

*Reversing the Increasing Underachievement
and Disengagement Among Boys*

**A Proposed Partnership Between
The Boys Project**

and

**The William Randolph Hearst
Foundations**



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Narrative

A. Executive Summary

Summary/Purpose of Request

The Boys Project is a national consortium of policy analysts, educators, writers on boys' issues, researchers, and families who have come together to reverse an ominous cultural trend—the increasing underachievement and disengagement of boys.

The Boys Project seeks a grant award from the William Randolph Hearst Foundations to fuel program development and capacity building efforts, and to produce a report that accurately describes the dimensions of the problem, “The State of Boyhood in America.” Funding will enable the project to design a comprehensive online resource center on the Boys Project website, plan and seek support for a national symposium on boys' issues, and pursue, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education, the creation of a national task force on boys' underachievement. Additionally, the Boys Project will build important coalitions with other organizations, increase awareness of these critical issues, work with Schools of Education to include boys' issues in teacher preparation, coordinate and expand the program's speaker series, and begin the establishment of a broad funding base through foundation and corporate grant applications and sponsorships.

Amount Requested

\$213, 072

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B. Organizational History and Capacity

History

Established in January 2006 under the auspices of the University of Alaska, the Boys Project is a national consortium of policy analysts, educators, writers on boys' issues, researchers and families who have come together to reverse an ominous cultural trend—the increasing underachievement and disengagement of boys. Led by a distinguished and diverse Board of Directors, the Boys Project governing body is comprised of national experts in boys' issues. What began as a grassroots effort includes contributors from the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and England.

Boys are lagging behind girls in achievement throughout the developed world and the “Boy Crisis” has become the subject of newspaper and magazine articles in many nations. The Boys Project was created to address these issues, although the program stresses continued attention to the educational needs and characteristic problems of girls and young women as well.

Judith Kleinfeld, founder and Director of the Boys Project, has published widely on gender issues, including authoring the groundbreaking article, *"The Myth That Schools Shortchange Girls."* Dr. Kleinfeld, who holds a doctorate degree in Education from Harvard University, has received awards from several associations for her work on gender equity and speaks regularly across the nation about the boys' crisis. Within the last year, she appeared on television, was interviewed on National Public Radio, and spoke in front of an audience that included First Lady Laura Bush—who pledged her support of the Boys Project at the White House Conference on Helping America's Youth on June 6, 2006. In fact, it is through the First Lady that other partnerships have been forged, such as with the U.S. Department of Education.



Boys Project Director, Judith Kleinfeld with First Lady, Laura Bush

Other founding members of the Boys Project, such as Michael Thompson, Michael Gurian, Kathy Stevens, Leonard Sax, and William Pollack, have published best-selling books on the needs of boys, held teacher and parent workshops across the nation, and made presentations at numerous educational conferences to standing-room only audiences. The underachievement of sons compared to daughters is a common topic of parental conversations, but no organization is systematically addressing it.

Prior to the Boys Project, no national organization existed to bring people together to develop the knowledge base and the momentum necessary to deal with the specific problems of boys. In the past, as the media has accurately reported, infighting prevented those concerned with boys from joining forces and identifying the fundamental problems, causes, and clear-cut strategies needed to address this crisis at the policy level. This discord is what prompted Dr. Kleinfeld to begin reaching out to others in the field to create a coalition that works together to bring attention to the issues and generate effective solutions.



In the short time since its inception, the Boys Project has already succeeded in bringing the parties together, muting personal conflicts, and creating a cooperative organizational culture that focuses on a unified social mission: *what to do—in practical, policy terms—to turn around the growing failure and disengagement of large groups of boys*. Partnerships have been formed, including one with the U.S. Department of Education, at the recommendation of the Office of the First Lady, and the discussion is proceeding on creating a national task force to deal with these complicated issues and their staggering implications.

Within three months of the program's start, the Boys Project website gained #1 ranking on Google searches. Word has spread quickly about this urgently needed resource, and each day brings inquiries from the media, parents, educators, and policymakers. Leaders of the Boys Project also speak regularly to "standing room only" crowds throughout the nation.

