



The Council of State Governments
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2011 Innovations Awards Application

DEADLINE: MARCH 28, 2011

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011- _____

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: West Virginia

Assign Program Category (applicant): Education (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name: ***Get a Life***
2. Administering Agency: ***West Virginia State Treasurer's Office***
3. Contact Person (Name and Title): ***Lynn Bennett, NetWorth Program Director***
4. Address: ***18 Meadow Lane, Bridgeport, WV 26330***
5. Telephone Number: ***304-842-4166***
6. FAX Number: ***304-842-8462***
7. E-mail Address: ***lynn.bennett@wvsto.com***
8. Web site Address: ***<http://www.wvsto.com>***
9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

Get a Life (GAL) engages middle school students in activities aimed at providing them with the skills and knowledge to make sound financial decisions about their future. Through simulation, students experience the challenges of purchasing the "needs" of life for a family, while simultaneously being confronted with the lure of acquiring "wants" not feasible for their budget.

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 28, 2011 to be considered.

Get a Life is a component of the NetWorth Personal Financial Education program, which has been in operation since May, 2008. The Get a Life program was first conducted with public school students in December, 2009.

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

West Virginia students consistently score poorly on national assessments of personal finance skills and knowledge. The average scores for seniors was only 48.3% on the most recent Jump\$Start test in 2008. Only 114 West Virginia students participated in the US Treasury sponsored 2010 National Financial Literacy Challenge. The average score for students aged 14-17 was 70.9%. These results do not take into account most of the student test-takers attended one school with a strong financial education program led by a single teacher. Financial literacy is one of the elements identified as a component of the state's Partnership for 21st Century Learning Skills, yet it is not taught in most classrooms. In 2007, the State Legislature mandated the inclusion of financial literacy in the high school curriculum. Consequently, a unit is taught in 12th grade civics classes. However, by this age, students have already established many financial habits. While the Treasurer's Office and others have been promoting financial education for over ten years, the above test results are one indication historical efforts have not resulted in reaching all students or achieving student mastery.

The Get a Life program primarily target 7th and 8th grade students, and is designed to directly ameliorate student attitude about, and mastery of, money management skills. These years of middle school are a critical time for students as they contemplate their five-year plan for high school and beyond. Understanding the importance of their career choices on future life style and success will help ensure they make wise decisions concerning high school courses and their plans for postsecondary education.

The deficient mastery of personal finance among our young adults is reflected anecdotally in comments from employers, college counselors, and financial institutions. In addition, students have little understanding of the costs associated with maintaining a career and family.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The Get a Life program is a cornerstone of the NetWorth initiative. Beginning in December, 2009, the Treasurer's Office conducted three Get a Life pilot programs. Since then, over 5000 students have participated in the program, which leads students through a real world budgeting experience. .

The simulation takes place years in the future when students are in their late 20's, and have decided against post-secondary education. In the first phase of the activity, students are randomly assigned entry level employment, and must establish a monthly budget for transportation and housing, while also maintaining their living expenses (i.e. utilities, fuel, food, etc.). The students are also provided with relevant information about their GAL "family" including the number of children, the housing needs, and distance from the workplace, all factors that impact monthly expenses. The simulation employs real averages of prices for homes, cars, groceries, and other living expenses, as well as a median salary for the profession they are assigned. Students are asked to meet all living expenses on these earnings for one month, and are immediately confronted with the financial challenges facing many families.

Very soon, students realize their financial resources are limited, and they usually complete the initial phase of the program unable to meet all necessary living expenses, and with an exhausted budget. In addition, a "Green Reaper" character randomly selects students for unexpected expenses such as a car accident or broken water line

At the midway point, the students exchange their profile for an occupation requiring postsecondary education with a realistic salary increase. Basic needs remain the same but their purchasing power increases. Some of the many lessons students are exposed to during the simulation include the importance of career choice and education to future success, the distinction between needs and wants, the concept of instant versus delayed gratification, and a realistic understanding of the financial responsibilities of an average family.

