



Request for Proposals:  
Process Evaluation for Family-Led Stability Pilot

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**Summary**

The *Family-Led Stability Pilot* (FLSP) is a place-based, collaborative effort between Boston city agencies and non-profit providers designed to boost student success by addressing housing instability and non-academic challenges. The pilot, launched in January 2018, seeks to provide housing and a variety of socio-economic supports for approximately 240 homeless students at seven pilot schools in the first two years.

The FLSP partnership is seeking help to design, plan (and through a separate solicitation process, implement) a process evaluation that studies the current operation of the collaborative and lays the groundwork - through appropriate research questions and data collection - for a comprehensive outcomes evaluation. The goal is to generate lessons about the launch and roll out of the pilot for later refinement and expansion to other Boston neighborhoods and schools.

The pilot is informed by the work of Boston's Higher Ground's work with three local schools and the *No Child Goes Homeless Initiative* (NCGH), a collaboration created by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, Project Hope and three Boston Public Schools, which began in 2012 to address the issue of homelessness and housing instability in the Dudley Street community. Building off this original NCGH

framework and the adopted FLSP model, we hope this evaluation planning effort can focus on using the lessons learned from NCGH to guide the planning for a robust evaluation of FLSP.

## **Background**

Homelessness and housing instability are on the rise in the City of Boston. While the number of homeless families in Massachusetts actually declined by 14.2% from 2016 to 2017, the 4,463 homeless people in families is still 65% higher in 2017 than in 2007. Additionally, an estimated 4,200 families are living in unstable, doubled-up situations. These 8,000+ families represent a fraction of 63,500 extremely low-income renter families at risk of homelessness due to high housing costs, according to a 2015 report by the Center for Social Policy at UMass Boston.<sup>1</sup>

Research suggests that the educational experiences of homeless children are characterized by high levels of school mobility, academic difficulties, and special education needs.<sup>2</sup> Students who have experienced homelessness can see negative impacts in the area of social emotional learning and are also at greater risk for chronic absenteeism.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the existing ecosystem of school-based support providers suggests that additional resources are needed to identify families at risk of homelessness and support the families of homeless students. Since launching in 2012, NCGH has identified 192 families in need of housing stability support and has worked with these families to help them achieve housing stability. To date, 100 of these families have either retained their current housing or obtained new housing. Higher Ground has met with families of 95 of the 143 homeless children identified by BPS in four of the seven schools.

The partners in NCGH have learned a number of lessons from implementing their model over the last six years:

- Identifying vulnerable families further “upstream” from homelessness can prevent trauma for families and reduce program costs associated with stabilizing housing and promoting family well-being.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Social Policy, University of Massachusetts Boston and Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Management, University of Massachusetts Boston, "ON SOLID GROUND: Building Opportunity, Preventing Homelessness" (2015). Center for Social Policy Publications. 78. [https://scholarworks.umb.edu/csp\\_pubs/78](https://scholarworks.umb.edu/csp_pubs/78)

<sup>2</sup> Dworsky, A. (2008) Educating homeless children in Chicago: A case study of children in the Family Regeneration Program. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education (2016) Supporting the Success of Homeless Children and Youths

- Preserving existing affordable housing in the Dudley neighborhood and creating more housing affordable to families with low incomes in the neighborhood can ensure neighborhood and school stability for vulnerable families in Dudley.
- Expanding subsidized housing waitlist priority status for families that are doubled-up (in addition to families in shelter) can enhance NCGH's ability to serve this particularly vulnerable subset of housing insecure families.
- Providing the most comprehensive and appropriate suite of supports to families and children (e.g. student supports, mental health services) will enable NCGH to achieve student and family outcomes.
- Institutionalizing the families' role in NCGH planning and administration will ensure that all NCGH components are best positioned to work with families towards their success, over time.

Building upon lessons learned from NCGH, the FLSP is a systems change/integration experiment that seeks to respond very particularly to significant incidences of homelessness among BPS students and their families. Specifically, FLSP seeks to model a "system of systems" that connects siloed agencies and systems that are minimally structured for bureaucratic efficiency to achieve more effective and transformative outcomes for families. In this instance, we are bringing state and local government together with nonprofits and private developers, and working across housing, education and social services to improve inter-agency and inter-system support and service coordination, and to develop more comprehensive data about youth and their families to help agencies better understand the contexts that families are navigating, the assets at their disposal and the barriers that we need to help them overcome.

