

# **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

**The Early Learning Initiative**

***Expanding high-quality childcare opportunities for children ages 0-3***

**Proposals Due: September 29, 2017**

## **1. PURPOSE**

The City of Burlington's Community & Economic Development Office (CEDO) seeks the services of qualified consultants and/or nonprofit organizations to initiate and assist in administering the *Early Learning Initiative (ELI)*, an effort to create more spots in high-quality childcare programs in Burlington for low-income children from birth to three years old. The City is interested in working with the successful respondent to make grants to childcare programs with clear plans for enhancing quality of care, cultural responsiveness and expanding existing spots for low-income children, as well as in preserving existing community capacity and preventing the closure or curtailment of programs with track records of success.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

Research has consistently shown the benefits of investments in early childhood education to a wide range of social, economic, health, and education-related outcomes. Ensuring an adequate supply of spots in early learning programs is vitally important in maintaining a vibrant community in which all children are given the opportunity to succeed.

Recent evaluations of the early childcare landscape in Burlington documented 189 available slots per year for children 0 – 3 (for context, about 350 children are born to Burlington parents each year). Parents in Burlington and surrounding communities struggle to find childcare and often spend significant time on waitlists at multiple institutions attempting to secure any spot, let alone a spot at a high-quality childcare provider.

### **The Early Learning Initiative**

In May 2017, Mayor Miro Weinberger and community partners announced the Early Learning Initiative (ELI), a \$500,000 annual City investment in early childhood education, and in June of 2017, the Burlington City Council appropriated funds for the initiative in the fiscal year 2018. As stated in the original announcement, the initiative seeks “to address the fact that low-income Burlington children are disproportionately likely to be unready for school, experience a widening achievement gap as they age in the public school system, and are more likely to experience a range of negative outcomes later in life, including reduced educational achievements, higher rates of chronic health problems, higher rates of incarceration and drug misuse, and lower lifetime earnings.”

In discussions with community partners, the City has determined that the most effective long-term strategy for the ELI may involve a transition from a capacity-grant model to a scholarship model tied to individual children. A model like this has been successful in other cities like Minneapolis, MN. Under this model, students will receive grant money to defray the cost of high-quality childcare, and childcare centers that receive substantial scholarship funding could be eligible for additional capacity grants to further expand operations.

In order to demonstrate the value of these investments in the near term, however, CEDO is seeking to expand the available high-quality child care slots by providing grants to

Burlington early care and learning programs and rigorously tracking the results of this investment. Through conversations with its partners, the City has also identified several key questions to be determined over the course of the planning and implementation of the pilot project, including:

- How will components of an application be weighed to increase the number of high-quality spots in Burlington most effectively?
- Which outcomes will the ELI track in order to determine the success of the program, and how will they be measured?
- Which investments yield the greatest returns on these key outcomes?
- How can CEDO best prepare to implement a scholarship model in the City in future years?

#### **The Role of the City and its Partners**

That winning respondent will first establish selection criteria in consultation with CEDO, and then review and score capacity grant proposals against established selection criteria. Through its consultation with the winning respondent, the City will also carry out a coordination role to ensure other City and community services are being considered by grant applicants when appropriate (for example, the Community and Economic Development Office's Lead and AmeriCorps Programs).

As currently envisioned, CEDO and its partners will sit on a committee, staffed by the successful RFP applicant, that will ultimately provide recommendations to the Mayor regarding the best childcare capacity grant program applications (the Advisory Committee). Applications for capacity grants will be submitted to this Advisory Committee through the winning RFP respondent. Advisory Committee members could include representatives from the University of Vermont Medical Center, the Burlington School District, and the United Way of Northwest Vermont, among others.

The Mayor will review the Advisory Committee's recommendations and bring a proposed slate of capacity grant allocations forward to the City Council for approval. The City Council will then review and vote on the proposed allocations.

### **3. SCOPE OF WORK/DELIVERABLES**

The successful respondent to this RFP will be responsible for developing selection criteria in consultation with CEDO, developing evaluation criteria in consultation with CEDO, soliciting, reviewing, and helping strengthen proposals for childcare capacity grants within the City, and for program implementation and day-to-day decision-making, in consultation with the City.

#### **Draft Selection Criteria for Grant Application Proposals**

Some criteria for eligibility for these capacity grants have been established, but other criteria, and the relative weighting of that criteria, will become the responsibility of the successful respondent.

For example, participating organizations may seek funding for hiring, training, or otherwise increasing staffing levels or hours or quality, as well as for capital investment. Ultimately, a proposal needs to demonstrate how the investment contributes to an increased number of

high-quality childcare spots for low-income children in Burlington. Applicants must be Burlington-based organizations that serve the greater Burlington community by providing high-quality childcare for our low-income youth from birth to three years old, and grants should be used to expand the number of available slots, enhance quality of existing slots, and/or preserve existing capacity of 0-3 programs.

Partner organizations must agree to participate in rigorous, long-term evaluation and will assure that children and their families covered by the grant agree to participate in evaluations on an ongoing basis. The City's livable wage policy will apply.

#### **Developing Measures to Evaluate Program Success**

Community and city stakeholders have identified a number of qualitative and quantitative indicators for tracking program quality and success. The respondent should establish evaluation measures in consultation with the City based on – but not limited to or requiring – some of the following:

- a. Number of new slots created or preserved
- b. Measures of childhood resilience, such as ACE scores adjusted for Burlington-specific challenges
- c. Childcare staff retention metrics
- d. Pre-K evaluation metrics

#### **Soliciting, Reviewing, Improving, and Ultimately Evaluating Grant Applications**

The respondent should use established relationships or develop relationships with Burlington providers in order to maximize the number of competitive grant applications that can effectively increase the number of high-quality childcare slots for low-income and diverse children in Burlington.

