

Request for Proposal – Acelero Learning Head Start Evaluation Opportunity May 20, 2013

Background

Acelero Learning is a Head Start grantee currently serving over 4,000 low-income young children and their families in three states: New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Nevada. Acelero Learning is deeply committed to using data to inform practice, and will use the ongoing results from the study described here to inform practice at the child level, classroom level (children and teachers), and program level (delegate and grantee).

Since 2010-2011, Acelero Learning has participated in an annual program evaluation funded by external foundations. It is anticipated that the study, with possible modifications, will be repeated for three more years through 2016.

Acelero Learning has collaborated in a close partnership with the National Institute for Early Education Research to design and implement the evaluation of its classroom programs. We anticipate that the successful bidder will also work closely with us to collect child assessment data to also investigate the impact of key program features at the classroom, center, and grantee level. This annual natural variation, quasi-experimental study examines the effect of various preschool programming inputs on the learning gains of 3- and 4-year-olds who are enrolled in Acelero Head Start classrooms. The components include variations in curriculum, assessment systems, classroom quality and age of children enrolled. Children's learning gains are compared across classrooms and to the gains reported by the National Head Start Impact Study (Puma, Bell, Cook, & Heid, 2010) and the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES). The research questions guiding the study are:

- How do the pre-post gains of Acelero Head Start children compare to each other and to those reported in the National Head Start Impact Study and FACES?
- What is the relationship between child characteristics and these gains?
- Do varying education components/practices differentially impact these gains?

The evaluation study uses standardized measures of child outcomes in three content areas: receptive vocabulary (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test), math (Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement Applied Problems subtest) and executive function (Executive Function Scale for Early Childhood). Child assessment data are analyzed at center, classroom and delegate levels, so the effectiveness of different supplementary educational pilots being conducted by Acelero can be evaluated, as well as the impacts of teacher qualifications, program options (full- or part-day), age of children, years of attendance in Acelero Learning, percentage of English Language Learners and other characteristics of children, families, teaching staff and centers. Executive function scores will also be analyzed to determine their mediation role on vocabulary and math outcomes. Specific research scope, methods for data collection and analysis of data will be determined in collaboration with the vendor.

Acelero Learning uses analysis of these data to inform practice on an ongoing basis, as well as to evaluate and select the most promising methods, strategies, and curriculum supplements for future use in its programs. For example, a number of the classrooms are currently using the promising Tools of the Mind Curriculum, and child outcomes in such classrooms are of particular interest. In addition, the results obtained using standardized, direct assessments will be correlated with teacher conducted on-

going assessments (e.g. the GOLD and the Early Learning Scale) to determine the reliability and validity of this assessment method required by the Office of Head Start. Classroom quality will be assessed by Acelero data collectors in the spring by conducting 4 – 5 cycles of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS; Pianta, LaParo & Hamre, 2008) in each Head Start classroom. Classroom quality results will be analyzed by teacher qualifications, teacher pay, child gains, internal measures of teaching quality (the Acelero Teacher Success Rubric), and other classroom features; specific research scope, methods for data collection and analysis of data will be determined in collaboration with the vendor.

The children participating in this research all attend classrooms funded by the Head Start initiative. This federal initiative is targeted toward at-risk children and families, and each Head Start grantee is required to follow specific eligibility guidelines when enrolling children. Eligibility is primarily determined by having a family income below 100% of the federal poverty level, being eligible for public assistance, providing foster care, or being homeless. Head Start grantees may also serve children with family incomes up to 130% of the federal poverty level in situations where children with family incomes up to 100% of the poverty level have already been enrolled. Ten percent of children who enroll in Head Start do not need to meet the income requirements, but such children often have an identified disability and are therefore also at risk.

The child outcome sample will consist of 1760 children in 220 classrooms at 30 different sites, with specific selection methodology to be determined in collaboration with the vendor. We anticipate that the sample will be evenly split between three- and four-year-olds, subsets of children as follows:

Age group	Description	Expected number of children
4-year-olds	Participants in current study, returning Acelero students	635
	Randomly selected, transitioning to Kindergarten in fall 2014	<u>245</u>
	<i>Total 4-year-olds:</i>	<i>880</i>
3-year-olds	Newly enrolled 3-year olds	880
	• Kindergarten transition: Fall 2015	
	• Random or continuing sample of IEP or ESL students ¹	
Study Total		1760

It is highly likely that the 635 returning, current subjects who will be followed in 2013-2014 will be disbursed in both a.m. and p.m. session of the same classroom. Thus, new subjects will be randomly selected from both sessions proportionately.

¹ Only English will be used for PPVT and WJ assessments since the current language of instruction in Acelero classrooms is in English. However, the EF measure will be conducted in Spanish where that is the dominant language of the child.

TIMELINE

Project start date: August 1, 2013

Project end date: July 31, 2014 with anticipated annual renewals through July 2016

Specific information about timing

It is critical for data collection in this project to begin at the very onset of the new school year. It is important that children just beginning Head Start have not yet received the benefits associated with Head Start participation at the time of their assessment. If children are not assessed early during the school year, it becomes more difficult to estimate the impacts of pre-K participation and compromises the research design.

