

Strong Women, Strong Girls Application

Strong Women, Strong Girls (SWSG) was founded in 2000 as a student group at Harvard University by then-student Lindsay Hyde. The first cohort consisted of only six college women and 30 elementary school girls, yet, since its inception, SWSG has intentionally connected girls from communities that are under-resourced and populations that are historically marginalized with caring women mentors from local colleges and universities. By 2004 there was significant demand for the all-female group mentoring model, and SWSG incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Since then, SWSG has grown into one of Boston's largest mentorship programs, annually serving 570+ elementary girls in 3th-5th grade across 45 program sites. Every year, more than 220 college women from seven partnering universities and 70+ professional women serve as our cohort of volunteer mentors.

Our mission is to empower girls to imagine a broader future for themselves through after school sessions facilitated by college mentors, who are themselves mentored by professional women. Our vision is that all girls and women will realize their inner strength to dream and do.

Program Need

Well into the 21st century, girls and women continue to confront significant opportunity gaps that limit their achievement and their leadership. The need for mentoring programs like SWSG, which enhances self-esteem and reduces risk factors for girls in Boston, cannot be overstated. A 2018 survey of 1,300 girls conducted by YPULSE, "The Confidence Code for Girls: The Confidence Collapse and Why it Matters for the Next Gen," illustrates the challenges girls' face as they reach middle school. They found that between the ages of 8 and 14, girls' confidence levels fall by 30 percent, and between the ages 12 and 13, the percentage of girls who say they're not allowed to fail increases by 150 percent. (YPULSE, 2018). These negative feelings developed at such a young age can have lasting impacts on girls' aspirations and achievements in high school, college and beyond. Girls of color, in particular, face disproportionate challenges that impede their fulfillment of potential. They are significantly more likely to be suspended or expelled, and not graduate from high school, limiting options for employment and higher education (Novo Foundation, 2018). They are also the fastest growing segment within the juvenile justice system (Novo Foundation, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, young girls in Boston face several mental health risks. Over one year, 36% of females within the Boston Public Schools reported feeling sad or hopeless consistently for two weeks, and 16% reported seriously considering suicide (Harvard Institute of Politics Women's Policy Group & The Boston Foundation, 2015). SWSG recognizes the critical need for programs that promote pathways to success for girls, and applies two effective strategies, after-school enrichment and mentorship, to invest in the next generation of female leadership.

Specific Request

To continue championing the aspirations and potential of girls in Great Boston through innovative mentorship experiences, SWSG is respectfully requesting \$10,000 from the Framingham State University Nonprofit Giving Class; this grant will support its core mentoring program that helps 570+ girls in third-fifth grade overcome obstacles associated with their gender, race, and/or socioeconomic status.

This multi-generational mentorship model draws strength from caring and consistent college women mentors who deliver a research-based, skill-building curriculum to participating girls every week throughout the academic year at schools and community centers. College women are then mentored by professional women, creating a cycle of service and engagement.

The focal point of the SWSG mentoring model is an experiential curriculum aligned with a recognized framework for Positive Youth Development: the 6 C's. These 6 factors (connection, caring, contribution, character, competence, and confidence) are research-demonstrated capacities that promote positive asset building and boost protective factors, leading to more positive outcomes in young people (Smith et al., 2017). Each lesson teaches girls about a female role model who embodies the 6 C's, plus skills such as bravery, perseverance and goal-setting. The lessons are culturally relevant (grounded in the social context of girls served) and developmentally appropriate (activities, vocabulary, and learning techniques align with cognitive abilities of this age group). The model provides opportunities for girls to relate to and practice these skills in the context of their own lives through journaling, hands-on activities, and small group and peer reflection.

This program is carried out by our 220+ college women mentors from 7 partnering university chapters: Harvard University, Boston College, Tufts University, Boston University, Northeastern University, University of Massachusetts-Boston, and Simmons College, and managed and facilitated by a team of SWSG staff members, including Program Director Patricia McGuinness, Program Manager Sarah Smiley, Program Coordinator Rossye Alvarez, and Mentor Coach Minh Nguyen.

