WEST VIRGINIA HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY COMMISSION

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR
WV GEAR UP EXTERNAL EVALUATION
RFP 09010

September 25, 2008

Table of Contents

Section 1  General Information ........................................................................................................ 1
Section 2  Eligibility Requirements .............................................................................................. 2
Section 3  Services Required ........................................................................................................ 3
Section 4  Proposal Preparation and Evaluation ........................................................................ 7
Section 5  Questions and Proposal Format ................................................................................ 8
Section 6  Other Information ........................................................................................................ 9
          Exhibits ............................................................................................................................ 10
          Appendices ..................................................................................................................... 10

Questions will be received until 5:00 PM, Eastern Time, October 17, 2008
Proposals will be received until 3:00 PM, Eastern Time, October 31, 2008
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Section 1 General Information

1.1 The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (the Commission) has been awarded nearly $18 million in federal funding for a six-year program to help middle and high school students prepare for and pursue a college education. The GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant from the U.S. Department of Education will fund programs and services for low-income West Virginia students who have been identified as being at risk of not pursuing an education past high school. Approximately 13,000 students will participate in the project at schools in 10 counties, including Boone, Clay, Lincoln, McDowell, Mingo, Roane, Summers, Webster, Wirt and Wyoming. The Commission is required by the grant agreement to hire an external evaluator to evaluate the Commission’s performance in meeting the grant objectives.

1.2 The West Virginia GEAR UP grant is comprised of two structural components: (1) early academic intervention(s) for a 7th grade cohort (Class of 2014) that will be tracked throughout the life of the grant and (2) a priority student approach focusing on post-secondary outreach and intervention for 11th and 12th grade students as they rotate through the identified schools. In year one of the West Virginia GEAR UP grant, staff will work with thirty-two high-poverty 7th graders and sixteen 11th & 12th graders in 45 schools in ten counties within three regional areas: (1) Central West Virginia (Glenville State College regional site): Clay County, Roane County, Webster County, and Wirt County; (2) Southern West Virginia (Concord University regional site): McDowell County, Summers County, and Wyoming County; and (3) South Western West Virginia (Northern West Virginia Community and Technical College regional site): Boone County, Lincoln County, and Mingo County. Two additional high schools serve as feeder schools to two 7th grade cohorts for a total of 18 high schools participating in grant years 3-6 (for a total of 47 schools participating over the life of the grant).

1.3 The West Virginia GEAR UP project will include programs aimed at increasing parent/guardian involvement in the education and educational aspirations of students. The funding also will be used for financial aid and career awareness programs for students, parents and schools to help remove the cultural barriers that keep students from furthering their education. Teacher professional development activities are also a vital piece to this grant.

1.4 This contract, which is contingent upon continued funding from the U. S. Department of Education and annual satisfactory performance as required, is
renewable and is anticipated to begin by January 5, 2009 and extend through July 14, 2011 (Years 1, 2, and 3 of the grant). The contact may be renewed for Years 4, 5, and 6 of the grant with written consent of the parties. The Commission will enter into one evaluation contract for all of the services identified in Section 2.

1.5 The point of contact at the Commission for questions and clarifications concerning this Request for Proposal (RFP) is:

Chief Procurement Officer
West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
1018 Kanawha Boulevard, East, Suite 700
Charleston, WV 25301
Phone: (304) 558-0277 Ext. 212
Fax: (304) 558-0259
Email: donovan@hepc.wvnet.edu

1.6 This RFP, addenda, answers to questions or any additional information will be posted on the website address below. It is the vendor’s responsibility to check this website for current information regarding this RFP. Please acknowledge receipt of addenda in the proposal.

http://wvhepcnew.wvnet.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=0

1.7 Data collection methods (i.e. surveys, interview protocols) developed for the purpose of conducting this evaluation will be retained as property of West Virginia GEAR UP.

1.8 Quantitative and qualitative data collected for the purpose of conducting this evaluation will be retained as property of West Virginia GEAR UP. These data must be submitted in clean electronic file formats at the time each report related to the vendor’s evaluation proposal is submitted.

1.9 The public schools to receive direct GEAR UP services and the total number of students are identified in Appendix 1.

Section 2 Eligibility Requirements

2.1 It is the policy of the Commission to encourage the participation of small businesses and women and minority owned business in the Commission’s procurement activities.

