

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
The Early Learning Initiative Scholarship Program
Expanding high-quality childcare opportunities for children ages 0-3
Proposals Due: Tuesday October 23, 2018

1. PURPOSE

The City of Burlington's Innovation & Technology Department and Community & Economic Development Office (CEDO) seek the services of qualified consultants and/or nonprofit organizations to initiate and assist in administering the *Early Learning Initiative (ELI) Scholarship Program*, an effort to increase access to high-quality child care for low income Burlington children through the provision of scholarships and the creation of additional spots in high-quality childcare programs in Burlington for children from birth to three years old.

Together with its partner Vermont Birth to Five, the City is interested in working with the successful respondent to provide scholarships for eligible children paid directly to the 4- and 5-STAR childcare programs where they will receive care. The respondent would also participate in monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the program. In future years, the respondent may also be asked to help to design a more unified child care waiting list for infants and toddlers in Burlington.

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. Mayor Miro Weinberger began the Early Learning Initiative 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. Ensuring an adequate supply of spots in early learning programs and access to those spots for our City's poorest children is vitally important in maintaining a vibrant community in which all children are given the opportunity to succeed.

The goal of the ELI Scholarship Program is to identify those eligible children not currently receiving Child Care Federal Assistance benefits and connect them with high quality childcare and the improved education and health outcomes, and public savings, such a connection entails. 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. A strategy to connect with families eligible for the ELI Scholarship Program who are not enrolled in a high quality program is essential to the program's success.

The Early Learning Initiative

In May 2017, Mayor Weinberger and community partners announced the establishment of 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 Fiscal Year 2018. The

first year of the program focused exclusively on increasing the number of available high-quality child care spots, readying other centers for future expansion, and helping preserve existing spots at risk in the community. The second year of the program will continue to increase available spots in Burlington where opportunities exist while shifting the emphasis of the program to focus on scholarships for low-income Burlington children.

The Role of the Respondent, City, and its Partners

The selected respondent will have experience operating in Chittenden County or Vermont, possess the administrative structure necessary to implement, monitor, and evaluate a scholarship program involving high-quality child care centers, have demonstrated experience administering income-based financial assistance programs, have the ability to help identify eligible families and child care spaces for scholarship awardees. The respondent selected will also provide feedback on the application process envisioned for the scholarship program and be able to meet the timelines established by the City and its partners for receiving and disbursing the scholarship funding. Through its consultation with the successful 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 Program).

3. SCOPE OF WORK/DELIVERABLES

The successful respondent to this RFP will be responsible for:

- Developing a process to engage eligible high-quality child care centers;
- Identifying potential spaces for scholarship recipients;
- Providing feedback on the scholarship application process;
- Disbursing the funding on the appropriate timeline;
- Monitoring the utilization of the awarded spots by scholarship recipients; and
- Design a plan for a unified waitlist for high-quality childcare centers in Burlington and possibly those in surrounding communities to be presented at the end of year one.

These tasks will be completed in consultation with the City and Vermont Birth to Five, and the successful respondent should be available for occasional meetings with members of the public, City Council, or the Mayor.

Deliverables

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

- a. A draft plan to engage high-quality child care centers and prepare for potential scholarship award disbursements (expected November 2018).
- b. A draft plan to identify potential spaces for scholarship recipients, in consultation with the City and VB5 (expected November 2018; note that the City and VB5 will already have begun this work).
- c. Feedback on the application process (Winter 2018/2019).
- d. Draft plan for monitoring utilization of awarded spots and a clear process for filling those spots not used, in consultation with the City and VB5 (expected Winter 2018/2019).

- e. Serving in a non-voting capacity on the Grant Committee (Spring 2019).
- f. Execution of the processes outlined in the draft plans described above once those plans are finalized.
- g. Recommended design for a unified waitlist for Burlington-based child care programs (June 2019).
- h. A report detailing how program funds were disbursed and the current state of utilization (submitted no later than October 21, 2019). Included in that report should be a preliminary analysis and recommendations regarding any additional evaluation metrics the City should consider.

