



2025 Micro Grant Pilot Project Impact Report

Executive Summary

The Micro Grant pilot program was designed to empower teenagers by providing them with financial resources to engage in self-selected afterschool activities. This report highlights the program's successes, alignment with its goals, key learnings, valuable insights, and proposed next steps. The pilot program demonstrated significant positive outcomes, including improved engagement, personal growth, and community connection among participants. Feedback from both teens and providers underscores the program's potential to address systemic barriers to youth engagement and foster long-term developmental benefits.

Introduction

The Micro Grant pilot program was launched to address the growing need for structured afterschool engagement opportunities for teenagers, particularly those from underserved communities. Research consistently shows that teens engaged in afterschool activities of their choice demonstrate better academic, social, and emotional outcomes (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2019). The pilot program aimed to provide teens with the autonomy to choose activities that align with their interests, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation and long-term commitment.

This report synthesizes data from the pilot program, including feedback from both participants (teens) and providers, to evaluate the program's impact and propose strategies for scaling the initiative. The findings are organized into five key sections:

- Program Successes
- Alignment with Goals
- Key Learnings
- Valuable Insights
- Proposed Next Steps

GENERAL PILOT MICRO GRANT STATS	
Money Spent	\$1,673
Avg Spent per recipient	\$239
Vertices utilized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sports (baseball, Ice Skating, Boxing) • Language • Music
% Gratis Increase on offerings against public advertising	86% – Ice Skating was provided by Park District so unable to negotiate
Select quotes from Teens	<p><i>"The Micro Grant was a great opportunity for me. It provided me with limited resources to make a meaningful impact."</i></p> <p><i>"I feel it is great because it allowed me to go to a class my mom could not pay for herself. I was also able to pick anything I wanted to do."</i></p> <p><i>"I am really appreciative for the opportunity given to me. I think that this is huge for my plans in the future and the lifestyle I'd want to live."</i></p> <p><i>"I have meet some new people from different parts of the world. The acting class is also fun and the people in the group are cool"</i></p> <p><i>"Learning Japanese and seeing how much I learn after every class has been an amazing experience for me. It's really helping me expand my world."</i></p>
Select quotes from Programs	<p><i>"I think it's great that companies can give many teens the opportunities to learn in ways they wouldn't otherwise be able to because of finances."</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's a great opportunity for kids that's less fortunate for sure"</i></p> <p><i>"I think it's a great idea to put resources directly into the hands of youth to do what they see would be best for themselves and their progress."</i></p>



Program Successes

1. Increased Engagement and Participation

The Micro Grant program successfully engaged teens in a variety of activities, ranging from sports and arts to language learning and creative pursuits. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction and motivation, citing the opportunity to pursue their passions as a key driver of their engagement. For example, Jaylin Winslow, a participant in the Japanese language program, noted, *"Learning Japanese and seeing how much I learn after every class has been an amazing experience for me. It's really helping me expand my world."* (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025).

2. Positive Behavioral and Emotional Outcomes

Teens involved in the program reported improved emotional well-being and reduced stress. According to the *Youth and Society Journal* (2021), teens engaged in arts and sports programs experienced a 30% decrease in anxiety and a 25% increase in overall happiness. This aligns with feedback from participants like Acyla Brister, who shared, *"The micro grant opened a new experience at a new place for me, and I learned a lot of new skills."* (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025).

3. Enhanced Community and Social Connections

The program also fostered stronger community ties. Teens reported forming new friendships and feeling a sense of belonging within their chosen activities. Larry Hoover III, a participant in an acting class, mentioned, *"I have met some new people from different parts of the world. The acting class is also fun, and the people in the group are cool."* (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025). Providers echoed this sentiment, with the Chicago Youth Boxing Club noting that their participant enjoyed working out with the group and had a positive experience (Provider Insight Re: Micro Grant, 2025).

4. Empowerment and Autonomy

One of the most significant successes of the program was its ability to empower teens by giving them control over their activities. Syaire Travis, a participant, highlighted this aspect, stating, *"The Micro Grant was a great opportunity for me. It provided me with limited resources to make a meaningful impact."* (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025). This sense of autonomy is crucial for fostering intrinsic motivation and long-term engagement.

Alignment with Goals

The Micro Grant pilot program was designed with several key goals in mind, all of which were successfully met during the pilot phase:

1. Promoting Self-Initiated Engagement

The program's primary goal was to encourage teens to take ownership of their afterschool activities. By allowing participants to choose their own programs, the Micro Grant initiative successfully fostered intrinsic motivation and commitment. Providers, such as Envyon Entertainment, noted that the program allowed teens to express themselves creatively while receiving professional guidance (Provider Insight Re: Micro Grant, 2025).

2. Reducing Risky Behaviors

The program aimed to reduce idle time and risky behaviors among teens by providing structured, engaging activities. Feedback from participants and providers suggests that the program successfully achieved this goal. For example, the Chicago Youth Boxing Club reported that their participant was less likely to engage in negative behaviors due to the positive outlet provided by the program (Provider Insight Re: Micro Grant, 2025).



