



nebraskachildren

CONNECTED YOUTH INITIATIVE

External Evaluator for a Connected Youth Initiative

To Help Unconnected Youth in Rural Areas of Nebraska Become
Contributing, Independent Citizens.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

November 2015

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I. BACKGROUND

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is engaging in an effort to help unconnected youth in rural areas of Nebraska become contributing, independent citizens. For the purposes of this work, unconnected youth are defined as young people ages 14-24 who are currently or have been in the Nebraska foster care system, have had contact with child protective services, have had contact with the juvenile justice system (but are not on probation), or are homeless or near homeless.

This effort, called the Connected Youth Initiative, uses a collective impact approach to create systems change in rural Nebraska communities and builds on a model (Project Everlast) that has proven successful in urban areas. See Appendix A for a definition of collective impact. It is anticipated that a diverse portfolio of 7 to 10 subgrantees will be selected by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to implement the Connected Youth Initiative using such an approach. See Appendix B for the Request for Proposals to which subgrantees were asked to respond; this document also contains additional details about the background and desired outcomes associated with the Connected Youth Initiative.

The Connected Youth Initiative is co-funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund. Visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/social-innovation-fund> for more information about the Social Innovation Fund. Specifically, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has been awarded a federal grant of \$1 million per year for a five-year project period (funds guaranteed for the first two years, with renewal subject to available federal funding, performance, etc.). An additional \$1 million per year in private match funds has been pledged, and it is anticipated that grantee communities will secure another \$925 thousand to \$1 million per year in matched funding from non-federal sources. The total project is expected to be for five years and have a budget slightly less than \$15 million.

II. ABOUT THE EVALUATION

Evaluation is perhaps the central feature of Social Innovation Fund grants. Social Innovation fund grantees (in this case, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation) are required to have at least preliminary evidence of effectiveness for funded efforts. Social Innovation Fund grantees are also expected to advance the level of evidence that exists. See Appendix A for definitions of levels of evidence. To meet the second of these expectations, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation will work with an external evaluator to move evidentiary support for its Connected Youth Initiative from a preliminary level to either a moderate or strong level by December 1, 2017. At present, evidence to support the effectiveness of the Connected Youth Initiative model is based on one group pre- and post-test data. Examples of evaluation designs that would lend themselves to moderate or strong levels of evidence include those that use well-matched comparison groups or multi-site large-scale randomized control trials, respectively. For additional information, see Appendix C, which contains the Social Innovation Fund Evaluation Plan Guidance.

In addition to the expectation that Social Innovation Fund grantees will advance the level of evidence that exists for funded intervention, the terms of the federal grant also specify that the subgrantees' capacity for evaluation and for increasing their level of evidence should be built over the course of the grant. Accordingly, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is soliciting a proposal for an evaluator to take on responsibility for external evaluation and capacity building in evaluation.

This project will have one evaluation plan for assessing program impact and implementation. For those familiar with the Social Innovation Fund, this project will, in other words, adopt a Unified Subgrantee Evaluation Plan (UniSEP) rather than a MultiSEP. As such, it is anticipated that there will be a shared set of goals and measurements across subgrantee sites for the purposes of evaluation. However, because subgrantees may implement the model in slightly different ways, resulting in possible variation across sites in terms of the degree to which and how the model is implemented, the evaluation plan should be designed to account for

these circumstances. Also, selected subgrantees may have varying degrees of evaluation readiness in addition to varying interventions; thus, strategies to determine how to adjust for variation among sites in designing the evaluation and providing evaluation-related capacity building will be important.

We anticipate that the shared measurements for the Connected Youth Initiative will relate to the following seven outcome areas: 1) personal and community engagement, 2) education, 3) employment, 4) daily living/housing and transportation, 5) physical and mental health, 6) permanence, and 7) economic stability. A finalized set of shared measurements will be developed collaboratively by the subgrantees, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and the external evaluator.

