

## **Statement of Work in a Solicitation for an External Evaluation of a Hypothetical AmeriCorps Program**

### **SECTION 3 - DESCRIPTION/SPECIFICATIONS/STATEMENT OF WORK**

#### **3.1 PURPOSE**

The Cincinnati Community Center (CCC) is soliciting proposals for the design and implementation of an external evaluation of the Financial Empowerment Corps (FEC), an AmeriCorps State and National (ACSN) program dedicated to improving the lives of vulnerable community members through financial education and empowerment. As an ACSN grantee, the FEC is required by the program's funder, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), to conduct an external impact evaluation by an external evaluator. Specifically, the evaluation must be designed to provide evidence of a causal relationship between program activities and outcomes.

This statement of work describes the design for an external impact evaluation of the FEC to assess the effect of the FEC's financial education and empowerment curricula on low-income clients. The evaluator is expected to use either a rigorous quasi-experimental or a randomized control trial (RCT) design with a treatment and control/comparison group; however, an RCT design is preferred given there are consistent waiting lists at each of the program sites. The timeframe for the project is 25 months, starting January 2014, and will be funded incrementally.

#### **3.2 FEC PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

FEC is a 10 site, ACSN program in the greater Cincinnati region that places members in credit unions and local financial institutions to provide financial counseling to low-income individuals, retirees, and young people. Members also assist with financial seminars and informational fairs, and recruit experienced financial professionals to serve as volunteers in a credit counseling program. For 2014, FEC plans to have 5 full time AmeriCorps members at each site for a total of 50 members.

Members are matched with clients on a first-come-first-serve basis by the site location's AmeriCorps program manager. Before their first meeting, clients take a short survey to determine their needs; this is administered by the local credit union or financial institution. Members then build a personalized education plan based on FEC's financial education and empowerment curriculum, which is administered over the course of twice weekly client meetings for lasting between 2 and 4 weeks. For example, many members work with clients on issues related to student loan and credit card debt. Using the core curriculum materials developed for student loan and credit card debt education, members work with clients to develop a savings and debt management plan, as well as develop realistic strategies to prevent further accrual of debt. According to a site survey conducted annually, most members work with clients to address issues of student loan and credit card debt, family budgeting, and basic saving for retirement. If there is a severe or persistent need, members refer clients to FEC volunteers, who are recruited based on their careers in the finance industry, or host site staff for additional services. Each member has a maximum caseload of 10 clients at any given time. As mentioned earlier, there are consistent waiting lists of up to four months at each of the 10 sites with a maximum of 500 clients receiving services at any given time.

The FEC's theory of change holds that individuals can most efficiently and effectively manage their money if they are educated and empowered with the relevant knowledge to do so. Low-income individuals in particular benefit, as they are not able to access these resources from professional financial planners and managers. Research shows that one-on-one, intensive counseling, using a curriculum based on industry best practices is the best approach for educating and empowering clients because it allows for personalized instruction that adapts to client circumstances and needs, challenges, and pre-existing knowledge. Multiple counseling sessions allow for the development of a learning plan that can comprehensively address clients' diverse and numerous needs, and allow for application of some of this knowledge in real time; clients can then troubleshoot emergent problems with their counseling member.

The short term outcomes targeted by FEC are that clients will increase their knowledge of basic components of personal finance and that they will gain the knowledge and skills to address a current financial challenge they are experiencing. Medium and long term outcomes targeted by FEC are that clients will apply the education learned through the counseling program to make significant progress towards solving, or will solve, a current financial challenge.

### **3.3 OBJECTIVES**

The overall objective of this evaluation is to assess the effect of the FEC's financial education and empowerment curricula on low-income clients using either a rigorous quasi-experimental or experimental research design with a treatment and a control/comparison group. The evaluation should be designed to answer the following short-term research questions:

1. Do low-income clients exit the program with increased knowledge of personal finance concepts? Do they know how to apply those concepts to address their financial challenges?
2. Are low-income clients that participate in member-led financial counseling through FEC able to better manage their personal finances than low-income individuals who did not participate in FEC counseling?