4. CONCEPTUAL SCHOLARSHIP MODEL TO BE ADMINISTERED & TIMELINE

In the pilot year of the scholarship program, the intention is to provide ELI scholarships for up to about 25 Burlington children eligible for CCFAP but not currently enrolled in high quality childcare, focusing on those children 14 months old or younger.

Scholarship awards would be based on the most recent market study as well as survey responses from Burlington centers to help better approximate the true cost of high quality care, as many providers charge below-market rates to allow families to access care. Scholarship recipients would be provided technical assistance to enroll in the State's CCFAP subsidy program, so that City investments leverage the substantial value of other existing subsidy programs and allow the impact of the City's investment to be spread among more families. Those programs that hold spaces and enroll children receiving ELI scholarships could be eligible to receive additional support grants.

A related goal is to increase the number of scholarships in future years, while maintaining sufficient funds to administer a robust program throughout the three-year cycle.

The total value of the ELI scholarship will vary based on different families' financial circumstance and the number of STARS the childcare center has (4 or 5 STARS), but will provide sufficient funding in combination with State subsidy to enable access to high-quality care for Burlington's poorest children and up to 65 percent of average median income.

If more than 25 children apply and meet these criteria, awardees would be selected on a lottery basis (note that until 2016, the Burlington School District used a lottery system to apportion 3 – 5-year old early education slots). If fewer than 25 children apply, the remaining slots would be apportioned on a first come, first-serve basis.

Timeline

The anticipated deadline for the completion of this Scope of Work is October 2019 with additional work expected to continue in future years, subject to the City's procurement policy.

The scholarship application period for families is anticipated to open on or about March 1, 2019 and close on or about April 1, 2019 for funding beginning in September 2019. The City and VB5 would conduct outreach to make sure potential applicants are aware of the opportunity prior to the application opening, and would work with the successful respondent to help secure spots for scholarship recipients throughout the fall and winter of 2018 and through to September 1, 2019 if necessary.

As currently envisioned, City representatives including the Chair of the Council's Community Development and Neighborhood Revitalization Committee and the Interim Chief Innovation Officer will sit on a Grant Committee, staffed by VB5, in April 2019 that will ultimately provide recommendations to the Mayor regarding the scholarship awards and child care capacity grant program applications. This committee's work could involve advising on a lottery process.

The Mayor will review the Grant Committee's recommendations and make a recommendation to the City Council for approval. Should the Council approve the awards, the winning respondent must be able to allocate the funding to the appropriate high-quality child care centers for each scholarship award recipient by September 1, 2019.

5. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Respondents—consultants or teams of professionals—must have experience with grant management, scholarship or benefit disbursement, working with diverse communities, program design, development, and implementation, and income verification practices. Experience in some facet of early childhood education is a plus.

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 4: **CONCEPTUAL SCHOLARSHIP MODEL TO BE ADMINISTERED & TIMELINE** as well as the projected date for Deliverables outlined in Section 3: SCOPE OF WORK/DELIVERABLES.
- A budget for fee and reimbursable expenses associated with the completion of the Scope of Work.

Proposals should be no more than 10 pages, but can include an appendix for resumes of key personnel if necessary to stay below the 10-page limit. Proposals shall be submitted via email by **4:00pm on TUESDAY, October 23, 2018**. 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 Brian Lowe and Rebecca Reese; 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 and be subject to the Vermont Public Records Act.

6. 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 complete proposals to the selection committee to review and provide a recommendation to the Interim Chief Innovation Officer on a preferred proposal.

The selection committee shall consist of representatives from the City's Innovation & Technology Department, the Community and Economic Development Office, and other representatives as selected from community partners like the Burlington School District, United Way of Northern Vermont, or the University of Vermont Medical Center. The selection committee may elect to interview respondents prior to final selection.

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 (20 pts)
- History of implementing successful projects with similar scopes of work (20 pts)

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:

Brian Lowe and Rebecca Reese
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