While the financial education staff of the Treasurer's Office coordinates GAL, the activity requires support from the school district, schools, and the community. As many as thirty (30) adults representing local business volunteer to man the various stations often representing their own career choices. Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs have taken on the role of recruiting the volunteers.

The goal for the 2010-2011 NetWorth initiative is to conduct a minimum of one Get a Life event in each of the state's fifty-five (55) counties. The financial education staff of the Treasurer's Office works with local school districts, chambers of commerce, and community organizations to plan for and coordinate each event. As many as thirty (30) adults representing local businesses volunteer to man the various stations often representing their own career choices. Chambers of Commerce and Rotary Clubs have taken on the role of recruiting volunteers for each individual, school-based program. It is anticipated approximately 10,000 students will have participated by the end of the school year. The NetWorth initiative is planning to conduct a Get a Life event in every West Virginia middle school by the conclusion of the 2011-2012 school year.

Find a brief timeline of the Get a Life program's implementation below:

- *May, 2008 – Establishment of NetWorth Personal Finance Education program*
- *May, 2008 – November, 2009 – Curriculum development and teacher training*
- *December, 2009 – Conducted first Get a Life simulation*
- *September, 2010 – May, 2011 – GAL in middle schools across the state*

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

While the use of simulation to teach personal finance skills is not a new idea, the comprehensive approach taken by the West Virginia State Treasurer's Office is innovative, and designed to ensure personal finance education reaches students in all of our middle schools. The community volunteers represent businesses and civic organizations in local West Virginia communities, and this community involvement underscores the effectiveness of the Get a Life program, and leads to a sustained effort to promote the entire NetWorth program in West Virginia schools.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

During the initial year of statewide coordination of Get a Life events, the primary costs has been incurred from staffing and staff travel to cover all fifty-five (55) counties. These costs are approximately \$150,000. The West Virginia Financial Education Foundation applied a \$5000 grant from the Council for Economic Education to producing eight (8) complete sets of simulation material for student use.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

During the initial year of statewide coordination of Get a Life events, the primary costs has been incurred from staffing, and staff travel to cover all fifty-five (55) counties. These costs are approximately \$150,000. The West Virginia Financial Education Foundation applied a \$5000 grant from the Council for Economic Education to producing eight (8) complete sets of simulation material for student use.

16. How is the program funded?

All of the funding to date has been committed to completing the 3-phase NetWorth program leading to statewide implementation. In addition to funding from the State Legislative in the first two years, five grants awarded to the West Virginia Financial Education Foundation have provided support. These grants, totaling \$250,000, have supported teacher training activities, replication of resource kits for student activities, and data analysis and reporting for a research project that will measure the overall impact of the NetWorth program. The grants were provided by the Council for Economics Education (2), West Virginia Department of Education, State Farm Insurance, West Virginia State GEAR UP, and the Investment Protection Trust. Funding for staff and travel was provided in a grant to the Treasurer's Office from the Governor's Office utilizing American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No. In 2006, the Legislature did mandate that personal finance be provided to high school students, leading the State Board of Education to require a unit of personal finance be included in the 12th grade civics curriculum. Implementation of the NetWorth initiative, including the flagship Get a Life program, did not require legislation, executive order, or adoption of regulations.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

The Get a Life program does not require hardware or software. The NetWorth curriculum resources, both those developed by West Virginia educators and provided by other organizations, are available to all educators on websites operated by the Department of Education and the State Treasurer. These resources are used in follow-up instruction provided by the classroom teachers.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes. The original concept of developing NetWorth, a K-12 Personal Finance Education Program, originated with the State Treasurer (John D. Perdue, West Virginia State Treasurer's Office, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard, Capitol Complex Building #1, Room E-145, Charleston, West Virginia 25305, 304-558-5000, john.perdue@wvsto.com) and State Superintendent of Schools (Dr. Steve Paine, West Virginia Department of Education, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East, Charleston, WV 25305, 304-558-2681, dvermill@access.k12.wv.us). The NetWorth Program Director (Lynn Bennett, 18 Meadow Lane, Bridgeport, WV 26330, 304-842-4166, lynn.bennett@wvsto.com) has had responsibility for the

program design and implementation. The Get a Life simulation was developed by Josh Groves (1201 Locust Avenue, Fairmont, WV 26554 (304) 367-4302, josh.groves@fairmontstate.edu), a staff member of the Fairmont State University GEAR UP program. The partnership with FSU resulted in the rights to adapt the Get a Life simulation for NetWorth.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