### **3.4 TASKS**

The external evaluator shall perform the following tasks:

**Task 1. Review Program Documents and Interview Program Staff.** The evaluator shall review relevant program documents and conduct interviews with FEC program staff to gather detailed information about the program's operations and the broader context in which it operates, existing data collection activities and instruments, and potential extant data sources. The contractor shall work closely with FEC program staff to refine the logic model of the program to ensure a common understanding of how the program is intended to work.

#### *Task 1 Deliverables:*

- Draft logic model (due mid-March 2014)
- Final logic model (due late-March 2014)

**Task 2. Develop Impact Evaluation Design Plan.** Based on the findings from Task 1, the evaluator will propose a plan for the evaluation that will detail the design of the impact evaluation. The evaluator is expected to use either a rigorous quasi-experimental or a RCT design with a treatment and control/comparison group; however, an RCT design is preferred given there are consistent waiting lists at each of the program sites. If the evaluator proposes a quasi-experimental design, please provide an explanation for why this is a better option for evaluating the program. The evaluation design plan shall include:

1. A conceptual model of how the FEC program is intended to work, that is, the intended relationships between the program's inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes, and how the evaluation will help determine if the program is operating as intended;
2. A summary of the purpose and scope of the impact evaluation, including a list of evaluation questions and hypotheses;
3. A description of the data to be obtained for the impact evaluation;
4. A description of the data collection methods, sampling methods, power analysis, and draft questionnaires or data collection instruments;
5. A description of the comparison/control group for the impact analysis and plan for recruitment;
6. A description of the analytical techniques that will be employed;
7. A description of any design limitations; and
8. A schedule of task milestones or timeline, and delivery dates for the period of performance

FEC intends for the evaluator to develop a design plan that utilizes the program's existing intake survey, as well as an existing pre and post-test survey developed a few years ago by an external evaluator. Member activity logs may also be used as a potential data source.

*Task 2 Deliverables:*

- Draft Impact Evaluation Design Plan (due April 2014)
- Final Impact Evaluation Design Plan (due May 2014)

**Task 3. Conduct Impact Evaluation.** The evaluator will carry out the evaluation activities as specified in the Impact Evaluation Design Plan. Specifically, the evaluator will conduct a pre/post-test to assess changes in clients' knowledge and behaviors. The evaluator shall plan for the data collection to span 12 months with the pre-test administered as part of clients' intake process and the post-test occurring at two time points – at the end of each clients' counseling services (2 to 4 weeks after pre-test) and again after six months have elapsed since their counseling services. Comparison/control group participants shall receive the same pre/post-test at similar time points as the treatment group. The evaluator is expected to gather any additional data (e.g., member survey logs) as specified in the evaluation design plan from Task 2.

FEC expects the contractor to achieve an 80% response rate on all surveys. The contractor will be responsible for preparing all documentation required for Internal Review Board (IRB) clearance<sup>1</sup> and assisting FEC in obtaining such clearance, selecting the sample(s) and administering the survey.

*Task 3 Deliverables:*

- IRB paperwork (due June 2014)
- Administer the pre/post-test to treatment and comparison/control groups (late August 2014 to late August 2015)
- Gather extant data (late August 2014 to late August 2015)

**Task 4. Analyses and Reporting.** The evaluator shall perform appropriate analyses to answer each of the research questions of interest. Additionally, the contractor shall conduct subgroup analyses for the treatment group by type of financial challenge (up to 3 types).<sup>2</sup> Where possible, the evaluator should perform statistical modeling that utilizes the pre and post-test data from both program and comparison/control groups to determine if outcomes are statistically significant.

The contractor shall provide a well-written, readable report to submit with FEC's recomplete application in the winter of 2015 that documents the activities and results laid out in the evaluation plan. Additionally, the contractor shall work closely with FEC staff to develop a lessons learned report that reflects on the evaluation process and lays out a plan for future research.