#### **Provide the Advisory Committee with Grant Applications and Recommendations**

The respondent should prepare applications in a manner which can be readily reviewed by Advisory Committee members. The respondent should provide recommendations and reasoning for those recommendations to the Advisory Committee in a combination of written and verbal communication as determined at least two weeks in advance of the Advisory Committee's first meeting by its appointed members and the respondent.

#### **Document the Use of Capacity Grant Funds**

The respondent should be prepared to track the utilization of funds by winning capacity grant applicants, in the form of a written report due no later than the June 10, 2018. That date will allow CEDO to review the report and answer questions in advance of submitting the report to the City Council in time for the final meeting of the City's fiscal year 2018.

This memo should include a preliminary analysis of progress against the evaluation metrics established as noted above in this section.

#### **Prepare a Long-Term Plan for Program Evolution**

In the form of a written memo, the respondent should provide an outline of necessary steps and associated timeframes for a transition to a scholarship-based model. The memo should clearly articulate a recommendation regarding the timing of such a transition that does not compromise the current capacity building effort.

### **Deliverables**

The respondent should expect to provide, at minimum, the following deliverables to the City over the duration of the project:

- a. A draft set of selection criteria for consultation with the City prior to finalization.
- b. A draft set of evaluation criteria for consultation with the City prior to finalization.
- c. A draft application for capacity grants.
- d. Monthly written updates during the grant application cycle to keep the City apprised of the number of prospective applications and to involve City staff in supporting the solicitation effort where appropriate.
- e. Providing the Advisory Committee with a packet of materials, including the respondent's recommendations and the complete set of applicant proposals, at least one week prior to the Advisory Committee's first meeting.
- f. A report detailing how program funds were utilized by winning capacity grant applicants by June 10, 2018. Included in that report should be a preliminary analysis of the evaluation metrics defined by the respondent in consultation with CEDO.
- g. An outline of the necessary steps and associated timeframes for a transition to a scholarship-based model.

## **4. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS**

Respondents—consultants or teams of professionals—must have experience with education, early childhood development, children's health, childcare, statistical methods and experimental design, and/or other relevant disciplines as applicable to the team's proposed approach to the Scope of Work. Respondents must have experience in grant administration, program design/implementation, and in working with diverse community partners. Respondents should be knowledgeable of the changing demographic profile and needs of the City of Burlington. Respondents with demonstrable experience preparing and executing efforts to expand childcare capacity or improve the administration of childcare programming will be strongly preferred. Proposals shall include, but not be limited to, the following information:

- Brief description of the responding organization, or each consultant in the event of a proposal that includes a team of professionals, and resumes of key personnel that will be assigned to this project. This should highlight relevant work/projects completed by the firm or team to demonstrate experience with similar projects.
- Detailed work plan setting out the approach to the Scope of Work tasks described in Section 3: SCOPE OF WORK/DELIVERABLES. The proposal should detail any proposed adjustments to the scope of the individual tasks.
- A proposed schedule which identifies the completion of individual work tasks, deliverables, and key meetings over the duration of the consultancy, consistent with Section 6: TIMELINE.
- A budget for fee and reimbursable expenses associated with the completion of the Scope of Work.

Proposals should be no more than 10 pages. Proposals shall be submitted via email by **4:00pm on September 29, 2017**. Consultants may submit a hardcopy proposal via U.S. Mail, but must also provide an electronic PDF copy; all digital and print proposals must be received by the deadline to be considered. All proposals shall be sent to the attention of

Noelle MacKay; contact information is provided in Section 7. This RFP does not commit the City to pay any costs incurred by any proposer in the submission of a proposal. The proposer is responsible for all costs associated with the response to this RFP. The City reserves the right to reject any or all proposals at any time with no penalty, to negotiate with any qualified source, to waive any formality or cancel the RFP in part or in its entirety if it is in the best interest of the City of Burlington. This solicitation of proposals in no way obligates the City of Burlington to award a contract. All materials submitted in response to the RFP will become property of the City upon delivery.

## **5. EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

All proposals will be evaluated using the criteria listed below by a selection committee. City staff will receive and review all proposals based on the criteria, and advance up to the top three scored proposals to the selection committee to review and provide a recommendation to the CEDO Director on a preferred proposal.

Proposals will be ranked based on the following criteria:

- Demonstration of overall project understanding and knowledge of the local area (30 pts)
- Qualifications of the responding team and key personnel to be assigned to this project and related experiences (30 pts)
- Clarity/Quality of the proposal and thoughtfulness in addressing the scope of work (25 pts)
- History of implementing successful projects with similar scopes of work (15 pts)

## **6. TIMELINE**

The anticipated deadline for the completion of this Scope of Work is June 2018. The following key milestones include:

- September 12, 2017: Issue Request for Proposals
- September 29, 2017: Proposals Due
- October 16, 2017: Consultants under contract; first meeting with partners
- October 23, 2017: Competition Begins
- December 12, 2017: Competition Closes
- December 14, 2017: Advisory Committee Meets
- December 19, 2017: Advisory Committee Presents Recommendations to Mayor
- January 8, 2017: Mayor Proposes Slate of Grant Allocations to the City Council

## **7. CONTACT PERSON**

All questions related to this Request for Proposals, and submission of all electronic or hardcopy proposals shall be directed to the attention of:

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