

# Transition Supports for Youth with Disabilities: Responses to Questions on Training and Implementation Support Provider Opportunity



The American Institutes for Research (AIR) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) inviting qualified entities to provide training and implementation support for high school programs to help prepare youth with disabilities to achieve success after high school. The selected provider(s) will participate in a large-scale evaluation project conducted by AIR, UNCC, and other partners (“the study team”) for the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences. The RFP is available on AIR’s website ([here](#)). Proposals are due on October 1, 2021.

This document provides responses to questions about the RFP that were submitted by interested providers by August 20, 2021.

## 1. Program Design

### 1.1. What criteria will the study team use for selecting districts/schools to participate?

The study team will seek participation from relatively large public high schools in relatively large school districts across multiple states. Recruitment efforts will focus on public high schools that enroll at least 18 eligible students. Eligible students are those with IEPs who are about two years from high school completion or the maximum age for special education, as applicable, in Fall 2022. Recruitment efforts will also focus on districts that (a) enroll at least 125 eligible students in total across such high schools and (b) do not already implement programs or services similar to those that the study will test. The study team will assess potential study districts’ existing programs and services by working through a checklist during initial discussions with district staff.

### 1.2. Where are the 16 school zones?

The location of the districts that will participate in the project is currently unknown. The study team will recruit approximately 16 public school districts across the U.S. during the 2021–22 school year.

### 1.3. Do strategies 1 and 2 run concurrently?

Yes, strategies 1 and 2 will be implemented concurrently within the same schools.

### 1.4. Does the project require that the same curriculum and materials be implemented at all study sites and for all students? Can multiple sets of resources be leveraged to meet a range of student goals?

The project requires that the provider’s program content is structured (e.g., using a curriculum, guidebook, manual, etc.) to be similar across all study sites where the provider’s program is being implemented. However, the RFP notes two main ways in which materials and resources may vary across students and sites.

First, as discussed on page 32, within the overall structure, individualized supports may vary across students with a range of post-school goals and diverse set of needs for disability-related supports and accommodations, following a protocol specified by the provider. To maintain replicability of the program, the protocol must provide systematic guidance for instructors to help them determine which students need additional support, which type(s) of additional support to provide, and how many additional hours to spend when providing such support.

Second, as indicated on pages 17 and 33, the provider will create district-specific supplements to program materials and specify an approach for tailoring instruction and activities to be useful across a range of local

contexts. The approach to tailoring based on local context should also guide instructors in helping students identify and make use of relevant local transition planning resources and (for Strategy 2) other community resources that allow students to engage in goal-aligned transition activities.

**1.5. Will vendor be responsible for any specific controls to address risk or prevent unintended knowledge share that could impact study results?**

The provider's proposed protocol for structuring the exchange of information between instructors and school/district staff should (per page 32 of the RFP) include controls to limit how interactions with instructors affect the standard practices used by school/district transition staff.

**1.6. The RFP states that students with disabilities in selected schools would be assigned by lottery to each of the treatment groups (including a control group). Much of our strength and experience lies in the work we have done with students with low-incidence disabilities. A lottery system could impede the ability to gather meaningful data on this group of students. Are there, or could there be assurances that the low-incidence population be more evenly distributed among the student population? One suggestion would be to stratify the selection process.**

When assigning students to study groups (Strategy 1, Strategy 2, or business as usual) by lottery, the study team plans to stratify on student characteristics, including disability type. Compared to a simple, unstructured lottery within schools, this approach will more consistently balance a range of student characteristics across the three groups.

**1.7. Could you clarify the treatment groups? Are there 4 mutually exclusive groups (Core Components A, B and C as well as the control group who will receive the district's typical transition services)? Or are there 3 groups based on strategies (strategy 1, strategy 2 and control) rather than core components?**

There will be three groups based on strategies: Strategy 1, Strategy 2, and control. As indicated in Section A.4 of the RFP, eligible students will be randomly assigned to these three groups: one third of eligible students will be assigned to a treatment group receiving Strategy 1, one third of students will be assigned to a second treatment group receiving Strategy 2, and one third of students will be assigned to a control group receiving typical transition supports only (business as usual).