Members of the Boys Project who could afford to do so made personal donations in the \$1,000 range to start up the organization, and the Project Director devoted her time and over \$5,000 personally to create an initial web site. The University of Alaska, recognizing that Alaska has the highest gender gap in the nation, has given the Boys Project an institutional base and is committed to providing support in the form of office space and secretarial services. Additionally, the University has provided substantial start-up funding through grant support, which is listed in the attachments section of this proposal.

Mission

The mission of the Boys Project is to help young males develop their capabilities and reach the potential that their families and teachers know they have. The Boys Project seeks to accomplish for young men what the Girls Project so successfully accomplished for young women—to increase academic skills, to increase college success, and to develop the confidence, drive, and determination to contribute to American society.

Governing Structure

An official sponsored project of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the institution provides oversight and administration of the Boys Project. The project's Board of Directors and the Boys Project Director, Judith Kleinfeld, make programmatic decisions with required University approval.

Principle Activities

At this time, the Boys Project provides information and resources to policy makers, educators, and parents through written materials and public speaking. The Boys Project has also become a major source of information for the media across the nation. While many newspaper articles and magazine stories document the problems of boys, both on a national level and in local communities, what is almost entirely missing is practical solutions that will prove successful.

Soon entering into our second year of existence, this national program will enhance services and outreach by developing and maintaining the online "go-to" source for issues related to the boy problem in the United States. The Boys Project website will offer an extensive collection of well-written media descriptions of the problems boys are facing, research studies, reports from other nations such as Great Britain and Australia, resources, tips, and accurate statistics.

We are especially seeking Hearst Foundations support to prepare a research report, "The State of Boyhood in America." This document will provide a careful review of the existing literature on: 1) labor market demands in the 21st century and the implications for postsecondary education, 2) the growing gender gap in academic performance, including grades, test scores, dropout rates, participation in leadership activities, college attendance and success, and 3) the growing gender gap in psychological problems, such as depression, suicide rates, and learning and behavioral disorders. In addition, the report will examine the evidence for practices which show promise of reversing these trends, such as teacher education on differences in the ways boys and girls characteristically learn, mentoring programs which provide male role models for the increasing numbers of young men who are

Everyday Letters

This email excerpt, representative of the pleas for help received on a daily basis by the Boys Project, is a good example of desperate parents in need of answers...

"Our son is 20 years old and we are having a hard time motivating him to pursue some career direction. He has recently returned home from working in Calgary and is now returning to his old habits of mooching off his parents while having a good time with old friends and skateboarding.

I'm wondering if you have a reference list of resources for this age group. Thanks for any light or info you can provide.

Blessings to you in this helpful work."

- G. C.

growing up in single-parent homes, and single-sex settings in schools and other organizations which are conducive to increasing ambition and achievement.

This informative document will be widely disseminated in digital form, with hard copies made available pending additional funding for printing and postage. It will be distributed nationally and provided to:

- School board members, teachers, administrators at both K-12 and college levels
- Policymakers and proposal writers
- Journalists and other media
- Parents and families
- Boys and girls themselves
- Organizations concerned with related issues, such as marriage and family, violence against women, crime, and juvenile justice

The Boys Project is actively engaged in dialog with other programs, including women's groups, with the intention of building effective coalitions and project partnerships. In connection with this effort, the Boys Project has begun discussion with the U.S. Department of Education to develop and lead a task force to further study this crisis, as well as the economic, scientific, and cultural implications of the problem, and to devise a strategic plan for systemic change.

Additionally, Boys Project leaders continue to speak across the country about this problem. Presentations occur on a regular basis to "standing room only crowds" where it is common for the auditorium to exceed capacity. Each day brings pleas from teachers and frustrated parents who want to help boys but do not know how to do so. Also, the Boys Project receives requests from doctoral students who want assistance in developing thesis proposals to deal with the problems of boys or from university professors and teachers who want to spend their sabbaticals assisting the Boys Project. Currently, we lack the capacity to use this grass-roots energy in productive ways.

