

SFY 2026 Bolder Options

Final Report

10/20/2026

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Employment and Training Programs Division

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Introduction

The DEED Direct Appropriation supports Bolder Options' continuum of mentoring and workforce development services for young people facing barriers to academic achievement, career exploration, and future employment. The model combines intensive one-to-one mentoring with wellness, goal setting, leadership development, and college and career readiness to help youth build the relationships, skills, and confidence needed to succeed in school, work, and life. Services include weekly mentoring, individualized case management, enrichment activities, career exploration, college visits, workplace tours, internships, and matched contributions to MN Saves 529 college savings accounts.

Youth enter Bolder Options through our first-year mentoring program, serving ages 10–14 in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Rochester. During this foundational year, participants meet weekly with a volunteer mentor and receive ongoing support from a Program Coordinator. Upon successful completion of the first year, youth become eligible for our alumni pathway, where they participate in progressively more advanced leadership, college and career exploration, workforce readiness, internships, and post-secondary planning through age 21. This phased approach creates a long-term pipeline that prepares young people for education, employment, and lifelong success.

Funds for this project are appropriated in Minnesota Session Laws, Special Session- 2025, S.F. 17, Article 1, Section 3, Subdivision 3(ll). The amount available to Bolder Options for SFY 2026 is $237,500.00 (Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development is permitted to retain up to 5% of the $250,000.00 appropriation for administration and monitoring of the grant).

Summary of Goals and Objectives Presented in the Work Plan

The goal of this project was to engage young people ages 10–14 in one-to-one mentoring and professional skills development, creating a strong foundation for future educational and workforce success. The work plan recognized that long-term career readiness begins with supportive relationships, goal setting, and healthy youth development. Youth first participate in intensive one-to-one mentoring before transitioning into alumni programming focused on healthy life skills, leadership development, career exploration, and workforce readiness. Through monthly events, adventure learning experiences, and the I Believe and I Achieve programs, alumni continue to build confidence, identify career interests, strengthen workplace skills, connect with professionals, and prepare for post-secondary education, military service, apprenticeships, and meaningful employment. These objectives align with the Legislature's investment in developing Minnesota's future workforce by helping young people build the skills, relationships, and experiences needed to succeed in school, careers, and their communities.

Participant Data

The SFY 2026 grant period ran from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026. The participant data is listed below.

Demographic Data

Total Participants Served: 132

Gender	Total
Male	59
Female	70
Other	3
Prefer Not to Answer	0

Age	Total
15 and under	115
16-17	15
18-19	2
20-21	0
22-24	0

Race/Ethnicity	Total
Hispanic/Latino	24
American Indian or Alaska Native	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	2
Black, African American, or African	30
White	26
Multiracial or Other	45

Education Level	Total
8th grade and under	33
9th Grade – 12th Grade	99
High School Graduate or equivalent	0
Post-Secondary Education	0

Other Demographics	Total
Limited English proficient	4
Participants who receive Public Assistance	105
Economically Disadvantaged	65
Participants who report a disability	10
High school drop-out	0
Participants who are justice involved	NA
Pregnant or parenting youth	1
Foster Youth	2
Homeless or Runaway	0
Not employed at program enrollment	110
Veteran	0

Program Services and Activities Data

Program Service or Activity	Total
Received Education or Job Training Activities	40
Received Work Experience Activities	40
Received Community Involvement and Leadership Development Activities	40
Received Post-Secondary Exploration, Career Guidance and Planning Activities	40
Received Internship or Apprenticeship Activities	9
Received Case Management, Guidance, Counseling Services	0
Received Support Services	0

Outcome Data

Performance or Outcome	Total
Attained Work Readiness or Education Goals	40
Completed Program Objective	30
Obtained High School Diploma, or GED, or Remained in School	132
Enrolled in Post-Secondary Education	4
Entered Vocational/Occupational Skills Training	4
Participants rating of experience	Average rating was 4.5 out of 5

Expenditure Data

Expenditures from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 for grant 6BO6300:

SFY 2026 Budget Category	SFY 2026 Allocation	SFY 2026 Expenditure
Administration	$23,700.00	$23,563.20
Direct Services/Project Staff	$198,750.00	$197,464.29
Participant Wages and Fringe	$15,000.00	$16,472.50
Total	**$237,500.00**	**$237,499.99**

Story of Impact

When Jimena joined Bolder Options, she was struggling with anxiety, inconsistent school attendance, and uncertainty about her future. Through weekly mentoring, individualized support, and encouragement from Bolder Options staff, she built the confidence to become more engaged in school and her community.

After completing her first year of mentoring, Jimena fully embraced Bolder Options' alumni pathway. She participated in both I Believe and I Achieve, Bolder Options' paid college and career exploration programs funded through this DEED appropriation. She also participated in a new financial literacy pilot in partnership with Bank of America, where she earned the highest score in the class while building practical skills in budgeting, banking, credit, and financial planning.

Because Jimena dreams of serving in the MN Army National Guard, she was paired with retired Colonel Eduardo Suarez as her career coach during I Achieve. Colonel Suarez has helped her understand military career pathways,

connected her with trusted local recruiters who can work with her in a culturally responsive manner, and is helping her navigate potential barriers to enlistment related to past trauma.

Today, Jimena is thriving. Her attendance and grades have improved, she is on track to graduate on time, serves as a youth speaker at Bolder Options events, and is working as a paid intern helping organize Bolder Options' "Back-to-School Night" for younger participants. Jimena's journey demonstrates how a long-term mentoring relationship, combined with intentional career exploration, leadership opportunities, and individualized coaching, can help young people build the confidence, skills, and connections needed to pursue their goals.

New Grant Funds

State funds for the SFY 2026 grant 6BO6300 have been fully expended. Bolder Options has begun to expend SFY2027 grant funds of $237,500 and is expected to 100% expend the funds by the grant end date of June 30, 2027.