To help subgrantees develop the moderate level of evidence (see definitions in Appendix A) needed to meet Social Innovation Fund requirements, the evaluator must have expertise in Quasi/Experimental Design (QED) and/or Experimental Design and experience navigating the requirements of Institutional Review Boards. The evaluator will also be skilled in mixed methods research design and the development of estimates of return on investment for social service-related interventions. Local connections to help build trust and develop the network needed to access data may be useful, in addition to familiarity with work involving unconnected youth.

This is a two-year federal grant, with potential for extension to five years total, based on performance. Extension of the evaluation contract in subsequent years will depend upon performance and extension of the grant.

III. POTENTIAL EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following set of potential evaluation questions is provided to assist those responding to this request for proposals in developing a sense, in very broad terms, of the types of questions and subquestions Nebraska Children would like the evaluation and its findings to address. Importantly, it should be noted that these, however, are potential evaluation questions. A finalized set of evaluation questions will be developed collaboratively by the subgrantees, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and the external evaluator.

Question 1: Do the supports provided as part of the Connected Youth Initiative impact the well-being of unconnected youth?

- a. What is the degree of impact overall?
- b. What is the degree of impact by outcome area?
- c. How does the degree of impact (both overall and by outcome area) link to variations in how the Connected Youth Initiative is implemented in communities?
- d. To what extent, if any, are there unanticipated outcomes? This includes unanticipated outcomes for youth, organizations, and/or communities
- e. How does the degree of impact (both overall and by outcome area) link to characteristics of the population being served?
- f. What challenges are subgrantees facing in the implementation of the Connected Youth Initiative model? And what, if anything, could be done to address these challenges?
- g. What are the positive effects subgrantees are seeing – for example, in their organizations, in their communities, and in youth?
- h. What do subgrantees want and not want in terms of how and with whom the formative evaluation data is shared?

Question 2: How is the Connected Youth Initiative being implemented in subgrantee communities?

Question 3: What is the return on investment from the Connected Youth Initiative?

Question 4: To what extent, if any, has the focus on collective impact increased the sustainability and capacity of the collaborative? How, if at all, has this focus on collective impact changed the manner for which gaps and solutions in a community are implemented?

IV. DEADLINE TO SUBMIT PROPOSAL

The deadline to submit a proposal is **December 11, 2015**.

V. PERSON AT NEBRASKA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES FOUNDATION TO CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS

Please email Catherine Humphries Brown at cbrown@nebraskachildren.org.

VI. TIMEFRAME AND KEY DATES

Note: Dates may change based on circumstances; however, please use these for planning purposes

- The two-year federal grant period will begin on September 1, 2015, and runs through August 31, 2017.
- **Selection of the external evaluator will be announced in January 19, 2016.**
- Review of potential subrecipients' proposals will take place between January 19 and February 5, 2016; please note that the external evaluator is encouraged to participate in this review process
- Selection of subrecipients will be announced February 22, 2016
- **February and March 2016: The external evaluator will be responsible for developing a Portfolio Evaluation Strategy (PES),** in collaboration with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. This must be submitted to SIF and approved by them before evaluation activities can begin. SIF approval can take three months or more. Substantial time and effort can go into the preparation of this document, and the evaluator should plan to start

work on it as soon as possible after the contract is signed (i.e., January 2016). The PES is less involved than the Subgrantee Evaluation Plan, but could take several days to develop, not counting iterations with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and SIF.

- **Second Quarter 2016: The external evaluator will be responsible for developing a Subgrantee Evaluation Plans (SEP)** for the project as a whole (see introductory section of this RFP), in collaboration with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation. This must also be submitted to SIF and approved by them before evaluation activities can begin. Substantial time and effort goes into the preparation of this document, which could be over forty pages long. SIF approval is a highly iterative process and can take three months or more.
- **The external evaluator must obtain approval from an Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to the study's implementation.**
- Third Quarter 2016: Subgrantee start date. Evaluation activities may or may not begin at that time depending on where we are with SIF approval of the Portfolio Evaluation Strategy and Subgrantee Evaluation Plan.
- October 2016: The first quarterly reports will be due to Nebraska Children and Families Foundation to verify that all subgrantees are up, running and ready for evaluation.
- Annual reports to SIF are due each year in April. The first one in which the external evaluator will play a role will be April 2017 (six month report).
- December 1, 2017: Compile report to share with stakeholders. Note that the completed evaluation report is a public document, and is expected to be broadly disseminated.