The pilot partners include:

- The Mayor's Education Cabinet (with support from Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics);
- The Department of Neighborhood Development;
- Boston Public Schools;
- Boston Housing Authority;
- Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative;
- Boston's Higher Ground;
- Project Hope;
- The Community Builders; and
- New Lease for Homeless Families.

The FLSP partners believe that our collaboration will allow us to identify and prioritize more permanent housing that is closer to a student's current school, thereby increasing the likelihood that students remain at the same school; improving school attendance; and better ensuring that the academic needs of students are known and met. We seek to measure, test, and refine these assumptions throughout the pilot.

FLSP partners' efforts currently focus on seven schools in the Dudley, Washington Park and Grove Hall areas of Boston: Dearborn STEM Academy, Dudley Street Neighborhood Charter School, David Ellis Elementary, Henry Higginson K-2, Higginson Lewis K-8, William Monroe Trotter K-8, and Orchard Gardens K-8.

### **Pilot Strategies**

The FLSP pilot has and will continue to experiment with strategies that add to the body of work developed by NCGH. We will continue to leverage and expand non-profit and school partnerships to improve identification of housing unstable students and their families. This includes providing two-generation supports to improve overall household stability. FLSP also seeks to develop a portfolio of affordable units near the pilot schools and facilitate prioritization of pilot families for those units. Below is an outline of this initial multi-pronged strategy.

#### **1. School and Community Based Outreach**

- The pilot takes a "no wrong door" approach, providing families several avenues to step forward and indicate interest. This approach will require a wide set of communication materials to various audiences in various spaces.
- Pilot partner organizations work together to develop and agree on the messages to be used in different formats, settings, and for different audiences.
- Messages will include information regarding program goals, partner roles and coordination, supports and services, and eligibility.

#### **2. Unit Aggregation and Family Prioritization**

- Housing units for the ~240 homeless students identified across the pilot schools will come from a variety of sources, including the Boston Housing Authority, partnerships with New Lease for Homeless Families and large developers in Boston, and turnover units from ~20 developers with buildings within two miles of the participating schools.

- Housing prioritization, using pre-formulated criteria, will be done by members of the Pilot Governing Board, which consists of key members of the pilot partner group.

### 3. Family Success Planning

- Family success should be family-led. In this pilot, families will lead by establishing two sets of goals, one for student(s) and another set for parent(s) or caregiver(s). These goals include:
  - **Student goals:** academics, out-of-school enrichment, health and social-emotional well being
  - **Parent/Caregiver goals:** employment, education, finances, and housing
- Alongside an assigned case manager from Project Hope, families will create an Individualized Family Service Plan, based on the goals set by the family. This two-generation plan will articulate steps towards reaching their goals, identify resources needed to reach their goals, and monitor families' progress towards their goals. Families, with their case managers, will complete a "Project Hope Assessment" once every three months. The assessment tracks a family's current status and any progress made in various domains (income, housing, employment, education, finances, childcare, health, immigration, etc.).
- In addition to supporting families in the creation and execution of their respective Family Stability Plans, case managers will also help families to access additional supports, collaborating with other service agencies to deliver needed tangible resources, such as food, clothing, and furniture.

### 4. Coordination of Two-Generation Support

- This pilot aims to develop and test new protocols, tools and strategies intended to enhance human service provider collaboration and coordination. These may include:
  - **Partner Organizations Tracking Tools** to build a growing list of service providers
  - **Bi-Monthly Case Manager Meetings** to share networks, successful strategies, and problem solve challenges
  - **Pilot Project Management** to support case managers by cultivating new relationships with service providers and assess the quality of supports

- Case managers will also play a connecting role between service providers supporting parents and students and school staff in the following ways:
  - **Hold Monthly Non-Profit and School Meetings** to share updates and better understand the strengths and needs of the family
  - **Attend Bi-Weekly Student Support Team Meetings** at each school to collaborate with educators on ways to support and nurture students while they are in school

### **Proposed Evaluation Scope**

The FLSP partners seek the services of an experienced evaluator to design an initial process evaluation for the pilot and its NCGH predecessor. The goal is to establish the foundation for a longitudinal, outcomes-focused assessment. Specifically, the pilot partners want to employ an evaluator who can help to:

- Identify primary research questions, potential metrics and measurement tools that can be used to monitor collaborative processes and assess progress toward intended outcomes;
- Develop data collection and data management strategies;
- Advise on data collection activities, and
- Develop an evaluation plan and design templates for analytic products that will be used to inform ongoing decision-making, course correction (as necessary), formative assessments of program implementation and (later) summative assessments of program effectiveness.