Grant writing and corporate sponsorship requests are currently underway to fuel all of the above activities, and the upcoming year will largely focus on strategic planning, resource development, and expanded national outreach. Our progress, without your assistance, is limited because the Project Director, Judith Kleinfeld, is a professor of psychology obligated, at present, to fulfill contractual requirements for teaching and administrative responsibilities within the University of Alaska. We need, above all, funding support to hire an Assistant Director of the Boys Project who can help us meet the many requests we receive and to spearhead the initiatives slotted for this year.

Population Served

The problems of boys touch us all. The problem obviously impacts on boys themselves, today and tomorrow—but it also affects parents, families, teachers, employers, women seeking to form stable families, social service agencies concerned with the boys in the school-to-jail pipeline, and United States global competition. This project will have the broad reach that the William Randolph Hearst Foundations emphasize.

C. Statement of Need



The nation has succeeded in removing the barriers to the success of girls in schools, and the achievement of girls is soaring. Today, girls score almost equal to boys in the areas in which they fell behind in the 1970s—mathematics and science achievement. When Congress passed the Gender Equity Education Act in 1994, educators heeded the call, launching into action with stunning success. Now more young women than young men graduate from college.

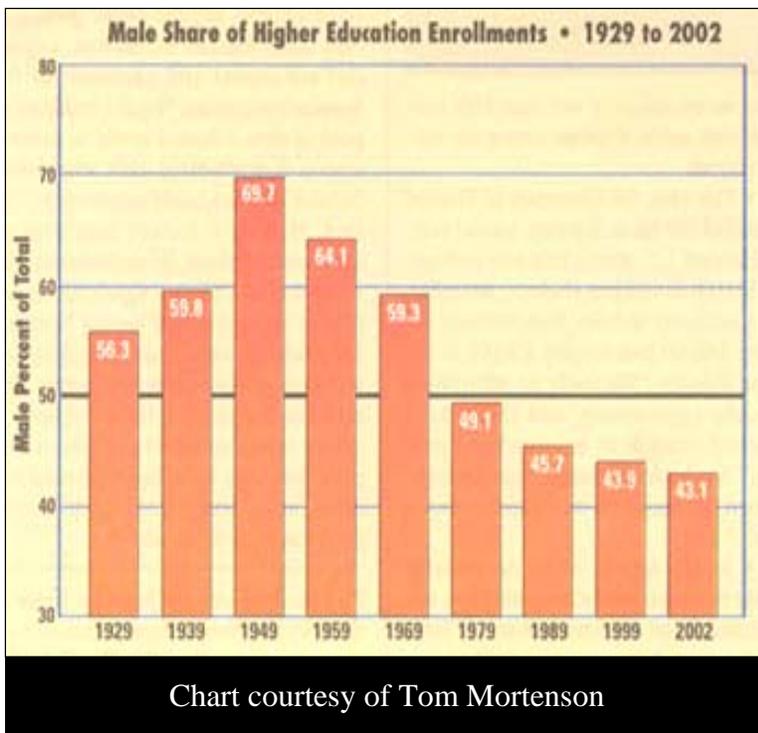
The United States created, within one generation, a remarkable advance in the achievement and aspirations of young women. The Boys Project applauds the success of young women and seeks to learn from the experience of the Women’s Movement and the “Girls’ Projects” that have led to this turn-around. At the same time, simple fairness demands that attention be given to the characteristic problems of boys and why so many are disengaging rather than responding to the economic demands and skills needed for success in the 21st century.

Many boys, especially boys of color, lag far behind in school achievement. The biggest problem lies in the essential skills of reading and writing where the typical boy scores a year and a half behind the average girl. The National Assessment of Educational Progress, mandated by Congress in 1969 to measure the academic success of America’s youth, offers the best and most comprehensive measure of the achievement of students across the nation. These tests show that boys are in trouble.