VII. FACTORS ON WHICH PROPOSAL WILL BE JUDGED (SCORING CRITERIA)

- Evaluation Experience (45%): See list of specific types of experience listed in the narrative section on evaluation experience.

- Work Plan (30%): Plan to work with 7–10 subgrantees on the same evaluation; plan to build subgrantee capacity in evaluation and ensure that they are ready to track and collect required data; plan to increase the level of evidence used by the subgrantees. See additional details relevant to the work plan in the narrative section.
- Local Knowledge and Subject Matter Expertise (15%): See list of specific types of knowledge and expertise listed in the narrative section of this document.
- Credentials (10%): Master's or doctorate in a related field. Strong biosketches and references.
- Note: Although a budget is requested, it will not be scored. Budgets are subject to negotiation and change as the evaluator learns more about the scope of the project.

VIII. PROPOSAL FORMAT

1. A signed cover letter on letterhead (PDF format)
2. A narrative (up to ten pages, fewer preferred) including the narrative elements listed below (Word or PDF format). Please use at least 12 point font, 1-inch margins, and at least 1.5 line spacing. Additional full-page tables, diagrams, etc., to further illustrate the narrative, are optional and do not count toward the page limit. There is no page limit on attachments. Tables may use single line spacing and 11 point font.
3. Biosketches of the principal evaluator and staff to be funded by the contract.
4. Three letters of reference.
5. A sample evaluation report from a previous engagement
6. A detailed line item budget (Excel format)

Please submit all items attached to an e-mail addressed to: Jamie Anthony at janthony@nebraskachildren.org. Please use the email subject line, "External Evaluator Proposal."

IX. ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR COVER LETTER

- Statement of interest
- Statement of interest in and availability to participate in the review of potential subrecipients' proposals
- Name and website of firm (if any)
- EIN (Tax ID) of your firm
- Name of individual contact
- Contact information (address, email, phone number)
- Bottom line amount of proposed cost
- Proposed start and end dates of evaluation contract
- Your credentials: Highest or most relevant academic degree(s); for each degree listed, institution where earned and field of study
- Statement of ability and willingness to travel throughout the project service area (i.e. Nebraska counties other than Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster)

X. ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR NARRATIVE

Evaluation Experience: Please describe your experience, if any, in the following areas. If no experience exists in a particular area, please note that in your narrative.

- Designing and conducting mixed-methods research.
- Calculating return on investment for social service-related programs.
- Evaluating collaborative projects (particularly collective impact projects).
- Evaluation that involves multiple agencies, and selecting the appropriate design for varying conditions.
- Empowerment Evaluation. Number of years of experience conducting this type of evaluation; where your knowledge of this approach was acquired; examples of projects in which you used this approach.
- Quasi/Experimental Design and/or Experimental Design.
- Working on an external evaluation for a Social Innovation Fund project (in other words, experience with the rigors of SIF requirements).
- Working with Institutional Review Boards.
- Working with interrupted time series data, random sampling, the use of

nonequivalent dependent variables, and the development of statistically matched comparison groups.

- Designing evaluations that eliminate threats to internal and external validity.
- Acquiring secondary (community-level) data, and using it. What, if any, secondary data sets do you see as being relevant to this evaluation? Have you negotiated data use agreements?

