

**Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy**  
**Applied Policy Seminar**  
**Project Proposal Form**

**Date:** 9/13/2010

**Organization:** Consulting Group

**Sector:** Private Sector

**Contact Name and Title:** (FSPP alum)

**Contact Phone:**

**Contact Email:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Organization Website:** [Click here to enter text.](#)

**Please describe the project in general terms. What is the project? How will completion of this project be valuable to the organization?**

We propose a project that can help the Ford School better understand the challenges states face when implementing new policies in the K-12 education sector and how our firm can add significant value to this process. (A more detailed explanation of our proposed project can be found later in this document.)

This is an interesting and challenging time in the K-12 sector. The federal government is asserting more control over education policy with laws such as No Child Left Behind and programs such as Race to the Top. Local governments seek to maintain regional control, particularly in large urban districts where some of the greatest problems lay. Charter school advocates continue to push for new state-funded alternatives to traditional public schools. The states themselves recognize the need for change with efforts such as the creation and implementation of the Common Core curriculum. All this comes at a time when tax revenues are at historic lows and budgets are severely tightened. The result is an environment in which state departments of education must quickly implement massive policy, organizational, and technological changes with already-overstretched resources.

We believe our company could help relieve the states of some of this burden. Our practice has a long and successful history of helping public sector organizations design organizational strategy and implement reforms to improve operational effectiveness. Our clients benefit from setting realistic, achievable plans and from employing their resources in a much more effective and efficient manner. It stands to reason that our experiences and skills could be leveraged to help states in the K-12 sector as well.

This partnership with the Ford School would help us confirm our beliefs and identify ways we can provide greater value to this segment of the education industry. The FSPP team would help us understand the key issues in the K-12 sector and work cooperatively with our management to identify the ways the firm could best help state departments of education solve these problems.

**Please describe what will be achieved through completion of this project as well as the expected deliverables. Please be specific.**

This partnership with the Ford School team would have two primary goals: 1) to define the major policy implementation issues that states' departments of education are faced with in the K-12 sector; and 2) to identify if and how consulting organizations can best help address those challenges.

Defining the key issues will provide the Ford School group with a more thorough understanding of the K-12 education sector and, perhaps more importantly, the challenges of day-to-day policy implementation. This process will also provide us with a wealth of knowledge regarding the K-12 sector that does not formally exist in the organization today. The second goal provides an outstanding opportunity for the Ford School team to study the ways in which private organizations can work cooperatively with public institutions and identify the factors that lead to successful, mutually beneficial public-private partnerships.

Management would work closely with the Ford School team to develop the project work plan and finalize the expectations regarding the final work products. At this stage, we expect the project will be executed in three phases, each with two distinct but parallel work streams, to take advantage of the varied skills and interests of the team members:

1. Knowledge Development
  - a. Issue Identification: Team will analyze policies and macroeconomic factors that have affected states' departments of education, then identify and prioritize the resulting issues.
  - b. Organizational Mapping: Team will research and summarize the division of responsibilities among federal, state, and local education organizations, as well as other key actors (charter management organizations, etc.), and create deep-dive organizational analyses of several individual states.
2. Performance & Capabilities Assessment
  - a. "Lessons Learned" Analysis: Team will review states' attempts at implementing various policies and identify best practices/ issues/ lessons from each example; team will also identify third-party organizations involved, their roles, and the associated successes/failures.
  - b. Capabilities Analysis: Team will work closely with staff to understand current firm capabilities, experience, and skills in order to identify strengths we might bring to the K-12 sector, as well as performance or knowledge gaps we would need to address.
3. Synthesis & Recommendations
  - a. Final Team Recommendations: Team will develop a management presentation discussing its findings and defining its recommendations.
  - b. Cost-Benefit Analysis: Team will identify a subset of opportunities that lends itself to CBA and quantitatively analyze the impact on states.

Based on this approach, we would expect the deliverables to be:

- Phase 1
  - Extensive (though not comprehensive) list of federal/state K-12 policies and the implementation issues they have created for departments of education
  - Issue prioritization methodology and resulting list of “ranked” issues
  - Key decision maker (ex: federal, state, local government; charter management organizations, etc.) organizational analysis and perceived roles concerning high-priority issues
- Phase 2
  - Series of short (1-2 page) memos on high-priority issues providing relevant background, impact, current efforts, funding sources, stakeholder/ decision maker analysis, and potential role of private sector actors
  - Strength/Weakness/Opportunity/Threat (SWOT) analysis of our potential position in the K-12 sector including brief review of other private-sector participants
  - Interim project presentation focused on brief descriptions of high-priority issues, lessons learned, identified case studies (both positive and negative), and initial ideas about potential roles
- Phase 3
  - Cost-benefit analyses (CBA), as needed and as possible, on financial and performance impact of interventions on high-priority issues
  - Final presentation integrating findings and providing Ford School team recommendations for client in the K-12 space

Overall this process begins from a pure research standpoint and, over time, layers in more specificity regarding the role of the private sector and our firm in particular. We therefore assume that as the project progresses the preparation of the deliverables takes on an increasingly iterative and cooperative process. This will not only improve the final product but also provide the Ford School team with an invaluable opportunity to experience and learn more about consulting.

**What specific activities will the student teams undertake? What skills will students need to successfully complete the project?**

We believe one of the most attractive aspects of this potential partnership is how well the MPP curriculum and skill set matches with this project’s requirements. We would obviously benefit from having such well-trained partners, while the Ford School team would have the opportunity to hone a wide range of their newly-acquired skills throughout the course of the project.

As the deliverables descriptions indicate, the success of this project requires that several key parts of the MPP curriculum be employed. The initial phase requires intense policy research and analysis; the organizational mapping requires a nuanced understanding of policymaking and the affected stakeholders; the memos summarizing high-priority issues require clear and concise writing; and the cost-benefit analyses require quantitative rigor and the ability to estimate values of non-financial outcomes such as increased academic achievement. The SWOT analysis provides the team with an interesting perspective on how organizations – whether public, private, or non-profit – can identify successful opportunities. The final strategy recommendations require the integration of all the previous segments of analysis as well as a clear knowledge of how private sector firms can best navigate the organizational and political landscape of the K-12 sector.

**What resources will your organization provide to the student team to ensure project success?**

Our primary contributions will be institutional knowledge, connections, and expertise in managing limited-duration consulting projects. In fact, given that this is the first year of the APS program we hope that this partnership can provide the Ford School with best practices and templates for managing client-team relations with future APS cohorts.

High-level directors in our practice will be available for planning meetings, K-12 knowledge sharing, explanations of our current strengths/ areas of expertise, and discussions of the “fit” between our capabilities and opportunities identified by the Ford School team. These meetings with decision makers will be critical in terms of building institutional support and “buy-in” for the team’s final recommendations. Additionally, although we do not currently have a specialization in K-12, several members of the firm have personal and professional connections in the sector; these connections will be leveraged to help the team whenever possible.

The Ford School team will also work closely with a Ford School alum throughout the entire project. The alum’s knowledge of the Ford School curriculum and the K-12 sector will help ensure a productive and mutually beneficial partnership. It is expected the alum will make at least one visit to Ann Arbor to meet with the project team. Additional staffing resources will be made available to the Ford School team closer to the start date of the partnership.

We will also provide for project expenses including research and teleconferencing costs, supplies, printing, and team travel to our headquarters for the final presentation and meeting with the head of our practice.