**1.8. It is clear from the RFP that the overall goal is to provide greater research into the efficacy of both self-determination and supports for students to access and participate in transition related activities as a means to greater post-school success. It is also acknowledged that some literature already exists that supports each of these strategies. Would the funder encourage applicants to focus efforts on specific interventions, or is replication of previous work acceptable? Similarly, to what extent are novel approaches with less formal research support encouraged?**

The RFP requires proposals to demonstrate a strong justification for how the proposed program(s) will improve the post-school outcomes for YWD. As indicated in Section D.2.4 of the RFP, the justification must state whether the proposed activities and materials are based on research findings and/or recommendations offered by leading technical assistance organizations. Additionally, as discussed in Sections C.6 and D.2.6 of the RFP, each proposal will be evaluated based in part on whether it includes research findings that support the linkage between critical elements of the program activities/materials and key outcomes presented in the theory of action. Hence, each proposal should include a justification, along with applicable research findings, for any specific interventions and/or replications of past work that the provider is proposing to use for its program(s). Approaches with less research support will be considered but will receive fewer points for the second proposal evaluation criterion.

## 2. Provider Tasks

**2.1. The RFP states that the provider will be working with approximately 16 school districts throughout the U.S. Given this, how much input will the provider have in choosing these districts, and more importantly, the states that they are in?**

The provider will not be expected to be involved in choosing districts or states for this study, but the provider will support the study team's recruitment efforts during the 2021-22 school year (as discussed in the RFP). Please note the provider's program and supports should allow instructors to work in schools and districts that could potentially be located in a wide range of states.

**2.2. How will plans to collect post-school outcome data be considered in the criteria for award? While our organization brings a great deal of expertise to this area, and we believe it to be the greatest indicator of success, this data collection could not take place until years after the project ends.**

The provider's capacity to collect post-school outcomes data will not be considered when making awards, and the provider should not plan to collect any data on student or parent outcomes as part of this project. The provider's only role in data collection is to gather implementation data and supply these data to the study team. Collection of data on all study outcomes and data analysis will be the sole responsibility of the study team. Section B.2 on pages 25–26 of the RFP contains additional information summarizing the roles and responsibilities of the study team and the selected provider.

**2.3. One of the requirements in the Training and Implementation Supports is to “Hold regularly scheduled check-in meetings (e.g., biweekly) with instructors to provide ongoing implementation support. Provider staff will review program delivery logs prior to meetings. Check-in meetings should include a review of students’ progress related to the core components of Strategies 1 and/or 2, addressing barriers and challenges reported by instructors, and case consultation, as needed.” Can this be done with multiple instructors at one time as a community of learners (per district or state) or is it expected to be one-on-one?**

The RFP does not specify the format for the regular check-in meetings between the provider and instructors. The provider should propose and justify an approach for these sessions that they deem to be the most appropriate in terms of being effective for supporting strong fidelity and feasible from a cost perspective.

**2.4. Can any of the instructor trainings, district/school orientations, or booster trainings be done virtually?**

Technical and price proposals should follow the assumptions specified in the RFP, including in-person delivery of trainings, district/school orientations, and booster trainings. However, we encourage providers to note any anticipated challenges in completing these activities in-person and suggest plans for addressing such challenges.

**2.5. Can any of the site visits be conducted virtually?**

Technical and price proposals should follow the assumptions specified in the RFP, including site visits being conducted in-person. The provider should note any anticipated challenges in completing these activities in-person and suggest plans for addressing such challenges.

