



STANFORD
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Alumni Consulting Team

Application ID: **29267**

April 12, 2010

Dear Applicant Review Panel:

Thank you for the opportunity to recommend Cynthia Dai for the Citizens Redistricting Commission. I have had the pleasure of working with Cyn in my role as Executive Director of the Stanford Alumni Consulting Team (ACT), an organization I co-founded in 1987 to share the management knowledge of Stanford Business School alumni with community nonprofits. Today ACT is one of the largest nonprofit consulting providers in the Bay Area providing \$3 million in pro bono services annually. ACT teams spend 6-8 months with a nonprofit to address management challenges such as strategic planning, financial sustainability and geographic expansion. Each ACT team is run by a project leader who assures that a team of volunteer consultants delivers specific recommendations which address a client's mission, needs and resources.

Cyn Dai is not only one of ACT's most active project leaders but also one of its most highly regarded and respected so I had heard of her before I arrived as Executive Director. Since 1994, Cyn has contributed her expertise to 14 different community nonprofits and led 11 of these teams. Her past clients, which illustrate Cyn's interest in and ability to work with diverse organizations that serve different California constituencies, include: Asian Neighborhood Design (helping ethnically diverse populations overcome poverty), San Francisco Big Brothers Big Sisters (youth mentoring), Women's Initiative for Self Employment (business training for underserved women entrepreneurs), Shanti (education and counseling for people with HIV), Smuin Ballet (arts & culture) and the Uganda Rural Development and Training Program (a client with a Californian Board that took an ACT team to Africa.)

Leading an ACT team requires considerable tact and patience as well as strong communication and organization skills. Not only is each ACT team comprised of business professionals of different ages and backgrounds, but also since a new team is created for each project, team members are working together for the first time. Each team moves through similar analytical steps: getting to know the client and its mission, determining what questions to answer, gathering information from multiple sources both inside and outside the client organization, analyzing the data, and developing impartial recommendations. With anywhere from 5 to 8 consultants on a team, the project leader must be skilled in supporting a wide range of team dynamics: building a cohesive working group, allocating work assignments, managing volunteers to a schedule, facilitating multiple viewpoints and building consensus, and sustaining the team's energy for the project duration.

I'd like to share what ACT consultants who have served on teams led by Cyn have to say about her qualifications for the CRC. Regarding Cyn's ability to be impartial, retired professor Hal Nystrom says, "She does not bring a pre-determined solution based on her own views. Instead she always focuses on doing things that helped to identify the unbiased reality at hand that would help make good decisions." Bruce Seaman, President of Technology Management Consulting, adds, "Cyn is the consummate leader-member of professional task-oriented teams. She balanced difficult client focus and team-member commitment situations very well in an impartial way." Jeff Landau, Senior Manager of Product Strategy at Onyx Pharmaceuticals, notes, "Cyn let me voice my thoughts and opinions yet challenged me impartially always on the basis of facts and logic." Anne Marie Burgoyne, Director of the Draper Richards Foundation, concurs: "Cyn's leadership is catalytic. She is purposeful, open to all ideas, and manages the team's energy and expectations."

ACT teammates also praise Cyn's analytical skills. "She was very good at breaking down the big questions into smaller questions that we could address in order to find valuable insights," says Hal. Bruce comments, "Her engineering/analytical background gives her an ability both to understand and direct teams toward objectives where quantitative analysis is critical to success."

Cyn is a master at building a cohesive team that can focus its energy on a common set of goals and accomplish impressive results under tight deadlines. We seek her out for difficult projects and usually are able to convince her to "volunteer". Susan Caspi, Vice President of Strategic Analytics, Wells Fargo Bank, agrees: "Cyn managed groups with many different styles from different stages of life (student, working, retired) and managed to get people to commit to schedules and assignments that enabled the team to overdeliver within deadlines." Jeff adds, "Cyn led a team made up of 6 California residents of varying experience and ages (28-60 plus) which required Cyn to impartially balance egos and enthusiasm while positioning each of us for success. She did a fantastic job balancing varying skill levels and gently nudging /allowing us to identify areas where we were individually stronger and thus able to contribute more. "

Kamael Sugrim, President of mPowering, states, "Our 7-person team was made up of individuals of varying backgrounds with different ideas on how the project should evolve. Cyn was a great leader for this project, clearly assessing the team's skills and allowing everyone to sign up for the work they thought was most interesting. She kept the team on plan and made sure that everyone contributed—not an easy task when your team is full of volunteers with very busy lives. She held everyone accountable and had those tough conversations with the few individuals who were not pulling their weight on the project." Anne Marie adds, "She is a hard worker with great integrity. I worked with her in a difficult project where a less talented leader might have lost the team or offended the client—or both. Instead, she persuaded the team to hang in and complete compelling research that delivered value to the client."

Here are similar words from Martha Dolben, Board Chair of the Uganda Rural Development and Training Program, ACT's first international client. "We are very grateful for the personal commitment the ACT team made to travel to Uganda and spend time in the field with our team. We especially appreciate how well they worked with surprises as they arose and put in the extra effort needed to create understanding across cultural and other divides. The team's excellent research, analysis and computer-based presentations are empowering for us."

I (and her ACT teammates) enthusiastically recommend Cynthia Dai for the Citizens Redistricting Commission. I can't express it better than Geetha Rao, CEO of Springborne Life Sciences, who notes "Cyn was hands down the best team leader I have ever worked with. She is phenomenal in her ability to balance the interests of numerous stakeholders, keep a very distributed work team focused and generate collaborative outcomes. Cyn accomplishes this with a remarkable optimism, a sense of humor and support of every individual. I know of no one else I would trust more to do a fair job on the redistricting."

Sincerely,



Alison Elliott, Co-Founder and Executive Director
Stanford Alumni Consulting Team