Males are lagging far behind females in college attendance, educational aspirations, and engagement in school. Boys get most of the D and F grades. Boys are also diagnosed three to four times more often than girls with learning disorders and relegated to special education classes.

While low-income boys and boys of color remain at the greatest disadvantage, “advantaged” boys are also falling far behind girls in class standing, honors and awards, and in positive attitudes toward schooling. Alarming numbers of boys now receive the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and take strong drugs such as Ritalin, beginning as early as kindergarten, which may prove to have deleterious effects on developing brains. Even MORE alarming are the suicide rates of young men—the ultimate form of disengagement. These rates have shown a disturbing increase in boys, while the suicide rates of young women are declining. Exactly how sobering are these statistics? Try – **For every 100 females, ages 15 to 19 that commit suicide, 549 males in the same range kill themselves.**¹

At this time of unprecedented economic prosperity, in a nation teeming with education experts and professionals whose mission it is to educate and prepare children for adult life, and a time when girls are excelling as never before, 36% of boys who graduate from high school fail to go on to any form of higher learning. And, an estimated 35% of boys never even reach that threshold — they drop out of high school.² Even boys from supportive families are falling behind. For example, of the 2006 high school students selected for the Principal’s Leadership Award, 66% are girls.³



Young men, especially young men of color, are falling farther and farther behind in college attendance and completion.⁴ For every 100 women enrolled in college, only 77 American men are enrolled. For every 100 American women who earn a bachelor's degree from college, 73 American men earn a bachelor's degree. Among African-Americans, almost two women graduate from college for every one man.

Of course, these problems of boys aren't entirely new. Girls of past generations typically did better in reading and writing. But the gender gap is increasing, especially

¹http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/LCWK1_2002.pdf

² Different studies provide higher estimations of the dropout rate. These are the newest statistics available from the Manhattan Institute. See Jay P. Greene & Marcus A. Winters, Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991-2002. The Manhattan Institute, Education Working Paper, No. 8, February 2005.

³ http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/sec.asp?CID=538&DID=53674

⁴ See especially Tom Mortenson, “For Every 100 Girls,” Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, 2006 and A. Sum, N. Fogg, & P. Harrington (2003). The growing gender gaps in college enrollment and degree attainment in the U. S. and their potential economic and social consequences. Boston Center for Labor Market Studies: Northeastern University.

in school grades and honors. While young women as a group are moving ahead, developing the skills to succeed in the global economy, young men as a group are stagnating.

This situation is the natural result of many forces at work in this country, starting with family breakdown and the numbers of boys without guidance from fathers and other males who model productive activity. But the Boys Project has pinpointed what absolutely can be addressed—*the failure of school systems, families, and community groups to help these boys develop a sense of purpose, responsibility, self-control, independence, and ambition.*

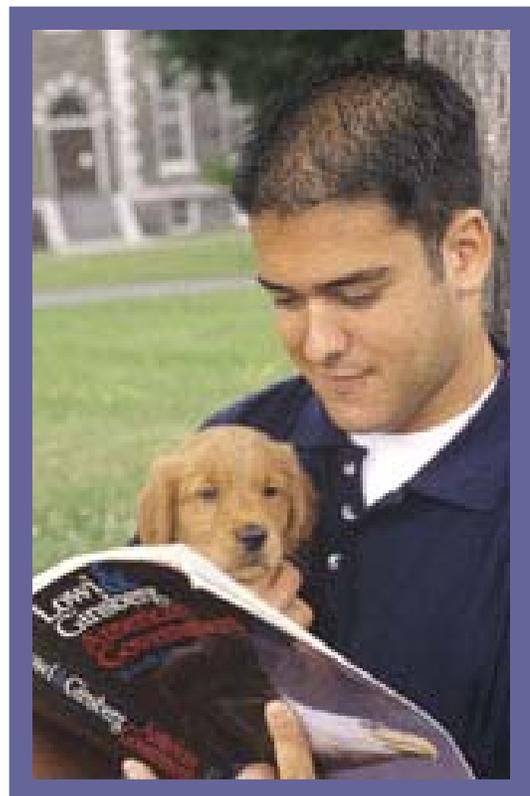
These virtues are essential to a free, dynamic society. Only if these boys are engaged, their energies channeled, and their characters shaped can they turn around and become successful in life. And the United States will, as it always has, rely on the success of its young men in order to meet the challenges of a global economy and ward off threats to free and democratic nations. In short, the alienation of boys has serious implications for us all, as it weakens the fabric of our historically strong country.

