Request for Qualifications (RFQ):
Evaluation of the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger

Overview

Trailhead Institute, the administrative home for the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger, offers this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to respondents who are interested in serving as an evaluation partner for the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger. The office plans to contract with a single entity to provide evaluation services to the Blueprint from November 2019 to October 2024, but the budget and work plan for years 2-5 will be developed collaboratively with the program office and governing council for the Blueprint.

Background

The Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger is a multi-year plan to end hunger for all Coloradans. It was developed, with funding from the Colorado Health Foundation, by individuals and organizations from across the state who are addressing or experiencing hunger in their own homes and communities.

Key elements of the plan include efforts to:

- **Maximize enrollment** of income-eligible Coloradans in both the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women, Infants, and Children Food and Nutrition Service (WIC), which focuses on mothers and children under five years of age.
- **Increase participation** in Federal Child Nutrition programs.
- **Grow the number** of Coloradans who can access the food they need in their communities.
- **Develop a groundswell** of Coloradans advocating to end hunger in our state.

The Blueprint is currently transitioning from development and planning to implementation. These efforts are supported through funding from the Colorado Health Foundation, with the intent to bring in additional funders as the work progresses. The Colorado Health Foundation contracted with Trailhead Institute (Trailhead) to serve as the Program Office to facilitate the process of moving the Blueprint’s aspirational goals into action. In this role, Trailhead serves as the administrative point of coordination for implementation efforts.

To achieve the goals and strategies outlined in the Blueprint, numerous organizations and individuals across Colorado have joined four goal-focused workgroups based on their areas of expertise or interest. Trailhead coordinates the logistics and multi-sector collaboration for these workgroups. A Governing Council serves as the oversight body for the project.

The Blueprint Evaluation Contractor will work directly with Trailhead through the Blueprint Program Office and the Governing Council to design a comprehensive evaluation for the Blueprint to End Hunger.

Objectives of the Evaluation

The overarching goals of this evaluation are to provide actionable information to both stakeholders and the Blueprint to End Hunger in the early stages of the initiative, and in later stages, to inform the
Blueprint and its partners about the type and effectiveness of the changes that have taken place.

Ultimately, the evaluation contractor should:

- Establish an adaptive and equity-focused learning agenda for the Blueprint to End Hunger that incorporates the needs of different stakeholders and the phases of the initiative’s development.
- Coordinate with existing efforts around data and evaluation, including work that state agencies and other non-profits in the anti-hunger space are already doing, that can inform the overall Blueprint evaluation.
- Provide rapid-cycle evaluation and support learning for workgroups and project teams throughout planning and implementation.
- Inform accountability, decision-making and continuous improvement for the governing council, program office, and workgroups.
- Assess progress towards effective collaborative practice and the stated goals of the initiative (across multiple levels including policy, systems, organizations, and individual).
- Reflect the complexity of the system and the issues being addressed, while remaining adaptive and goal oriented; be able to make meaningful judgments about progress to inform both the Blueprint to End Hunger and its stakeholders.

Below are some suggestions of the types of activities that the evaluation contractor will need to engage in. These activities are presented as a guide to frame the evaluation work. However, once a contract has been awarded, the first task of the evaluator will be to work with the Blueprint to End Hunger and the workgroups to finalize a set of study questions and determine the methodology. Given the adaptive nature of collaborative efforts, it is expected that the evaluation plan will be revisited and revised regularly (at least annually, but likely more frequently) throughout the course of the initiative’s lifecycle to address emergent questions and needs. Potential activities for the first year of the evaluation may include:

1) Working with the governing council and the program office to identify the appropriate roles and responsibilities for the evaluation team (particularly focused on the first few years), taking into account the needs, capacities, and assets of the partner organizations.

2) Establishing the goals of the evaluation with the governing council and the program office. Creating an action plan to outline how these will be accomplished in both the short and long term.