The pilot partners assume that the prospective evaluation will be rooted in the principles of "Developmental Evaluation." Developmental Evaluation (DE), an approach credited to former University of Minnesota professor and field evaluator Michael Quinn Patton, is meant to take the complexity of social change and innovation processes into account, respond to dynamic change over the life of interventions and provide high utility feedback to social program leaders. Developmental Evaluations take a holistic approach to assessment recognizing that we need to pursue both learning ("What did it take to do this?", "How did we do this?") and summative ("How well did we do this?", "Did this work?") questions. DE approaches also develop appropriate measures of change and success over time, providing feedback that is pertinent to initiative stage and relevant to formative and implementation phase decision making. Ultimately, this kind of dynamic feedback - as opposed to latter-stage formative feedback - is required to meaningfully and continuously test assumptions and guide the sharpening of our theories of change.

Following are examples of the kinds of research questions the FLSP partners seek to answer through the process evaluation called for by this RFP and through future outcome evaluations:

## Learning Questions

- How are school and nonprofit staff working collaboratively to identify vulnerable students and families?
- Who are the students and families participating in the pilot and what are their needs?
- How are pilot partners aggregating housing units? And by what methods are they able to gain prioritization for participating families?
- How are two-generation supports being delivered to families?
- How responsive are two-generation supports to the needs of families participating in the pilot?
- How are participating families experiencing case management and service activities? What roles do participating families play in determining their paths to increased stability?
- What practices and procedures are partners putting in place that might serve as a systems model for supporting similar families?

## Evaluative Questions

- On average, how long does it take to connect participating families to sustainable housing? Support services?
- To what extent is burden (time, resources) associated with accessing and coordinating services decreased for participating families?
- What trends in academic performance and social emotional competence do we see among students whose families participate in the pilot?
- How might we collect and measure evidence regarding household stability (e.g., gains in income, increased food security, social emotional stability to then further nurture and advocate for their children in school, etc.) among participating families?

Many evaluation questions will be longitudinal questions and we cannot expect to have answers to them in the short term. The pilot partners will work with the selected evaluator to choose stage-appropriate measures that provide some indication of status changes for pilot participants in light of this. Lastly, the selected evaluator will work with the pilot team and help to develop and support data collection systems and produce appropriately iterative analytic products to guide decision-making and process refinement.

**For the purposes of response to this RFP, the pilot partners are asking bidders to primarily assist with planning the pilot's process evaluation, including:**

- Refining short- and long-term research questions;

- Developing data collection plans and leading short-term, early-stage data collection and data management strategies;
- Producing real-time (bi-weekly) memos/interim reporting to aid translation of planning into pilot policy; and
- Complete final report/memo and reporting templates (i.e., data tables or exhibits that might be routinely updated, progress report outlines, etc.) for use once the process evaluation is fully implemented.

### **Bidder Qualifications**

Prospective evaluators must:

- Have expertise in mixed methods evaluation design and implementation with particular proficiency in qualitative techniques;
- Have experience evaluating multi-site, place-based initiatives;
- Have a working knowledge of Developmental Evaluation principles and approaches;
- Be familiar with evaluating multi-agency, cross-sector partnerships;
- Be familiar with policy and systems issues related to local education and school operations, state and local housing and nonprofit services;
- Be a clear and organized writer, able to translate data and evaluation results into messages and recommendations for the pilot partners, policy makers and interested audiences.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Members of the Pilot Leadership Team will undertake an evaluation of each Vendor’s technical capabilities. The evaluation will use a rating scale of “highly advantageous”, “advantageous”, and “not advantageous” for each of the criteria listed below. The chosen vendor may apply for the full pilot evaluation in the future and will not be granted any preference based on their participation in this initial process evaluation.