The good news is that public awareness to the current and persistent problem is growing, even though some devoted educators and community leaders have been working on solutions to the boys' problems for years. Many of these change agents have signed on with the Boys Project already, creating an energetic consortium of people from across the nation seeking to address boys' issues. It is time to learn from their local successes, from policy efforts in other countries, particularly Australia and Great Britain, and to set a national agenda for dealing with disengaging boys.

The Boys Project has brought together experts in boys' issues from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to set an agenda for action and to identify the most promising strategies for change. The nation needs the energy, innovativeness, and “out of the box” thinking of its young men—and we ask for your help in this important mission.

We need to educate teachers about the biological and neurological differences between boys and girls, and the specific motivational strategies—like working hard so your classroom team will succeed—that engage boys in school. Teachers are hungry for this knowledge. In our presentations across the nation, the demand is for solutions—strategies and programs that work. We have examples of what appears to work, but we need to develop approaches that test these ideas and generate evidence-based knowledge.

In conclusion, to turn around the “boy problem” we need programs, national policy change, innovative ideas, gender-specific teaching techniques, and



modifications in classroom strategies. But we also need to shift our attitude towards boys. We need to respect the strengths characteristic of boys—and find ways to harness boys’ energy, boldness, and playfulness. We must appreciate and tap into their energy, their spiritedness, their offbeat ideas, and, yes, even their rebellion and defiance. This energy moves us forward as a culture.

The nation succeeded in encouraging ambition and achievement among girls. We can do the same for boys, if we have the will, the energy, and the resources.

D. Project Description

The Boys Project seeks to expand its national and international reach through program development, capacity building, strategic planning, the creation of a comprehensive online resource center, and the publication of a report, “The State of Boyhood in America.” The upcoming year will focus on forging new partnerships and projects, and laying the groundwork for national dialog about the potential answers to this urgent crisis.

Goal

The Boys Project will educate teachers, policy makers, and families on how to best reach and teach boys.

Objectives

1. Identify and showcase schools, teachers, colleges, and organizations that have succeeded in engaging young men, increasing their academic success, drive, and ambition.
2. Educate families, educators, and the public about the challenges our young boys and young men are facing.
3. Develop federal, state, community, and foundation initiatives that support relevant research and necessary legislative change.
4. Serve as the leader and expert resource within the United States to all concerned with the success of currently disengaged boys and young men.

Activities

1. Secure grant support for capacity building/program development activities.
2. Hire an Assistant Director for the Boys Project who can work with the media and community partners, respond to numerous requests from parents, teachers, and schools, and identify the most promising examples of success.
3. Hire a temporary Research Assistant/Website Administrator to build resources for a new online resource center.
4. Complete the design of a new Boys Project website with expanded resources, examples of promising programs, and teaching strategies, making available the best and most recent information for the many parents, teachers, and policymakers struggling with the issue of disengaging boys in America.
5. Keep the Boys Project website up-to-date with current information as we gain more knowledge and resources.
6. Maintain the Boys Project listserv, which has successfully brought together boys' experts on policy, research, and individual school levels to share information, resources, and new ideas.
7. Build coalitions with relevant organizations, especially women's organizations who are also recognizing that the needs of girls and boys coalesce.
8. Develop a national task force with the U.S. Department of Education.
9. Plan a national symposium with select experts and key stakeholders in Washington, DC.
10. Continue outreach through the public speaking series, interviews, and consultations with those seeking to do productive research on boys' problems.
11. Research and prepare academic papers on boys' underachievement and promising programs, specifically "The State of Boyhood in America."
12. Pursue additional grant funding and corporate sponsorships for a symposium, publications, staffing needs, operational costs, and special projects.

