

Request for Proposal – Acelero Learning Head Start Evaluation Opportunity

June 18, 2012

Background

Acelero Learning is a Head Start grantee currently serving close to 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. In past years, these funds have been directly awarded to the research institution that collected the data, provided analyses and reported on the results. For the 2012 -2013 year, Acelero Learning, Inc. has obtained funds to directly contract for this work. It is anticipated that the study, with possible modifications, will be repeated for four 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 and classroom quality 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). 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?
- Do varying education components/practices differentially impact these gains?

The evaluation study uses standardized measures of child outcomes in 2 content areas: receptive vocabulary (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) and math (Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement Applied Problems subtest). 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.

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 others are using the Evidence-based Program for the Integration of Curricula (EPIC), 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 Work Sampling System) to determine the reliability and validity of this assessment method required by the Office of Head Start.

Classroom quality will be assessed 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.

SAMPLE

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, 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 must have an identified disability and are therefore also at risk.

The child outcome sample will consist of 2160 children in 180 classrooms, 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	750
	Randomly selected, transitioning to Kindergarten in fall 2013	330
	<i>Total 4-year-olds:</i>	<i>1080</i>
3-year-olds	Newly enrolled 3-year olds	1080
	• Kindergarten transition: Fall 2014	
	• Random or continuing sample of IEP or ESL students ¹	
Study Total		2160

It is highly likely that the 750 returning, current subjects who will be followed in 2012-2013 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.

Classroom quality will be assessed in all 180 classrooms in the spring of 2014. Half-day sessions will be observed by randomly selecting either the am or pm session such that there are equal numbers of am and pm sessions in the data base.

¹ Only English will be used for assessments since the current language of instruction in Acelero classrooms is in English.

TIMELINE

Project start date: August 1, 2012

Project end date: July 31, 2013 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 2012:</u>	
Meet with Acelero partners to discuss study plans and procedures	8.1 - 8.15.2012
Hire and train data collectors	By 8.31.2012
Randomly select newly enrolled children from each classroom	8.15 - 9.7.2012
IRB certification required	By 9.1.2012
Complete passive parental consent	9.1 - 9.17.2012
Collect child assessments	9.7 - 11.2.2012
<u>Fall/Winter 2012-2013:</u>	
Clean and enter data	9.7 – 11.30.2012
Conduct initial analyses on pretest data	11.30 – 12.14.2012
Prepare report to Acelero Learning and meet to discuss results	By 1.11.2013
<u>Spring 2013:</u>	
Meet with Acelero partners to discuss post test plans and procedures	By 3.1.2013
Conduct refresher training for assessors	By 4.15.2013
Conduct post tests for child assessments	4.15 – 5.31.2013
Train CLASS assessors to reliability	By 4.1.2013
Conduct CLASS observations	4.15 – 5.31.2013
<u>Spring/Summer 2012:</u>	
Clean and enter CLASS data	4.15 – 6.7.2013
Provide Excel CLASS data base to Acelero	By 6.12.2013
Clean and enter child assessment data	4.15 – 6.7.2013
Preliminary child pre-post analysis	By 6.12.2013
Complete analyses and submit draft report to Acelero Learning	By 7.15.2013
Meet to discuss report and findings	By 7.31.2013

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)
 - **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, 2012.
 - 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 welcome 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 – estimated at \$150 per CLASS; \$20 per 4 year old assessment; and \$15 per 3 year old assessment and approximately \$4 per child for data entry.
 - Please note that since the CLASS observations and the Spring child assessments occur at the same time these must be different data collectors. Please also 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.
 - It is assumed that the successful bidder will already have CLASS certified trainers to conduct observer training internally.

- 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 28th. Bidders who submit an intent-to-respond letter by this deadline will be able to submit written questions via e-mail to katherine@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 18th

- Electronic and hard copies are BOTH required!
 - Bidders should submit an **electronic copy** of their proposal narrative, budget and budget narrative to katherine@acelero.net by **5:00 PM EST on July 18th**.
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 19th**.
- 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 (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%)