#### **(1) CONTRACTOR PROFILE & EXPERIENCE**

##### *Highly advantageous*

The contractor or contractor team has a diverse set of skills and experiences and has (or includes member(s) if a team) with extensive and strong backgrounds in designing and implementing developmental and process evaluations. The project would be well staffed during the project. Multiple team members and/or staff from the contractor/contractor team have language capabilities that are useful in Boston. The team has experience working effectively and respectfully with diverse populations in Boston neighborhoods. Three references on similar projects consistently rate services and results as “excellent.” The examples of past work provided are highly relevant to this project and demonstrate success on similar projects.

### *Advantageous*

The contractor/contractor team is somewhat diverse and includes members with some experience in designing and implementing developmental and process evaluations. The project would be adequately staffed during the project. At least one team member and/or staff have language capabilities that are useful in Boston. The team has limited experience working with diverse populations in Boston neighborhoods. Only one or two references on similar projects rate services and results as “excellent.” The examples of past work provided are somewhat relevant to this project and demonstrate some success on similar projects.

### *Not advantageous*

The team is not diverse and does not include members with experience in designing or implementing developmental and process evaluations. The project would not seem adequately staffed. No contractor/contractor team members have language capabilities that are useful in Boston or experience working with diverse populations. No references on similar projects rate services and results as “excellent.” The examples of past work provided are not relevant to this project and do not demonstrate success on similar projects.

## **(2) RIGOR OF RESEARCH METHODS**

### *Highly advantageous*

The proposal and approach shows thoughtful adherence to rigorous methodologies commonly used in developmental and process evaluations. The implementation plan shows a strong understanding of school and housing systems, and seems realistically designed to be effectively carried out within the given budget and scope of work.

### *Advantageous*

The proposal and approach shows some adherence to methodologies often used in developmental and process evaluations. The implementation plan shows some understanding of school and housing systems, and seems designed to be carried out within the given budget and scope of work.

### *Not advantageous*

The proposal and approach shows no adherence to methodologies often used in developmental and process evaluations. The implementation plan shows no understanding of school or housing systems, and does not seem designed to be carried out within the given budget and scope of work.

## **(3) PROPOSAL CLARITY**

### *Highly advantageous*

The proposal is well-written in clear, concise language. Materials are well-organized and easy to navigate. As a whole, the proposal provides a thoughtful and complete response to this RFP.

### *Advantageous*

The proposal is clear and organized. It provides a complete response to this RFP.

*Not advantageous*

The proposal does not address all aspects of the RFP. It is poorly written and/or difficult to read. It does not provide adequate information.

**(4) EXPERIENCE WITH POLICY AND SYSTEMS ISSUES**

*Highly advantageous*

The submitter clearly demonstrates a deep understanding of both K-12 education policy and housing policy, and has extensive experience researching and analyzing systems-level issues. It is highly evident that the team would be able to quickly jump into the project and begin evaluative work almost immediately.

*Advantageous*

The submitter demonstrates a surface-level understanding of both K-12 education policy and housing policy, and has some experience researching and analyzing systems-level issues. It is somewhat evident that the team would be able to jump into the project quickly and begin evaluative work within a short period of time.

*Not advantageous*

The submitter demonstrates a surface-level understanding of either K-12 education policy or housing policy, but not both, or has limited experience researching and analyzing systems-level issues. It is not evident that the team would be able to jump into the project quickly and begin evaluative work without significant onboarding and support from the Pilot team.

**Budget and Timeline**

The budget for this initial scope of work is \$11,000.

We anticipate that this contract term will be for 3-6 months, depending on the applicant's proposed approach and deliverable(s) timeline.

**Submission Requirements**

Professionals interested in serving as the pilot evaluator should submit a proposal that includes:

- (1) A brief statement outlining the submitter's understanding of the pilot and proposed evaluation scope;

- (2) The bidder's proposed approach to the FLSP process evaluation and the steps that will be taken to develop the research questions and data collection/analysis systems that will support the current evaluation and future evaluations;
- (3) A clear statement of qualifications highlighting the primary skills and experience the submitter possesses that will enable him/her to perform the evaluator role;
- (4) A biographical statement that provides additional detail on educational and professional background; and
- (5) Brief examples of analogous engagements (no more than two).

Qualification statements and resumes should be submitted via email to Kristin Haas at [khaas@prohope.org](mailto:khaas@prohope.org) by **August 1**. It is acceptable to submit qualification statements in Word or pdf format. The review committee may choose whether or not to host interviews with respondents.