Project Budget Request

CATEGORY	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	ANNUAL COST
Program Director (Dr. Judith Kleinfeld)	12 months @ 25% effort	\$40,529 salary + \$18,765 benefits
Program Coordinator (tba)	12 months @ 75% effort	\$37,042 salary + \$21,114 benefits
Travel	Program Director, domestic travel	\$4,266
Contractual Services: Website Design	(One time only)	\$3,500
Contractual Services: Website administration	Brockington, Inc. ~ 6 months @ 20-hours/week	\$19,200
Contractual Services: Technical Writing	Creative Edge Consulting ~ 6 months @ 10-hours/week	\$14,400
Project Supplies	Consumable items	\$250
Communication services	Phone/fax/internet/audioconference	\$300
General Operating Support	Applied as 33.7% of direct costs	\$53,706
Total Grant Request		\$213, 072

Numbers Served

The Boys Project serves our entire nation and is a resource to professionals and laypersons alike—policymakers, educators, families, and the boys who so desperately need our help. Between our website and other materials, task force involvement and other special projects, speaking engagements and media presence, the Boys Project will impact upon everyone within the United States, as well as other countries.

Timeline

All activities specified in the previous section will be completed within one year. Please see the deliverables under the Evaluation heading for our general implementation plan timeline.

Staffing Plan

Currently, the Boys Project relies on the volunteer contributions, in time and in expertise, of the many stakeholders dedicated to effecting systemic change in our country as relates to the boys' crisis. This includes our Steering Committee, Boys Project Director, Judith Kleinfeld, and the many organizations that band with us on this important issue. Most immediately, an Assistant Director is essential to our project goals and the effective implementation of the activities described within this proposal.

Judith Kleinfeld is the only staff person on board at this time, and much of her work has been an in-kind donation to date. Further, the University of Alaska Fairbanks, as compensated through indirect costs, provides administrative and clerical support, legal and accounting services, office housing, and website hosting.

Anticipated Results

“THE STATUS OF BOYHOOD IN AMERICA”

This report will carefully and objectively synthesize the research on the academic performance of boys, psychological problems such as depression, suicide, and behavioral disorders, and the educational status of boys compared to the demands of the labor market in the global economy emerging in the 21st century. The report will also include an analysis of various strategies to turn around this problem within schools, families, and communities. These include parent education on the importance of guiding and pushing “directionless” boys, teacher education on the characteristic difficulties of boys and teaching strategies which help boys succeed, mentoring programs which offer productive role models to boys who have grown up in single parent families, and single sex settings in schools and other organizations which offer gender-specific education.

WEBSITE

The Boys Project website will make available the best and most recent information on the academic achievement and school engagement of boys and how to increase the college entrance and success of boys, especially boys of color and other underserved populations. The site will emphasize practical and applied research-based information for guidance counselors, teachers, parents and families, and college admissions staff.

The challenge is how to reach the greatest number of people, not only within the United States but also in other highly developed nations that are facing the same problem of disengaging males. The solution is the World Wide Web. An attractive, interactive, changing website is the most efficient way to reach the largest national and international audience.

Parents “Google” such childrearing problems as “smart and unmotivated boys.” Prospective teachers and educators, seeking licensure or in-service credits to maintain licensure, look to the web for resources to write papers on gender and education. Teachers search the web for books that boys enjoy reading and programs they can use at their schools. The website will also enable the program to make the papers and policy proposals from Boys Project activities freely available within the United States and the many other developed nations facing similar problems of driven young women and drifting young men.

This website will include the best resources for reaching and teaching boys, program ideas, teaching tips, breaking news, a “water cooler” for exchanging information, summaries of research on controversial issues, and trustworthy statistics on such topics as gender differences in school achievement, college success, and suicide rates. A resource such as this is currently unavailable, but will be after completion of this grant-funded project.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND PROGRAM PLANNING

Funding through the William Randolph Hearst Foundations will also result in Boys Project preparation for national initiatives such as a task force with the U.S. Department of Education, expansion of an urgently needed speakers bureau across the country, and establishment of a diverse funding base that will fuel new projects and offer sustainability to the program.