**2.6. For Task 6.1 for strategy 1, following the group training in DC, the provider administers an orientation in each of the 16 school districts shortly after training. Following the orientations provides an implementation readiness to each district to help instructors and schools finalize plans. Are the onsite district orientations and the onsite district readiness visits in separate trips for a total of 32 trips for orientation and readiness visits in the fall of 2022?**

The on-site district orientations and the on-site district readiness visits could be specified as two separate trips per district (which implies a total of 32 trips) or two parts of the same trip (which implies a total of 16 trips). The provider must propose and justify a cohesive plan for the timing and logistics of instructor trainings, district/school staff orientations, and implementation readiness visits. The provider should choose parameters

for timing and other logistics that they deem to be the most appropriate in terms of being effective for supporting strong fidelity and feasible from a cost perspective.

**2.7. For Task 6.1, the provider shall administer an orientation for school and district staff, and these orientations need to be recorded. How much time should be planned for each orientation session in a district (1-hour, 3-hours, more?), and should we budget for a videographer?**

The study team recommends that each orientation session lasts no more than one day, and the provider should propose and justify the specific duration for these sessions, as they see fit. The provider should propose a recording approach that they believe to be most useful and cost-effective.

**2.8. For Task 6.2 for strategy 1, the provider conducts one site visit with each district and spends one day with each instructor and one day observing key implementation activities. For budgeting purposes, we are instructed to assume staying in each district for two days for strategy 1. If a district has two or three instructors, would the site visit still only be two days in length?**

Since this question refers to observation of implementation activities, we believe it is asking about Task 6.3 (not Task 6.2). As mentioned on page 21 of the RFP, for budgeting purposes, the provider should assume 16 trips per semester, with provider staff staying in each district for two days for Strategy 1. The duration of two days was intended to be an average so that providers could use common budgeting assumptions. Given the range of district sizes, provider staff may, in reality, need to spend less than two days in smaller districts and more than two days in larger districts.

### **3. Proposals, Awards, and Contractual Matters**

**3.1. Can different departments from the same organization/institution apply for funding?**

Yes, all organizations, institutions, departments, and agencies are eligible to apply. Hence, different departments from the same organization/institution may submit proposals separately as distinct providers, or the departments may work together as a team to submit a proposal as a consortium (if necessary or desired, to address the scope and/or scale of the RFP's required activities). Please note that ED and the study team will make awards only to entities that submit strong proposals with demonstrated capacity to fulfill the full scope and scale of required activities in 16 public school districts across the U.S. (to be recruited by the study team during the 2021–22 school year). Recognizing that some interested entities may not have this capacity, the study team encourages providers to collaborate and form consortia, as needed, to meet the RFP's requirements.

**3.2. Are private schools eligible to apply?**

Yes, all organizations, institutions, departments, and agencies are eligible to apply. Hence, private schools may submit proposals to be providers, even though implementation of Strategy 1 and 2 programs will occur in publicly-funded schools only. Please note that ED and the study team will make awards only to entities that submit strong proposals with demonstrated capacity to fulfill the full scope and scale of required activities in 16 public school districts across the U.S. (to be recruited by the study team during the 2021–22 school year). Recognizing that some interested entities may not have this capacity, the study team encourages providers to collaborate and form consortia, as needed, to meet the RFP's requirements.

**3.3. Are state agencies allowed to apply?**

Yes, all organizations, institutions, departments, and agencies are eligible to apply. Hence, state agencies are allowed to submit proposals to be providers. Please note that ED and the study team will make awards only to entities that submit strong proposals with demonstrated capacity to fulfill the full scope and scale of required activities in 16 school districts across the U.S. (to be recruited by the study team during the 2021–22 school

year). Recognizing that some interested entities may not have this capacity, the study team encourages providers to collaborate and form consortia, as needed, to meet the RFP's requirements.

**3.4. Would you look more favorably on a provider that can/will do both Strategy 1 and Strategy 2, rather than just one of them?**

A provider's choice of strategy(ies) will not affect the ratings assigned to technical proposals using the technical review criteria shown in Exhibit C2 of the RFP. If a provider is bidding on both strategies, reviewers will assign one rating to the provider's proposed plans for Strategy 1 and a separate rating to the provider's proposed plans for Strategy 2.

