

Young Invincibles' Comments on Awards for Innovation in Higher Education

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September 15, 2014

Committee on Awards for Innovation in Higher Education
State Capitol, Room 112
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Committee Members:

Young Invincibles is a national non-partisan advocacy organization committed to expanding economic opportunities for young adults, with particular focus on health care, employment, and education. We believe that higher education is the pathway toward economic stability for many young adults. For this reason, we write in strong support of rewarding institutions and partnerships that are developing innovative ways to increase the amount of students who receive bachelor's degrees.

We are pleased to see that the Committee is looking for creative ideas that can be scaled and replicated by multiple institutions. Young adults are counting on innovations that will strengthen and streamline the higher education system. Given the great opportunity that these awards present, we humbly commend the following considerations as you embark on the task of selecting awardees:

Equity and Reducing Disparities

California's public higher education institutions have served as an opportunity for economic advancement for some young people, but other groups of young Californians have experienced disparate access to education and preparation for the workforce. The stated goals of the Awards address problems that disproportionately impact students of color. Unemployment rates among Californians ages 18 to 34 remain far higher (11.4 percent) than the rate among the full working-age population of 7.9 percent.¹ However, black young adults are unemployed at a rate over twice that of white young adults in our state – 24 percent and 11 percent, respectively.² As a result, California loses approximately \$219.2 million in revenue each year due to young adult unemployment.³ We look forward to learning more about institutions that are addressing young adult unemployment and persistent disparities through higher education and respectfully request that the Committee consider an emphasis on ending disparities and creating greater equity as part of your selection criteria. Specifically, where the application calls for statistical profiles of students served, we would appreciate analysis of students who are excluded by the status quo including African American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, undocumented, women, and LGBT students as well as an analysis of the program's impact on those disparities.

¹ Young Invincibles' analysis of "Current Population Survey," Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Census Bureau, accessed June 25, 2014.

² Young Invincibles' analysis of "Current Population Survey," Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Census Bureau, accessed June 25, 2014.

³ Rory O'Sullivan, Konrad Mugglestone, and Tom Allison, In This Together: The Hidden Cost of Young Adult Unemployment, (Washington, DC: Young Invincibles, January 2014), 26-29, <http://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/In-This-Together-The-Hidden-Cost-of-Young-Adult-Unemployment.pdf>.



Community Colleges

We appreciate that the application encourages Community Colleges to apply because we believe that community colleges are a crucial pathway for young Californians to improve their economic positions. With nearly one-quarter of all community college students nationwide enrolled in California's 112 community colleges, California Community Colleges are the largest higher education system in the country.⁴ However, less than half of all California community college students earn a certificate, associate's degree, or transfer to a four-year institution within six years.⁵ The rates are much worse for African American and Hispanic students, at 37.5 percent and 39.1 percent respectively.⁶ This is particularly troublesome considering African American and Hispanic students accounted for almost half of the entire student population at CCC in the 2012-13 academic year.⁷ Strengthening these institutions has important consequences on individual students as well as the state's economy. Associates degree holders earn nearly \$200,000 more over a lifetime than individuals with some college education but no degree.⁸ We are hopeful that awardees will focus on improving the completion and transfer rates of community colleges and building smooth pathways between K-12, community college, 4-year institutions, and the workforce.

Student Engagement

Through our work in California and across the nation, Young Invincibles has engaged young adults in substantive conversations about the challenges they face in accessing jobs and jobs training. Our generation is thoughtful, creative, entrepreneurial, and most importantly, we are experts on our own lives. Programs with a track record of including input from young adults in their design and implementation should be prioritized in the selection process. We feel that including young people in the selection and implementation process will be crucial to ensuring that these innovations are effectively tailored toward the needs of young Californians.

Thank you for your work on this exciting endeavor, we look forward to seeing a better higher education system for young Californians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Leu".

Linda Leu
California Policy and Research Director
Young Invincibles

⁴ Foundation for California Community Colleges, "California community colleges." Accessed June 27, 2014. [http://www.foundationccc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=uQqtm\)mC4eg=&tabid=636](http://www.foundationccc.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=uQqtm)mC4eg=&tabid=636).

⁵ California Community Colleges Student Success Initiative, "Student success scorecard." Accessed June 27, 2014. <http://scorecard.cccco.edu/scorecardrates.aspx?CollegeID=000#home>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ United States Census Bureau, "Work-life earnings by field of degree and occupation for people with a bachelor's degree: 2011." Accessed June 27, 2014, 4. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acsbr11-04.pdf>.