3) Supporting the governing council to identify their major needs and identifying the evaluator’s role in meeting these. Needs may include supporting planning (e.g., theories of change), measurement strategies (e.g., establishment of the shared measurement system, identifying early progress indicators, implementing strategies for collection of data), providing data to inform strategy (e.g., context or environmental scans), etc.

4) Creating a comprehensive and equitable evaluation framework to support the evaluation design and implementation longer term. This should provide guidance for clarifying the role of the third-party evaluator, how the third party evaluation activities link to internal evaluation activities (e.g., which the initiative partners are conducting), communication approaches with both internal and external partners, nature and timing of learning loops, etc. This is not intended to be a multi-year detailed evaluation plan,
but rather a way of guiding evaluation activities and discussions, for determining how best to allocate evaluation resources, and as a way of ensuring that evaluation activities are aligned towards longer term goals (e.g., assessment of impact).

In order to engage in a successful evaluation of the Blueprint to End Hunger initiative, the evaluation partner will need to effectively manage a number of elements present in this initiative. The evaluation partner needs to be able to:

- Balance the interests of multiple stakeholders, including the governing council and the work groups, who may have different needs and interests in the evaluation.
- Build strong relationships with all stakeholders, while being able to maintain an objective lens on the implementation of the initiative.
- Be able to quickly adapt and modify the evaluation (including questions and methods) to meet the needs of partners, while ensuring that evaluation activities are coherent and support long term needs (e.g., impact measurement).
- Have at their disposal team members who are experts in a variety of evaluation approaches (including developmental evaluation, process, formative, and summative), and who can provide a variety of support depending on the needs that arise (e.g., strategic planning, logic modeling, measurement development, facilitation, data collection systems development, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis).
- Be willing to work closely with the Blueprint and its partners in a situation that is complex and adaptive, and which will require exceptional agility by the evaluation team in both their thinking and their methods.
- Have a clear focus on identifying observable changes in the system, partnerships, equitable outcomes for consumers, etc. and be able to draw appropriate conclusions (both positive or negative) about the amount and quality of progress being made by the initiative.
- Be able to apply evaluation methods, frameworks and approaches appropriate for initiatives involving systems-change and complex adaptive systems.
- Clearly and effectively communicate findings in a real-time and non-academic way to a variety of audiences and in a variety of ways.

Timeline

The first year of this evaluation is expected to occur between December 2019 and November 2020. There is the potential for renewal on a yearly basis, as determined by the Trailhead Institute. Budget for future years of evaluation will be determined in discussion with the program office and the governing council.

Reporting Structure

The evaluation contractor will report directly to the Blueprint Implementation Director at Trailhead but will also be expected to work closely with other Blueprint personnel, including the policy and communications manager and the community engagement manager, as well as the governing council. Given the nature of this particular evaluation, there are a variety of key stakeholder relationships which are critical. The evaluator will need to work closely with the workgroups as well as the groups described
above; and the evaluator is expected to appropriately manage communications and relationships with these stakeholders as key partners.

Budget and Contract

The budget for the first year of this study should not exceed $250,000 including all fees and expenses. Given the very emergent nature of this work, the Blueprint expects to enter into an evaluation contract with a ‘not to exceed’ amount where the evaluation scope and associated budget will be developed in short tranches (e.g., 3 months) throughout the first year. Given this method of scoping, the evaluation partner is expected to carefully manage their budget to ensure that evaluation activities can be appropriately carried out for the duration of the contract year.

Responding to the Request for Qualifications

Given the scope and nature of this evaluation, the skills and expertise required of the evaluation team are fairly extensive. Interested firms, groups or individuals must have experience in the following areas:

1. Content expertise in evaluations related to systems change and collaborative efforts as well as access to services.
2. Skills around methods and frameworks appropriate for evaluation of changes in complex adaptive systems.
3. Expertise evaluating large-scale system changes with multiple levels of complexity.
4. Experience working with large-scale collaborative projects.
5. Working with large and diverse groups of stakeholders who have different interests and needs.
6. Implementing methods appropriate for rapid/real-time evaluation, process evaluation, formative evaluation and summative evaluation.
7. Outstanding reputation in the field of research and/or evaluation.
8. Excellent communication, reporting, and interpersonal skills.
9. Experience in food systems/nutrition preferred, but not required.

