, enrollment, and persistence. Youth Rebuilding New Orleans (Propeller '16) gives students skills that can help them secure future careers. They have engaged more than 10,000 youth volunteers to help over 350 homeowners and rebuild 13 homes, which were resold to deserving teachers at a reduced cost (80% market rate) to stabilize neighborhoods and positively impact the education system.

While many of our ventures focus on specific disparities in education, we also have a number of ventures creating extracurricular opportunities for underserved populations. These organizations seek to engage students with interests ranging from STEM, arts, and sports to environmental awareness and safe spaces for LGBTQ students.

Additionally, we see strong potential from our current Startup Accelerator Ventures tackling the most pressing challenges of race and equality in the South. Overcoming Racism provides training and consulting services to help guide schools and teachers through the process of developing anti-racist educators. While Southern History Project increases the number of students from the American South who graduate from college through the development and implementation of engaging, relevant social studies curricula tailored to southern schools.

The impact of our ventures on improving New Orleans school systems and student outcomes demonstrate the effectiveness of Propeller's network of organizations and leaders to uniquely and comprehensively solve problems through collaboration and innovation.

## **Organizational Model**

### *Differentiation*

The nature of our programming and expertise within each of our four sectors allow Propeller to have a unique ability to meet the challenges of different schools and districts throughout Louisiana. We tailor our programs to meet the specific goals of a wide range of organizations from non-profits to for-profits working in Early Childcare Education, K-12, and Opportunity Youth.

Propeller not only works to solve problems inside the classroom, but our sector focus allows us to work on education from a perspective that takes into account other tangential factors and larger policy issues, like the transportation initiative, consumption study and work to reform food standards in schools – as Healthy School Food Collaborative did.

Although we are based in New Orleans, Propeller can support in addressing challenges in a diversity of regions. We are currently expanding programming to Baton Rouge in some of our sectors. Additionally, many of our ventures are already doing work in schools outside of the city of New Orleans. We solve local challenges in education through a network of social entrepreneurs and innovators that can be utilized elsewhere in Louisiana.

### *Ideal Partner School or District*

As a New Orleans-based organization with a mission to tackle issues within the Greater New Orleans area, we would most effectively work with schools and districts that are in geographical proximity to New Orleans. However, we have experience impacting other districts and cities through the reach of our partner organizations. Propeller's ideal partner school or district would share our belief in solving difficult challenges through innovative and collaborative strategies willing to take risks to achieve success.

Additionally, the school or district would recognize the intersection of challenges in education with issues in Healthcare, Food Security and Water Management and seek to make decisions for change keeping that perspective in mind.

### *Working with Third Party Providers*

Propeller's Accelerator Program connects social entrepreneurs with the industry-specific resources they need to grow and scale their ventures. Propeller provides ventures with one-on-one mentorship, access to high-level networks and investors, pro bono consultants, and access to the Propeller Incubator space.

Our work in education policy advocacy is collaborative at its core. As mentioned, Propeller is currently working on a transportation initiative to address challenges faced in school transportation by improving access for New Orleans high school students and lowering costs for New Orleans Public Schools. This initiative involves working alongside many partners including New Orleans Kids Partnership, Ride New Orleans, the Regional Transit Authority, school district leaders and our City Council.

Working with others to expand resources for those who need them most is an integral part of our mission and programming. Not only do we have the experience, but we have proven to be an effective gatekeeper of information and communication. Our goal is to provide expertise for schools and districts in need of similar support in an effort to help them refine and scale their impact with students and families.

### *Support*

In order to enhance Propeller's success as a partner, we would need funding for the support of third party organizations. Depending on the needs of the district or school with whom we work, we will connect them to organizations who focus on their specific challenges. We will use the funding to compensate the organizations prepared to solve those issues in the district or school, and to further support the development of a partner pipeline effective in supporting the redesign of schools.