2.2 In order to assure the integrity of the evaluation and unbiased commentary, no employees of the Commission or the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education will be considered. Employees of the following
West Virginia GEAR UP regional sites will be excluded from consideration: Central West Virginia (Glenville State College regional site); Southern West Virginia (Concord University regional site); and South Western West Virginia (Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College regional site). Employees of the Fairmont State University GEAR UP Partnership grants will also be excluded from consideration.

2.3 The evaluator must have extensive knowledge of research principles and methodologies as well as experience with data collection and analysis. The evaluator must have experience in collecting, analyzing, and reporting large amounts of data in a longitudinal style.

2.4 The evaluator must demonstrate knowledge of PK-12 education (specifically grades 7-12), knowledge of post-secondary education, and knowledge of how to assess student academic success.

2.5 The evaluator must have experience in evaluating large educational grants and in working with large cohort groups in establishing data collection procedures and protocols.

Section 3 Services Required

3.1 The external evaluation service provider shall establish a framework or model to evaluate the impact of West Virginia’s GEAR UP program on students, families, teachers, and other relevant persons. This evaluation model must address the following GEAR UP goals and objectives:

- Goal One: To significantly increase the academic performance and rigorous preparation of cohort students for participation in postsecondary education.
- Goal Two: To significantly increase the number of high-poverty, at-risk students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.
- Goal Three: To significantly increase the rate of high school graduation and participation of cohort students in postsecondary education.
- Goal Four: To significantly increase cohort students’/families’ knowledge of postsecondary educational institutions, admissions requirements, and financial aid.
- Goal Five: To ensure effective, efficient, and most appropriate use of resources through intentional collaboration with identified partners that are committed to our goals.

3.2 West Virginia GEAR UP has established three service strands to meet the broad goals identified in 3.1. These strands are: (1) service to students; (2) service to educators and schools; and (3) service to parents/guardians. Each strand includes one or more measurable objectives related directly to one or more of the project
goals and serves as the foundation for GEAR UP activities and programs as follows:

3.2.1 Measurable Objectives for Strand One: Service to Students

- Increase student interest and involvement: interventions will include academic enrichment activities, hands-on instruction, counseling, and mentoring (relates to Goals 1, 2, 3, 4).
- Increase student academic achievement: interventions will include: study skills, tutoring, summer academies, mentoring, and hands-on instruction (relates to Goals 1, 2, 3, 4).
- Enhance student academic progression: interventions will include tutoring, mentoring, counseling, and hands-on instruction (relates to Goals 1, 2, 3, 4).
- Promote student career awareness and interest: interventions will include guest speakers, college/career fairs, job shadowing, career counseling, college/career publications, and family nights (relates to Goals 1, 2, 3, 4).
- Promote student college awareness: interventions will include college tours, admissions counseling/financial aid workshops, summer academies, publications/brochures, speakers, family nights, and West Virginia college/university outreach campaign (relates to Goals 2, 3, 5).
- Increase participation in postsecondary education: interventions will include test preparation, college/career fairs, college admissions info, parent/teacher conferences, campus tours, dual enrollments (relates to Goals 2, 3, 4, 5).

Measurable Objective for Strand Two: Service to Educators and Schools

- Develop GEAR UP schools and educators: interventions will include providing instructional equipment and workshops that address curricula alignment, instructional technology, and higher education student opportunities (relates to Goals 1, 3, 5).

Measurable Objective for Strand Three: Service to Parents/Guardians

- Increase parent school involvement and knowledge of college/university admissions and financial aid: interventions will include college/university admissions workshops, financial aid workshops, campus tours, parent mailings, family nights, college/university career fairs, and West Virginia college/university outreach campaign (relates to Goals 2, 3, 4, 5).
3.3 In addition to assuring the aforementioned objectives are measured and reported appropriately during the GEAR UP grant period, the evaluation framework must also engage in an evaluation process that is grounded in research questions framed to address both project implementation (the quality and quantity of project activities and interventions) and impact—the degree to which project objectives and goals are achieved. To effectively support both formative and summative purposes, this research based evaluation must be responsive to changes in the project and its context. Guiding research questions to be measured as outlined in the West Virginia GEAR UP grant include:

- To what degree are West Virginia GEAR UP activities being implemented as planned?
  - Are project activities being implemented with fidelity to the design?
  - Are services to students, parents, and schools/teachers achieving the desired reach?
  - How do stakeholders perceive the quality of project activities, interventions, products, and immediate outcomes?
  - What problems have emerged in implementation of project activities and interventions, and how are they resolved by those responsible for delivery?
  - How effectively, efficiently, and appropriately are (a) resources being used, and (b) partners collaborating toward GEAR UP goals (Goal 5)?