Work Plan

- Please submit a **two-year** work plan, with a February 22, 2016 start date and concluding in August 2018.
- Please read the Social Innovation Fund's Evaluation Plan Guidance found in Appendix C, to understand the scope of work involved in developing a Subgrantee Evaluation Plan. *Note: We are not asking you to submit a Subgrantee Evaluation Plan as part of this proposal.*
- Describe your plan to work with subgrantees to solidify their agreement on shared goals and measurements to be tracked in this evaluation.
- Describe, in general terms, your plan to work with 7-10 subgrantees (to be selected by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation) on a single evaluation.
- Describe your plan to ensure that subgrantees are ready to track and collect required data, and to build their capacity in conducting evaluations of their work.
- Describe your plan to help increase the level of evidence for the Connected Youth Initiative.
- Please use the definitions of preliminary, moderate, and strong levels of evidence listed in Appendix A.
- *Please provide a timeline for your work*, outlining month-by-month the phases or activities of the evaluation process. This may be included as an

attachment. When do you propose to begin and end the contracted work? Timeline should not exceed the federal grant dates (September 1, 2014 – August 31, 2016).

- Note: Please be sure your timeline reflects time to be spent preparing the Portfolio Evaluation Strategy and the Subgrantee Evaluation Plan for SIF approval (see attached SIF guidance). We recommend that you begin this process in February 2016.

Please refer to the “Timeframe and Key Dates” listed on pages 7 and 8 of this RFP to ensure that your timeline aligns with those dates.

Local Knowledge and Subject Matter Expertise

Please describe your knowledge and expertise, if any, in the following areas. If no experience exists in a particular area, please note that in your narrative.

- Overall experience in serving as an external evaluator for programs involving unconnected youth. If you have not served as an external evaluator, describe your experience as an internal evaluator and your experience working with external evaluators.
- Working with nonprofit organizations in the rural project service area (i.e. in Nebraska counties other than Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster).

XI. ABOUT THE BUDGET

Please submit a detailed line-item budget for Years 1 and 2 in an Excel format. The budget should show how you would plan to spend grant funds to conduct the work plan you have proposed. Please refer to the SIF Evaluation Guidance (Appendix C) when preparing your budget. This attachment includes sample budget formats.

Please break out personnel, including **hourly rate**, travel, supplies, and other standard budget categories, rather than listing cost per activity. Please note that first class airfare and alcohol are disallowed items.

Indirect costs are allowed and are capped at 10% of the total contract (not above and beyond the contract amount).

Equipment costs are allowable as long as they are reasonable and necessary. Equipment is defined as any item (or group of items, such as laptops) of \$5,000 or more; other goods would go under “supplies.” Any equipment included in the budget must be necessary to perform responsibilities under the contract. Any budgeted items of \$5,000 or more must be specifically approved by the Social Innovation Fund before they can be purchased, even if the overall budget is approved.

XII. FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

The selected contractor must abide by all requirements for a federal contractor, to include the Office of Management and Budget’s (OMB’s) Uniform Guidance at 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 200. See all relevant federal circulars for guidance. Any staff paid by the contract must receive all required background checks.

XIII. STATEMENT ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. All qualified applicants are encouraged to apply, including minorities, women, veterans and individuals with disabilities.

XIV. STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

We understand achieving diversity requires organization-wide commitment to openly welcome, meaningfully engage, and fully incorporate both traditional and unique voices in our operational culture, values, norms, and behaviors, including external interactions. Our work at practice, policy and internal governance levels will continually seek to represent diversity in all of its forms, encompassing but never limited to population characteristics such as age, disability and health status, economic circumstance, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, family formation or structure, race, religion, or location.

Diversity Practice Strategies:

As an organization that values diversity and the inclusion of all people, Nebraska Children will:

- Actively seek underrepresented voices and invite them to decision making tables
- Approach community challenges around diversity issues with sincere interest and as good listeners
- By listening and observation, learn the values, norms, and practices of cultures present in communities and incorporate the knowledge into our work
- Acknowledge trauma present within affected populations and take action to assure policies and practices employed promote healing and minimize any further trauma
- Regularly check our own perceptions and attitudes and offer staff and board member learning opportunities at least annually
- Support and coach communities in articulation of their unique community context
- Maintain our practices of data driven decision-making and facilitating best practice in overcoming population differences unique to each community

XV. STATEMENT ON DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation is committed to complying fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and ensuring equal opportunity in employment for qualified persons with disabilities, with a previous record of disability, who have been regarded as having a disability or with life-threatening illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, and HIV/AIDS. All employment practices and activities are conducted on a non-discriminatory basis.