A general timeline of the program, which is ongoing and follows the school year calendar, is:

- September 2019: Full-day mentor training
- Ongoing from September 2019 through April 2020:
 - Participating girls receive 22 weekly 90-minute mentoring sessions
 - Mentors receive onsite support from a mentor coach, a SWSG staff person
 - Program staff perform site visits, visiting each site at least once
 - Program management team attends college chapter meetings every other week to provide additional support and oversight
 - Girls participate in an end-of-program event and field trip
- January 2020: Full-day mentor training
- March 2020: Completion of service project by girls
- May-August 2020: Attend professional development trainings; community partner and university outreach; planning for upcoming school year; college mentor recruitment; finalization of curriculum and preparation of activities.

What makes your organization stand out as distinct?

There are several aspects of SWSG's program that sets us apart from other youth mentoring programs.

1. *Gender-focused at the pivotal stage of pre-adolescence.* SWSG intentionally engages pre-adolescent girls, beginning at age 8, to take a preventative stance against declines in self-confidence and build protective factors. Research shows between the ages of 8 and 14, girls' confidence levels fall by 30 percent (YPULSE, 2018). Providing an inclusive, all-female safe space enables the girls to embrace their abilities, broaden their perspective of what's possible, and

have strong, female role models to look up to for help, guidance and support. In Greater Boston, there are limited systems in place to support girls during adolescence. For example, only 5-7% of foundation funding is granted to women's and girls' initiatives, and only 10% of mentor programs in Greater Boston exclusively address girls' social-emotional and developmental needs.

2. *Multi-generational mentorship model.* SWSG is unique in that it provides girls and college women with a space to model and practice strong, supportive relationships with peers and with mentors/mentees at the same time. The college women, in turn, are mentored by professional women who help them develop professionally and personally, creating a cycle of service and engagement.
3. *Focus on socio-emotional health, with a research-backed curriculum.* Most pertinent to our model is that the SWSG's curriculum is aligned with the 6Cs of Positive Youth Development, an internationally recognized framework that emphasizes experiential learning. Studies show that participants in 6C's-aligned programs demonstrate better decision making, academic performance, health habits, confidence, and are less likely to have depression symptoms and/or engage in delinquent behaviors (Lerner et al., 2005; Lerner et al., 2011). Youth in 6C's-aligned programs have been documented to achieve:
 - Competence: A positive view of one's own actions including better: interpersonal skills, decision making, academic performance, health habits, and vocational aspirations.
 - Confidence: Overall sense of positive self-worth and self-efficacy.
 - Connection: Positive bonds between youth and peers, family, school, and community.
 - Character: Respect for societal norms, possessing standards for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and moral integrity.
 - Caring: A sense of empathy for others.
 - Contribution: Contributions to self, family, and community, and more engaged citizens.

What impacts have you made in the local community?

SWSG provides a free after-school program to over 570 elementary school girls each year. This program has several impacts on the girls and the community:

- *Sense of belonging.* In post-program surveys of participants in Fall 2019, 94% of girls indicated a sense of belonging at SWSG. Girls reported positive relationships with their mentors and other participants, with 94% of girls responding that they care about how other girls and mentors feel at SWSG.
- *Improved attitude toward school:* Based on results, 97% of girls in the program indicated that they feel confident in school and 82% report that they enjoy school. Additionally, 94% of girls indicated feeling confident that they can go to college if they choose.
- *Improved confidence and agency.* We talk with girls about confidence and offer opportunities to build their confidence in an effort to have it translate to other parts of their lives. SWSG's program also enables girls to develop a greater sense of agency – the control they have over their life, goals and happiness.

Below are a few anecdotes that serve as examples of the positive change SWSG can't always measure with numbers. These were collected after a lesson on social awareness, in which girls learned about the late Kip Tiernan, Boston based social activist and founder of Rosie's Place, from their college mentors.