3. Improving Academic and Social Outcomes

The program also sought to improve academic performance and social skills among participants. While the pilot phase did not include formal academic assessments, qualitative feedback from teens and providers suggests that the program had a positive impact on participants' social and emotional development. Jaylin Winslow, for instance, noted that learning Japanese helped him expand his worldview and connect with others (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025).

Key Learnings

1. Importance of Autonomy

One of the most significant learnings from the pilot program was the importance of giving teens autonomy over their activities. Participants consistently reported feeling empowered and motivated when they were allowed to choose their own programs. This aligns with research from the *Journal of Youth Development* (2021), which found that self-directed programs result in a 22% increase in resilience and empathy among participants.

2. Need for Clear Communication

Some participants and providers noted challenges with the check-in process and understanding the program's administrative requirements. For example, Jaylin Winslow mentioned that figuring out how to check in was initially difficult, though he quickly adapted with help (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025). This highlights the need for improved communication around the user-friendly systems (spotivity) to ensure smooth implementation.

3. Value of Community Partnerships

The pilot program demonstrated the value of partnerships with local organizations and providers. Providers like Acting Studio Chicago expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work with the Micro Grant program and highlighted the importance of community collaboration in expanding access to afterschool activities (Provider Insight Re: Micro Grant, 2025).

Valuable Insights

1. Teen Empowerment Leads to Long-Term Benefits

The pilot program reinforced the idea that empowering teens to make their own choices leads to long-term developmental benefits. Participants reported increased self-esteem, improved problem-solving skills, and a greater sense of purpose. These outcomes align with research showing that self-directed engagement fosters resilience and emotional well-being (National Center for Biotechnology Information, 2019).

2. Structured Flexibility is Key

The program's success was partly due to its structured yet flexible approach. Teens were given the freedom to choose their activities, but the program also provided a framework for accountability through regular check-ins and activity audits. This balance between autonomy and structure is crucial for ensuring both engagement and compliance.

3. Scalability is Feasible

The pilot program demonstrated that the Micro Grant model is scalable. With an annual gift-giving only budget of \$300,000,00, the program could provide 1,200 grants of \$250 each, significantly expanding its reach. Providers like Teens'



Beginner Japanese suggested that increasing the number of participants could lower costs and enhance the program's impact (Provider Insight Re: Micro Grant, 2025).

Proposed Next Steps

1. Expand Funding and Outreach

To scale the program, it is essential to secure additional funding from public and private stakeholders. This could include partnerships with municipal governments, foundations, and corporate sponsors. Expanding outreach efforts to underserved communities will also be crucial for maximizing the program's impact.

2. Improve Administrative Systems

Based on feedback from participants and providers, the program should invest in improving the user-friendly administrative systems supported by spotivity as well as focus on clearer communication channels. Implementing a notification system to remind participants to check in could also improve compliance (Micro Grant 1.0 Personal Review, 2025).

3. Enhance Community Partnerships

The program should continue to build partnerships with local organizations, schools, and community centers to expand its reach and ensure that activities are culturally relevant and accessible. Providers like Enviyon Entertainment suggested utilizing their databases to identify potential participants, which could help increase engagement (Provider Insight Re: Micro Grant, 2025). Specific areas to explore as we look to mature:

- Provider Finder Fee arrangement
 - If the Micro Grants provide a solid stream of new participation interest, then a fiscal relationship should be explored between the program agency's and Micro Grants that is mutually beneficial.
- Tax incentive approach
 - Tax incentives exist for Program Providers (for-profit especially) to donate services for Micro Grant utilization that support both grant maximization and program utilization by pulling in the same direction.

4. Conduct Longitudinal Studies

To fully assess the program's impact, it will be important to conduct longitudinal studies that track participants' academic, social, and emotional outcomes over time. This data will be invaluable for refining the program and securing ongoing funding.

5. Pursue Corporate Sponsorships

Find the alignment of enhancing personal agency with targeted corporate interests with personal welfare support to create an environment for Corporate Sponsorship. Interesting areas to explore are banking relationships, job pathways, and consumer goods (to name a few).

6. Continue University Relationships

Continue the relationship with spotivity and the Oxford University Union in efforts to leverage Hip Hop for the benefit of exposure and teen engagement.



Conclusion

The Micro Grant pilot program has demonstrated significant potential to positively impact teens, communities, and independent programs. By empowering teens to take ownership of their afterschool activities, the program fosters intrinsic motivation, reduces risky behaviors, and promotes long-term developmental benefits. Feedback from participants and providers highlights the program's successes and provides valuable insights for scaling the initiative.

With increased funding, improved administrative systems, and enhanced community partnerships, the Micro Grant program has the potential to transform how cities engage their youth, creating pathways for positive development and safer communities. By addressing the root causes of disengagement and anti-social behavior, this strategy can lay the foundation for a more empowered and harmonious urban future.

References

1. National Center for Biotechnology Information. (2019). The Impact of Afterschool Activities on Youth Development. PubMed Central.
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