APPENDIX A - DEFINITIONS

Collective Impact

The commitment of a group of actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem, using a structured form of collaboration. The concept of collective impact was first articulated in the 2011 Stanford Social Innovation Review article *Collective Impact*, written by John Kania, Managing Director at FSG, and Mark Kramer, Kennedy School at Harvard and Cofounder FSG.

For this initiative, the concept of collective impact hinges on the idea that in order for organizations to create lasting solutions to social problems on a large-scale, they need to coordinate their efforts and work together around clearly identified goals for unconnected youth.

Initiatives must meet five criteria in order to be considered collective impact:

1. **Common Agenda:** All participating organizations and participants have a shared vision for social change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving the problem through agreed upon actions.
2. **Shared Measurement System:** Agreement on the ways success will be measured and reported with a short list of key indicators across all participating organizations.
3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities:** Engagement of a diverse set of stakeholders, typically across sectors, coordinating a set of differentiated activities through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
4. **Continuous Communication:** Frequent communications over a long period of time among key players within and across organizations, to build trust and inform ongoing learning and adaptation of strategy.
5. **Backbone Organization:** Ongoing support provided by an independent staff

dedicated to the initiative. The backbone staff tends to play six roles to move the initiative forward. Guide Vision and Strategy; Support Aligned Activity; Establish Shared Measurement Practices; Build Public Will; Advance Policy; and Mobilize Funding.

Social Innovation Fund Evidence Tiers

The Corporation for National Service Social Innovation Fund uses the following definitions of preliminary, moderate, and strong evidence, recognizing that there are multiple levels of development within each tier. These definitions are consistent with those used by the Office of Management and Budget:

- Preliminary evidence means evidence that is based on a reasonable hypothesis supported by credible research findings. Thus, research that has yielded promising results for either the program model or a similar program model will meet CNCS' criteria. Examples of research that meet the standards include: 1) outcome studies that track participants through a program and measure participants' responses at the end of the program; and 2) third-party pre- and post-test research that determines whether the participants have improved on an intended outcome.
- Moderate evidence means evidence from previous studies on the program, the designs of which can support casual conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity) but have limited generalizability (i.e., moderate external validity). This also can include studies for which the reverse is true—studies that only support moderate casual conclusions but have broad general applicability. The following would constitute moderate evidence:
 1. At least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental study supporting the effectiveness of the practice strategy, or program, with small sample sizes or other conditions of implementation or analysis that limit generalizability;
 2. At least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-

experimental study that does not demonstrate equivalence between the intervention and comparison groups at program entry but has no other major flaws related to internal validity; or

3. Correlational research with strong statistical controls for selection bias and for discerning the influence of internal factors.
- Strong evidence means evidence from previous studies on the program, the designs of which can support casual conclusions (i.e., studies with high internal validity), and that, in total, include enough of the range of participants and settings to support scaling up to the state, regional, or national level (i.e., studies with high external validity). The following are examples of strong evidence:
 1. More than one well- designed and well-implemented experimental study or well-designed and well- implemented quasi-experimental study that supports the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program; or
 2. One large, well-designed and well-implemented randomized controlled, multi-site trial that supports the effectiveness of the practice, strategy, or program.

**APPENDIX B – REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS, SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND
GRANT PROGRAM RURAL NEBRASKA CONNECTED YOUTH INITIATIVE**

The following link will direct you to Nebraska Children and Families Foundation website, where you can find an electronic copy of the Request for Proposals, Social Innovation Fund Grant Program, Rural Nebraska Connected Youth Initiative:
<http://www.nebraskachildren.org/connectedyouth.html>

APPENDIX C – SOCIAL INNOVATION FUND EVALUATION PLAN GUIDANCE

The following link will direct you to the Corporation for National and Community Service's website, where you can find an electronic copy of the Social Innovation Fund Evaluation Plan Guidance: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/documents/social-innovation-fund/2014/social-innovation-fund-evaluation-plan-guidance>