- "After the lesson about the founder of Rosie's Place, our group discussed the importance of standing up for what you believe in. The girls in our group were really passionate about the environment. After our mentoring session, the girls started an environmental club at school. They organized a school clean-up and a "walk to school" day."
- "One day at West End House, one of the girls came in and told the mentors that she had taken the previous week's bio (Kip Tiernan's) home and read it to her little sister. She said she taught her about compassion and how important it is to care for other people because that makes you strong. I believe that embodies the SWSG mission, because not only did she learn about those concepts, but she was able to pass that knowledge on to her little sister."

The following anecdote is from a college mentor, and again exemplifies SWSG's impact not only on the participants in the program, but the community as well:

- "It is my hope to work with young people once I graduate from college and being with SWSG has allowed me to gain more experience in working with young people. Personally, I have been able to learn more about myself as a leader."

What are your other sources of funding?

SWSG operates its programs and expands its offerings in large part through the generosity of foundation grants, corporate sponsorships, and individual donors. A tremendous amount of in-kind support via volunteer time, physical space, and professional development, as well as vital collaborations with 7 college chapters and 45 community sites enables SWSG to operate in an efficient, yet effective manner. The value of volunteer time alone for the agency's 220 college women totals over \$335,000, utilizing the Independent Sector's 2018 estimate of \$32.15/hour.

For the current fiscal year, the agency has secured over \$497,000 to support programs and operations through diverse revenue streams. Current support includes the following Foundation grants: The Paul and Edith Babson Foundation (\$3,000), The Boston Foundation (\$10,000), CHT Foundation (\$3,000), Liberty Mutual Foundation (\$40,000), Cradles to Careers through the Philanthropic Initiative and The Boston Foundation (\$40,000) Imago Dei Fund (\$35,000) Nellie Mae Education Foundation (\$25,000), Mass Mentoring Partnership (\$9,300), Anna B. Stearns Foundation (\$12,500) and Rockland Trust (\$2,500).

In addition to these foundation and corporate gifts, SWSG has a strong base of individuals who give to the agency through their workplace, United Way, and various SWSG campaigns including year-end, Giving Tuesday, and digital opportunities.

What are your short-term and long-term goals?

Through their participation in SWSG, girls in elementary school will achieve the following short- and mid-range outcomes:

1. Build a range of social and emotional skills based on the 6Cs of Positive Youth Development.

2. Increase their understanding of pathways to higher education, as well as, local and global career paths, particularly those nontraditional for women.
3. Improve their capacity to engage in and understand the benefits of meaningful and supportive relationships, both within and outside of SWSG.

SWSG long-term program outcomes are an extension of the short-term outcomes and reflect a deepening of impact over time. Through their continued participation in SWSG, elementary school girls will achieve the following after their time in the program:

1. Grow into strong young women with a positive sense of self.
2. Continue to develop capacities in each of the 6Cs of PYD.
3. Continue to seek out mentoring relationships and leverage the skills of mentorship in their other social relationships.
4. Experience academic success in middle and high school, and pursue higher education, career training or other post-secondary learning.
5. Become socially and civically engaged.
6. Remain involved in SWSG as alumni.

Why are staff members passionate about the work they do?

Staff members at SWSG come from a diverse background, with a variety of skill-sets, experiences, and perspectives, which together form a high powered team of passionate women carrying out the mission of SWSG. As all staff members are women, they understand the barriers and challenges that young girls face and are eager to help create a space for positive youth development. Their drive to be a part of SWSG comes from different places, however the common thread is they want to build strong, confident women leaders of tomorrow. To illustrate some of the staff's paths to SWSG: Rosseye Alvarez, the Program Coordinator, has a long history of involvement with SWSG. She participated in the mentoring program as a young girl, later volunteered as a college mentor and is now on staff. Her dedication and continued involvement with SWSG illustrates the impact of the program on young girls. Patricia McGuinness, our Program Director, is a Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) and began her career in the mental health and juvenile justice field before focusing on roles in prevention. She is dedicated to empowering youth and families and found that opportunity at SWSG. Finally, Sarah Smiley, our Program Manager is passionate about mobilizing education and advocacy as tools for inclusion, accessibility, and sustainable change for women and girls' empowerment, which lead her to SWSG.