Proposal responses are due by Thursday, October 24 by 5:00pm and should be clearly structured into the following sections:

1) Why is this a compelling opportunity for you? Tell us a little bit about why you want to respond to this RFQ. What sparked your interest? What makes this the kind of work that you want to spend your time on? (no more than 1 page)

2) Why do you think your team would be a good fit for this project? Tell us a little bit about who would be coming to the table – who will be collaborating to complete this work? Why is this the team you want to involve, and why are they a good fit for this particular project? What experience would this team bring to the table that would help make them successful on this project? What amount of time will each team member be contributing to the project? We will assume that the people/organizations you propose will be available for the project if your proposal is selected. (no more than 5 pages)

3) How would your team approach this work? Provide us with a brief narrative (no more than 6 pages) that shares ideas of how you would approach this project. The goal is not to provide a project plan, but
to help us understand how you would think about approaching this work and what you’d take into consideration. A few things we’d like to hear about are: a. How do you think about centering equity in this work? b. Given this work has been ongoing for several years, how would you come up to speed with the work? c. When you look at what is needed for this work, what do you see as a major learning curve for your team? d. What is the range of research and evaluation methods you have in your toolkit and do you have experience in rapid evaluation? Tell us a little bit about what you’ll need to wrestle with and learn, and how you’d think about doing that.

4) Budget: Please provide some general ideas about how you would use your time and resources for this project. You do not need to provide a detailed or line-item budget, but please tell us about the types of fees and expenses you anticipate being a part of the project. Please indicate the hourly rate of the types of individuals you would staff on this project, and the total hours you would anticipate spending on the project. This is designed to be an estimate only, and subject to change based on contracting to complete specific work agreed upon with the Foundation. (Cost effectiveness will be considered in proposal review.)

5) Legal Status: Your organization’s legal status (a 501 C3 or a for-profit organization).

6) References: Please provide three references who are very knowledgeable about work you have done which would be relevant to this project (please include a description of working relationship and contact information).

7) Deliverable Samples: Please provide us with two deliverables from other projects that you feel are really great exemplars of the types of skills you’d bring to this project. These can be any format, such as evaluation reports, presentations, briefs, etc. At least one sample should demonstrate your ability to communicate complex evaluation results with a lay audience.

8) Primary Contact: Include the name, title, phone number and e-mail address for the primary point of contact for communication regarding this proposal.

How to Apply

This RFQ includes the following phases.

- Proposal Deadline: Thursday, October 24, 5:00 (MDT)
- Interview of selected applicants (estimated): November 1 – November 15
- Award Announcement: Friday, November 22

Please send Letter of Interest, Proposal, and supporting documentation electronically in Microsoft Word or PDF format to Erin Ulric, Implementation Director, eulric@endhungerco.org, (303) 974-8427. You may also send any questions about the RFQ or process to Erin as well.
Terms and Conditions

Application Rejection: Trailhead Institute reserves the right to reject any or all applications and to waive informalities and minor irregularities in applications received and to accept any portion of an application or all items proposed if deemed in the best interest of the Trailhead Institute.

Modification or Withdrawal of Applications

Applications may be modified or withdrawn prior to the established deadline.

Expenses

Trailhead Institute is not liable for the costs incurred in the preparation of a response to this RFQ.

Review

The review will identify the applications that most effectively meet the requirements of this RFQ. The work will be offered to the contractor whose application conforming to the RFQ will be most advantageous to the Trailhead Institute, price and other factors considered. Women, people of color, and LGBTQ-led organizations are highly encouraged to apply.