- To what extent are project objectives being accomplished, relative to established benchmarks?
  - To what degree are student interests and involvement in school being increased (1 obj.)?
  - To what degree are student academic achievement and progression improving (2, 3 obj.)?
  - To what degree are students’ interest in and awareness of college and career opportunities increasing (4, 5 obj.)?
  - To what degree are students participating in postsecondary education activities (6 obj.)?
  - To what degree are schools and educators being developed to support student preparation for postsecondary education (7 obj.)?
  - To what degree is parent involvement in targeted schools and parent knowledge of college admissions and financial aid increasing (8 obj.)?

- To what degree do West Virginia GEAR UP activities appear to be influencing stated project goals?
• Are academic performance and rigorous preparation of students increasing (Goal 1)?
• Is the number of targeted students prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education significantly increased (Goal 2)?
• Is the rate of high school graduation and participation in postsecondary education increasing significantly (Goal 3, quasi-experimental design)?
• Is target cohort students’ and families’ knowledge of postsecondary education increasing significantly and to a greater extent than that of nonparticipating cohort students and parents (Goal 4)?
• How do activities and interventions, and other variables, relate to the above goals?

• To what degree is the West Virginia GEAR UP model sustainable and transferable?
  • How, to whom, and how successfully is project information being disseminated?
  • Which, if any, project elements appear to be sustainable beyond the life of the project?

3.4 Data collection methods should be tailored to support implementation and impact perspectives in line with attributes of activities and interventions, specific project measures associated with defined objectives, GEAR UP minimum variables (see Appendixes 2 and 3) and required Annual Performance Report indicators (see Appendix 4).

3.5 The successful evaluator will also work with the West Virginia GEAR UP staff to establish baseline data and annual benchmarks to be measured. These baseline data and benchmarks must be established no later than March 2, 2009. The baseline data and benchmarks must align with the required GEAR UP APR. At the time of this RFP, West Virginia GEAR UP had administered the required APR student and parent baseline surveys. A clean data file will be provided to the successful vendor for analysis once the contract is approved.

3.6 The successful evaluator will also create and/or subcontract a secure Web-based data warehouse to import data from primary (e.g., surveys, focus groups, etc) and secondary (e.g., Education Needs Index, APR required data elements such as student tutoring contact hours, etc) sources, organized to allow cross-referencing by project goal and objective or by national evaluation indicator number. The evaluator will provide appropriate training to West Virginia GEAR UP staff in data entry if necessary.

3.7 The evaluation team’s data that is not included in the APR must be reported in
quarterly progress reports to provide timely feedback to project, district, and school staff and stakeholders. These must include (a) descriptions of methods; (b) summaries of implementation data; (c) summaries of outcome data; (d) discussions of policies and practices; and (e) recommendations for adjustments to the project and school/district systems.

3.8 To foster collaboration and evaluation relevance, the vendor evaluation team must hold quarterly face-to-face meetings with West Virginia GEAR UP project managers and key stakeholders, to manage the evaluation and communicated periodic data summaries, as appropriate. Meetings may require presentations to the West Virginia GEAR UP advisory board.

3.9 At the conclusion of year three of this project, a summative evaluation report must detail the degree to which the project was successful in achieving its aims. Recommendations for enhancing the projects must be provided for school systems, the state, and the Commission.

Section 4 Proposal Preparation and Evaluation

4.1 A proposal response to this RFP should contain four components as outlined below. Please note that proposals will be scored on each of the sections (excluding the conflicts section) with a maximum possible amount of points being 100. If there are any conflicts, the proposal will be rejected without scoring. This proposal must not exceed 50 double-spaced pages using Times New Roman, 12 point font. Please bind the proposal in a three-ring notebook. Also, please provide an exact copy of the proposal on a CD.

4.1.1 Conflicts:

- Affirm that you or your firm and all individuals who will be assigned to this evaluation are free from obligations and interests that might conflict with the Commission, the State of West Virginia, and the US Department of Education.
- Disclose any information about you or your firm which presently or in the future could impair you or your firm’s ability to provide the level of services outlined in the RFP.