*Task 4 Deliverables:*

- Evaluation Report Outline (due October 2015)
- Draft Evaluation Report (due late November 2015)
- Final Evaluation Report (due mid-December 2015)
- Lessons Learned Report (January 2016)

**Task 5. Meetings with FEC Program Staff.** To begin the project, the evaluator shall attend a kick off meeting with the FEC evaluation manager (EM) to discuss details regarding the tasks outlined in the proposal, study design, scheduling activities, and other issues related to the contract. This meeting shall be via telephone conference call or in-person and occur no later than 1 week after the contract award. The evaluator shall work with the EM to develop an agenda for the meeting, which is to be finalized at least two days in advance of the meeting.

---

<sup>1</sup> IRBs are committees that review research protocols and other materials to ensure the rights, safety, and welfare of human subjects participating in studies. The IRB can certify that the rights of subjects will be protected, that any potential adverse effects on participants will be minimized, and the data will be securely managed and maintained. IRB clearance may be required by your agency leadership or funding source, so it is important to include this in your statement of work if you determine it is necessary and would like your evaluator to prepare the IRB paperwork.

<sup>2</sup> Subgroup analyses involve splitting the data into subgroups, often so as to make comparisons between them or explore differences in how people respond to an intervention. Subgroup analyses may be done for subsets of participants such as males and females or in this case, by participants' type of financial challenge.

The evaluator shall meet regularly with the EM via telephone conference call. These meetings shall occur no fewer than once per month and not to exceed [4, 2, etc.] times per month. The purpose of the meetings is to brief the EM on the progress of the evaluation and to discuss and resolve any issues as they arise.

Within one-week following each meeting, the evaluator shall prepare and deliver a memo summarizing the discussion.

*Task 5 Deliverables:*

- Kick-off meeting (January 2014)
- Memo summarizing kick-off meeting (January 2014)
- Periodic meetings (ongoing)
- Memos summarizing periodic meetings (ongoing)

**Task 6. Submit Progress and Expenditure Reports.** The evaluator shall prepare [monthly, quarterly, etc.] progress and expenditure reports due at the same time as the invoice. The progress reports shall summarize the major activities and accomplishments for the reporting period. In addition, the contractor shall provide information for each project task regarding significant findings and events, problems encountered, and staff use. The reports shall also specify the extent to which the project is on schedule, briefly describe the activities planned for next month, identify and discuss significant deviations from the substantive and time factors in the management plan, and identify and discuss any decisions which may be needed from FEC.

The expenditure reports shall summarize the actual personnel assignments for the month just completed and exhibit the total budget, current expenditures for the time period in question, total expenditures, and the balance remaining for each task.

*Task 6 Deliverables:*

- Progress and expenditure reports (ongoing)

**Task 7. Submit Data Files and Working Documents.**<sup>3</sup> The evaluator shall deliver all data collected under this contract to FEC at the time the evaluator reports the results of the analysis to FEC. The FEC Data Files shall include all individual level data from the study, including identifiers and contact information in a format specified by the EM (i.e., tab-delimited, ASCII, SPSS). The evaluator shall also provide a codebook explaining each variable and the variable values, and a full description of the formulas and procedures used, weights, and weight calculations for all datasets, and methods used to control for attrition and nonresponse and to adjust for incomplete or missing data.

*Task 7 Deliverables:*

- Working documents and data files (December 2015)

---

<sup>3</sup> As part of your long-term research strategy, your program may want the contractor to submit final data files and working documents, such as a data codebook and other important documentation about the evaluation methods used, in order for any future evaluation efforts to build on this existing evaluation work.

### **3.5 SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS**

The evaluator shall propose a data collection plan that makes efficient use of extant data collection tools and processes in place at FEC sites and minimizes burden on clients.

The evaluator shall be required to provide the necessary personnel to accomplish each task listed above. The key personnel positions and their required time commitment are listed as follows:

Project Director (50%); Task Leader(s) (50%)