



# THE HIDDEN GENIUS PROJECT

## COLLEGE ACCESS SUPPORT PROPOSAL

JUNE 2020

### **BACKGROUND**

The Hidden Genius Project trains and mentors black male youth in technology creation, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills to transform their lives and communities. With holistic strategies that instill hope, develop family-sustaining skills, The Hidden Genius Project is empowering young people to leverage their creativity to self-determine. We partner with community organizations and public systems to address as many material needs as possible, and inspire our young men to apply their skills and interests to manifest their hidden genius.

Our core component is a 15-month Intensive Immersion Program focused on community transformation and career readiness. Each year, it provides over 100 black male high school students with 800 hours of training and support to help them think critically about their future academic and career plans and chart a path that supports their long-term goals. By providing an intensive format, integrating leadership and entrepreneurship as core components, providing black male staff and mentorship, ensuring multiple programming languages are taught, offering alumni continuing support and opportunities for growth, and expanding our holistic support service strategy, we are building a game-changing organization that is investing in and ultimately changing the future of our communities. Immersion sites currently include Oakland, Richmond, and Los Angeles.

Our organizational growth has proliferated on the shoulders of our Immersion Program alumni, who are brilliant, dynamic, and possess tremendous capacity to make a positive impact on their communities. We continue to expand our alumni service offerings to enhance their opportunities, and one key area we are developing is college access support.



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### **ALUMNI COLLEGE ACCESS SUPPORT**

As increasing numbers of enterprising alumni emerge from our Intensive Immersion Program cohorts, we continue to build infrastructure to empower them to access postsecondary education. After a couple years of programmatic partnership with UC Berkeley's Destination College Advising Corps, they endowed us with a full-time college advising fellow for one year, starting in fall 2019. Since the fellow came aboard, our alumni support capacity has increased exponentially, particularly in the following areas:

- Extra touch points with alumni
- Connecting with active Immersion Geniuses
- Creating smooth transition for alumni families going from immersion to Alumni
- Resource facilitation (tutors, networks, hierarchy of needs)
- Goal development (HS Grad, College/Career Readiness supports)
- Paid opportunities (Scholarships, Internships, Fee for service opportunities)
- College Expo coordination support
- Virtual Graduation coordination support
- Collection, curation and reporting of data around strategic key performance indicators
- Created a game plan connecting to resources (DCAC) the organization was using to support college readiness allowing smooth transition between onboarding, summer programming, back to school immersion and Alumni engagement stages.
- College application and enrollment support

With all this added capacity, 23 out of 23 high school senior alumni in the Class of 2020 are graduating high school, and at least 85 percent have already enrolled in college (two-year or four-year) as of May 2020. UC Berkeley has indicated that they hope to continue to share a college advising fellow with us in fall 2020, but they would need to cost share. Given the ultimate value added of our college advising fellow, we are raising funds to retain that role—as well as resource an additional role to support the growth of our Los Angeles program site—over multiple years (up to four).

This area is a moving target for us, as we seek to balance between the clear benefits of postsecondary education pathways and the benefits of dynamic career/entrepreneurial pathways along which our alumni might flourish. Still, for those enrolling in college, we know completion is critical, and we would target at least 85 percent completion over time (working in partnership with organizations and entities expert in this area).



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To support successful completion, we recognize our current capacity is limited and we should avoid reinventing the wheel. Hence, we are deploying the expertise of a best-in-class national college retention organization, Beyond 12:

Beyond 12 is a technology-based nonprofit organization that was founded in 2009 to increase the number of low-income, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students who graduate from U.S. colleges and universities. Through a longitudinal student tracking platform and a personalized student coaching service, Beyond 12 helps high schools, college access organizations, scholarship providers, and colleges equip their students with the academic, social, and emotional support they need to succeed in higher education.

Beyond 12's vision is that one day, all students will have the opportunity to earn a college degree that provides them with meaningful economic and personal prospects. To realize this vision, Beyond 12 acts as a data and service bridge between our lower and higher education systems. By collecting and sharing longitudinal data that crosses K-12 and higher education, Beyond 12 not only provides students with differentiated coaching that ensures they earn a college degree, but also provides actionable feedback to high schools about their college preparatory efforts, informs the retention work of colleges and universities, and influences the national conversation about student success.

As we scale, Beyond 12's partnership will be critical in ensuring we can maximize outcomes and effectiveness for the young people we serve. We aim to fund a full four-year cycle of their support.

Based on our projections, we estimate that an investment of \$125,000 would seed four years of impactful collaboration with Beyond 12. This would cover Genius coaching, staff training, and technology costs to serve at least 150 unique alumni (with multiple years of support per alum).

Additionally, a four-year investment in a college advising fellow strategy would cost roughly \$375,000, to cover staffing, travel, and supply costs for a dedicated team to serve the aforementioned 150 alumni.

We project that effective implementation of a refined college access and completion strategy would cost approximately \$475,000 total. In the context of COVID-19, the populations served by The Hidden Genius Project and Beyond 12 cannot take for granted equitable access to a college education, nor an equitable opportunity to complete that education. Investment in our college access and completion strategy stands to pay great societal dividends over the long term.

We ask that you invest in this dynamic collaboration to effect a more just society. We are happy to provide more information and engage in dialogue around our vision. You may contact Brandon Nicholson ([brandon@hiddengeniusproject](mailto:brandon@hiddengeniusproject)) or Sean Valentine ([sean@hiddengeniusproject.org](mailto:sean@hiddengeniusproject.org)) with any questions or ideas.