<u>Timeframe / Event</u>	<u>Date</u>
<u>Late Summer/Early Fall 2013:</u>	
Meet with Acelero partners to discuss study plans and procedures	8.1 - 8.15.2013
Hire and train data collectors	By 8.31.2013
Randomly select newly enrolled children from each classroom	8.15 - 9.7.2013
IRB certification required	By 9.1.2013
Complete passive parental consent	9.1 - 9.17.2013
Collect child assessments	9.7 - 11.2.2013
<u>Fall/Winter 2013-2014:</u>	
Clean and enter data	9.7 – 11.30.2013
Conduct initial analyses on pretest data	11.30 – 12.13.2013
Prepare report to Acelero Learning and meet to discuss results	By 1.6.2014
<u>Spring 2014:</u>	
Meet with Acelero partners to discuss post test plans and procedures	By 3.1.2014
Conduct refresher training for assessors	By 4.15.2014
Conduct post tests for child assessments	4.15 – 5.31.2014
<u>Spring/Summer 2014:</u>	
Clean and enter child assessment data	4.15 – 6.7.2014
Preliminary child pre-post analysis	By 6.12.2014
Complete analyses and submit draft report to Acelero Learning	By 7.15.2014
Meet to discuss report and findings	By 7.31.2014

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Applicants for this contract must provide the following:

- **A full description of how the organization will approach this project** and meet the timelines above, not to exceed 10 double-spaced pages. Applicants should include the following information:
 - **Research methodology:** sampling, data collection and analysis
 - **A description of similar projects** successfully completed in the past (references will be required), including experience with multi-site projects in different states (e.g. hiring and supervising data collectors)
 - **Biographical outlines or CV's** of key project leads (these will count toward the page limit; abbreviated CV's are encouraged)
 - **Statement of IRB process** – applicants must describe the process by which they will obtain IRB certification by September 1, 2013.
 - All subcontractors must also be IRB-certified by 9/1
- **A project budget and budget narrative**, not to exceed 5 pages (see below)
- **Three references** with whom applicants have worked on similar projects in the past
- **All compliance documentation**, filled out and signed as needed
- **Partnerships and collaborating groups of research institutions or organizations are encouraged to apply – please consider the following guidelines if preparing a joint application.**
 - Co-applicants should outline the nature of their collaboration, the division of responsibilities and expectations for each partner, and identify the lead contact for this project at each participating organization.
 - Co-applicant proposals must submit a budget that includes expenses for each organization according to the responsibilities outlined in the proposal
 - In the case of a partnership or group application, all participating teams must describe their path to IRB certification by the September 1 deadline

BUDGET FOR THE PROJECT

Acelero Learning will contract to pay up to \$200,000 in direct costs for the evaluations. Acelero Learning does not pay indirect costs but will allow within the \$200,000 for reasonable administrative staff costs (e.g. bookkeeper or payroll clerk) as well as facility costs with substantiation (e.g. lease or occupancy costs telephones, utilities). No equipment purchases are allowable with this contract. Other allowable costs include but may not be limited to the following:

- Research Staff (should be individually listed as budget line items)
- Data collection and entry costs –\$25 per 4 year old assessment; and \$15 per 3 year old assessment and approximately \$4 per child for data entry.
 - Please note that teacher and child and family characteristics are available in Acelero's databases; thus, no data collection costs for this are anticipated.
- Data collector training including travel to Nevada once in the fall and once in the spring.
- Costs of instruments and score sheets
- Mileage for data collection
- Telephone, postage, copying and other communications costs

Applicants must submit a proposed budget for the duration of this project, with a budget narrative. Combined budget documents should not exceed 5 pages, with the narrative portion of the budget double-spaced.

SUBMISSION DEADLINES AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Deadlines

Intent-to-Respond: Bidders can submit an *optional* Intent-to-Respond letter by 5:00 PM EST on June 17th. Bidders who submit an intent-to-respond letter by this deadline will be able to submit written questions via e-mail to cate@acelero.net for clarification on the project specifics – answers will be publicly posted to the Acelero website in order to be fair to all vendors.

Proposal Deadline: July 8th, 2013

- Electronic and hard copies are BOTH required!
 - Bidders should submit an **electronic copy** of their proposal narrative, budget and budget narrative to cate@acelero.net by **5:00 PM EST on July 8th**.
File type requirements are as follows:
 - **Electronic copies should be in PDF format**, with the exception of **budget documents** (NOT budget narrative), which can be submitted in Excel
 - For those documents available in Word in the original RFP documents and **NOT requiring a signature**, a save-to-PDF version is acceptable
 - For those documents **requiring a signature**, documents must be **signed and scanned to PDF** for submission
 - PDFs can be consolidated or separate – if separate, file names must reflect both the **bidder name** and the **contents of each document** (example: "CompanyName_ProposalNarrative.pdf")
 - **Hard copies of submissions are also required** for documentation – proposals and signed compliance documents must be **postmarked by July 9th**.
- The proposal narrative should not exceed 10 double spaced pages at 12 point font and 1 inch margins. Signed compliance documents should be scanned for the electronic submission.

Selection Criteria

The proposal review committee will use the following criteria to choose the successful bidder.

- Institutional capacity including research staff qualifications and experience relevant to preschool program evaluation (25%)
- Record of past performance and institutional capacity to meet deliverables and timeline, including a record of past experience completing multi-site evaluations (15%)
- Description of human subjects research protocol for this evaluation and ability for proposed research to meet that protocol and be completed in a timely manner (10%)
- Plan for training of assessors and quality control methods (20%)
- Thoroughness and rigor of plan for statistical analysis of data (15%)
- Budget and budget narrative, including reasonable rates for field researchers (15%)