The Boys Project is the only national organization that has drawn together boys’ experts, educators with on-the-ground knowledge of the problem and its complexities given current accountability mandates and other school reforms, such as bullying programs. Together, we are able to bridge the gap between academic researchers and educators who must deal with the daily issues of life in schools and competing programs and priorities.

Above all, a grant award through the Hearst foundation will allow our program to plant the seeds for the next tier of attack on this widespread issue. Academic papers, a national symposium, and effective discussion of the report, “The State of Boyhood in America,” will lead to long-term systemic change... and a brighter future for today’s young men—and our society as a whole.



E. Evaluation

Success of the development/capacity building phase of the Boys Project will be determined by meeting the following deliverables:

1. Within 9 months of funding, the Boys Project will have developed a fully functioning, comprehensive and interactive website that will offer the most extensive listing of up-to-date research studies, academic papers, articles, statistics, resources, and tips for boys, their parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers.
2. A “hit counter” will be included in general website design, allowing the Boys Project to determine a baseline of initial Internet traffic. Once the website is fully operational, records will be kept that will graph monthly traffic. This will provide accurate statistics with regard to the website’s impact and reach within a given year. This evaluation will also indicate increased traffic as correlates to publication release dates, speaker presentations, and enhanced national visibility.
3. The website will include a “Contact Us” category through which parents and teachers can communicate their needs and we will address them either internally or by putting people in touch with experts who can help them. Results will be tallied in month 11 and included in the final report to the grantmaker.
4. Within 6 months of funding, grant applications and corporate sponsorship packages will have been completed, targeting a minimum of \$750,000 in financial support requests.
5. Within 12 months of funding, the research and paper will have been completed on the “State of Boyhood in America.”
6. Within 12 months of funding, the Boys Project will have identified members of the national task force, in addition to goals, objectives, and methodologies for study.
7. A final report will be provided to the grantmaker within 30 days of grant cycle completion. This report will summarize all activities funded through this award, lessons learned, plans for correction, if needed, and any new initiatives that grew out of the prior 12-month capacity building period.

F. Conclusion

Males are lagging far behind females in college attendance, educational aspirations, and engagement in school. The alienation of boys has serious implications for the nation's competitiveness and standing in the global economy.

The Boys Project is a new, national consortium of experts on boys' issues that seeks to understand the causes of this alarming new gender gap and to find practical solutions that will reverse this cultural trend before the problem becomes culturally entrenched and even more difficult to resolve. Falling under the William Randolph Hearst Foundations interests in both education and social services, the Boys Project stands poised to take the next step in addressing this national crisis—the state of boyhood in America.

The Boys Project seeks a grant award in the amount of **\$213, 072** from the William Randolph Hearst Foundations to fuel program development and capacity building efforts that will enable the program to begin laying the groundwork for the next tier of outreach and services, enhancing its national leadership role and harnessing the momentum in the media that is currently on our side. Under this project, the Boys Project will develop a comprehensive, “one-stop-shop” online resource center, publish a well-researched report, “The Status of Boyhood in America,” build partnerships with organizations throughout the United States, plan for the launch of a national task force, expand our speaking engagement force, and address our fiscal sustainability needs.

The strength of our society relies upon our country successfully addressing a critical issue that, if ignored, negatively impacts upon us all. Boys, and young men, are needed and missed. They are essential to our well-being as a nation.

We ask that you help us help them to be all they can be.

Attachments

- A. Non-Profit Status Letter of Determination
- B. Board of Directors & Steering Committee
- C. Audited Financials
- D. 2005 and 2006 Operating Budgets
- E. Program Budgets
- F. List of Funders
- G. Annual Report
- H. Supplemental - Statistical Fact Sheet
- I. Supplemental - Letter from University of Alaska
Chancellor