4.1.2 A 5 ½ year (January 1, 2009 - July 14, 2014) evaluation/research plan that is clear, grounded in research, addresses the services required as outlined in Section 3 of this RFP and addresses each of the following (50 points maximum):

- A rationale addressing evaluation of project services that is grounded in research principles and methodologies;
• Data collection procedures (including Institutional Review Board practices);
• Measures and variables;
• Data analysis procedures;
• Indication of how measures and analysis related to project services;
• A detailed timeline (that includes monthly benchmarks) for conducting and completing the evaluation project; and
• Description and dates of deliverables throughout the evaluation process.

4.1.3 Provide a description of the experience and qualifications of the principal investigator and other investigators (20 points maximum).

4.1.4 Provide a 5 ½ year fee and expense proposal (both chart and narrative) that addresses costs such as, but not limited to the following (30 points maximum). The fee and expense proposal is to be presented by fiscal year, July 1 through June 30, for the 5 ½ year timeframe (January 1, 2009 - July 14, 2014):

• Salaries, wages, and benefits;
• Consultant fees;
• External contracts;
• Travel;
• Equipment;
• Printing;
• Indirect costs;
• Any match you may be willing to offer the project; and
• Other.

Section 5 Questions and Proposal Format

5.1 Questions concerning this RFP will be received in writing until 5:00 PM, Eastern Time, October 17, 2008. Please submit questions to:

Chief Procurement Officer
West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
1018 Kanawha Boulevard, East, Suite 700
Charleston, WV 25301
Phone: (304) 558-0277 Ext. 212
Fax: (304) 558-0259
Email: donovan@hepc.wvnet.edu
Questions will be answered by addendum and posted to the Commission’s purchasing webpage by October 21, 2008. It is the vendor’s responsibility to check the website below for current information regarding this RFP.

http://wvhepcnew.wvnet.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=30&Itemid=0

5.3 Please deliver an original and four (4) copies of the proposal, plus one complete copy on a CD. The original should be bound in a three-ring, loose-leaf binder. This proposal must not exceed 50 double spaced pages, using Times New Roman, 12 point font. Proposal must be submitted in a sealed opaque envelope or package. Proposals will be received until 3:00 PM, Eastern Time, October 31, 2008:

Chief Procurement Officer
RFP 09010 WV GEAR UP External Evaluation
West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission
1018 Kanawha Boulevard, East, Suite 700
Charleston, WV 25301

5.4 Faxed or electronically submitted proposals will not be accepted.

5.5 All expenses incurred and associated with preparing and submitting proposals are the exclusive responsibility of the vendor. The proposals and all other documents submitted to this solicitation will become a matter of public record and subject to the West Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

Section 6 Other Information

6.1 Discussions and interviews may be held with firms under final consideration prior to making a selection for award; however, proposals may be accepted without such discussions or interviews. In the event that mutually acceptable terms cannot be reached within a reasonable period of time, the Commission reserves the right to undertake negotiations with the next most advantageous firm without undertaking a new procurement process.

6.2 The successful vendor must also be a registered vendor with the Purchasing Divisions, West Virginia Department of Administration, and have a valid vendor number. Furthermore, the vendor must have a current W-9 Request for Taxpayer Identification Number Form on file with the Finance Division, Financial Accounting and Reporting Section, West Virginia Department of Administration, and have a valid vendor number.
6.3 The State’s Agreement Addendum (WV-96) is attached to identify State law and guidelines which must be adhered to in any contracts presented to the Commission for execution.

6.4 Payment of fees and expenses, not exceed the maximum proposed, will be made upon satisfactory completion of the required services. Progress payments may be approved at the discretion of the Chief Procurement Officer.

6.5 The following list of Exhibits and Appendices is a binding part of this RFP. These Exhibits and Appendices are attached to the RFP and can be viewed using the Adobe “Attachment” feature:

Exhibits:
- Exhibit A, Instructions to Bidders
- Exhibit B, Terms and Conditions
- Exhibit C, Agreement Addendum (Form WV-96)
- Exhibit D, Prompt Pay Act of 1990 (W. Va. Code §5A-3-54)
- Exhibit E, No-Debt Affidavit
- Exhibit F, Vendor Registration and Disclosure Statement

Appendices:
- Appendix 1: List of GEAR UP Schools
- Appendix 2: GEAR UP Evaluation Framework Indicators
- Appendix 3: GEAR UP Framework Indicator Definitions
- Appendix 4: GEAR UP Annual Performance Report Form
- Appendix 5: WV GEAR UP Grant Narrative, Abridged Version