No. Various forms of personal finance simulations have been used in schools for several years, but the Get a Life program is unique in its portability and the relatively few resources needed for implementation, and was developed in West Virginia. We are not aware of any other state in which a statewide initiative has been implemented this comprehensively in the public school system. Other states have initiated varying programs to address personal finance in their schools, but have not fully integrated the program into the existing state standards and objectives for the core subject areas at all grade levels.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

No. While all school districts have had access to the curriculum materials and teacher training, there are still gaps to be filled. The remaining Get a Life simulations will take place throughout the rest of the school year. The three-year/three-phase NetWorth program has achieved its goals of curriculum development, teacher training, curriculum integration, and student engagement. The next few years will measure the impact and sustainability of the programs. To date, one school district and one Chamber of Commerce have committed to continued Get a Life activities in subsequent school years. Other Chambers are in the planning stages of sustaining and expanding the Get a Life experience.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

The impact on students has been significant as they are confronted with the challenges of living within the means of one's net income, while providing for all of the necessities of having a home, providing food and utilities, and protecting the family with insurance. Participating students also gain an appreciation of the importance education and career choices will play in their future quality of life. In addition, community volunteers begin to understand the need for personal finance education in their community's schools.

Students are engaged in the simulation for less than two hours. The challenge is ensuring the schools and teachers continue integrating personal finance throughout the core curriculum. Get a Life is only a single, powerful introductory component of building financial literacy skills that will last a lifetime.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

When the NetWorth program was established almost three years ago, the plan was to develop curriculum and resources, pilot the program and train teachers and counselors. To support this mission, it was decided to take the learning directly to the students. Following the success of the first three Get a Life pilot sites, it was determined the program was the most appropriate vehicle for creating awareness of the comprehensive NetWorth program. The Get a Life simulation has demonstrated the real need for developing the life skills of money management. The strategic plan for NetWorth was

modified to focus on this activity. In addition to Get a Life, other direct student activities are planned for the spring and summer of 2011.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

The key to success of an activity like Get a Life is the partnerships established between government agencies, the educational system, financial institutions, and community organizations. School administrators and teachers need to be open to the importance of providing students with personal finance education opportunities. The primary limitation is the availability of resources to produce the initial materials kits and provide support for staff to initiate the activity across a state. A train-the-trainer model is one strategy for developing coordinators within the local communities. Recruiting volunteers to commit the time to the activity is the most challenging task in conducting the Get a Life simulation.

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2011 Innovations Awards Application Program Categories and Subcategories

Use these as guidelines to determine the appropriate Program Category for your state's submission and list that program category on page one of this application. Choose only one.

Infrastructure and Economic Development

- Business/Commerce
- Economic Development
- Transportation

Government Operations and Technology

- Administration
- Elections
- Information Systems
- Public Information
- Revenue
- Telecommunications

Health & Human Services

- Aging
- Children & Families
- Health Services
- Housing
- Human Services

Human Resources/Education

- Education
- Labor
- Management
- Personnel
- Training and Development
- Workforce Development

Natural Resources

- Agriculture
- Energy
- Environment
- Environmental Protection
- Natural Resources
- Parks & Recreation
- Water Resources

Public Safety/Corrections

- Corrections
- Courts
- Criminal Justice
- Drugs
- Emergency Management
- Public Safety

Save in .doc or rtf. Return completed application electronically to innovations@csg.org or mail to:

CSG Innovations Awards 2011
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