A provider's choice of strategy(ies) will also not directly affect how the study team and ED rate the business proposal. However, the provider should keep in mind that final selection will entail a price-quality tradeoff.

**3.5. Should vendor provide alternate plans for meeting deliverables in the case COVID restrictions limit onsite services?**

Although the study team and ED recognize that conditions may change, technical and price proposals should follow the assumptions specified in the RFP, including on-site delivery of services (as applicable). Vendors are not required to provide alternate plans for meeting deliverables. However, we encourage providers to describe potential challenges to completing the scope of work described in the RFP, including any challenges due to COVID-19 related restrictions, and the providers' approach to addressing such challenges.

**3.6. Should proposals address the possibility that ongoing challenges related to COVID-19 will impact in-person training and implementation design/plans?**

Although the study team and ED recognize that conditions may change, technical and price proposals should follow the assumptions specified in the RFP, including in-person delivery of training and implementation support elements (as applicable). Proposals are not required to address the implications of COVID-19 for in-person delivery. However, we encourage providers to describe potential challenges to completing the scope of work described in the RFP, including any challenges due to COVID-19 related restrictions, and the providers' approach to addressing such challenges.

**3.7. What is Plan B in case travel restrictions or restrictions in schools are implemented due to COVID-19?**

Although the study team and ED recognize that conditions may change, technical and price proposals should follow the assumptions specified in the RFP, including on-site delivery of services (as applicable). Vendors are not required to provide alternate plans for meeting deliverables or address implications of COVID-19 for in-person delivery. However, we encourage providers to describe potential challenges to completing the scope of work described in the RFP, including any challenges due to COVID-19 related restrictions, and the providers' approach to addressing such challenges.

**3.8. Could you provide any guidance regarding how to identify partners? It seems impossible to identify state level partners (other than departments of education and vocational rehabilitation) without knowing more about who the principal stakeholders are in each state. Would the proposal be acceptable if it was ambiguous regarding which partners a provider would involve until the project started?**

If forming a consortium, lead organizations should choose specific partners that help ensure that the provider can carry out the full scope and scale of required activities in approximately 16 school districts across the U.S. (to be recruited by the study team during the 2021–22 school year). If a consortium is proposed, proposals from lead organizations must identify and name partners, and must clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of each partner in the proposal. Proposals with unnamed partners will be considered incomplete.

Therefore, providers are encouraged to consider partnering with national organizations or other entities with a national reach (i.e., organizations or teams of organizations who can perform their designated responsibilities to support implementation across a range of districts and states). The study team does not believe that partnerships with specific state-level agencies that serve only one state will be viable, given the uncertainties about where implementation will take place. (Please note that providers do not need to identify or obtain letters of support/commitment from sites—states, districts, or schools—for implementing the program(s); the study team will recruit and select these implementation sites.)

**3.9. For those proposing the implementation of existing materials from evidence-supported models that are considered the intellectual property of a university or other entity, what are the expectations around potential licensing, for this study and beyond? Will the program materials specifically used, adapted, or developed for this project be considered the intellectual property of AIR and/or IES going forward? Or would the provider retain future licensing rights to, for example, train schools using the program materials implemented in this study?**

The provider may propose to use preexisting intellectual property, including copyrighted materials produced prior to the start of this project. In such cases, the provider’s budget should include relevant licensing costs (if applicable) required to use such materials for this study.

The provider may also be required to adapt program materials for this study and submit them as a deliverable under Task 3. Please refer to Appendix A of the RFP for additional contractual requirements regarding the disposition of data, deliverables and records first produced in performance of this project and what rights are granted to IES. The provider’s subcontract will include FAR 52.227-17, which specifies the process to identify a contractor’s rights in data, including assertion of copyright claims for materials produced as part of this project.

Across several past contract-based evaluation projects, ED has allowed program developers to retain the licensing rights and copyrights for program materials developed as part of the projects. While the study team expects that the same will hold true for this project, the provider may note requested exceptions to contractual terms when returning the Sample AIR Subcontract Agreement (per page 38 of the RFP).

**3.10. To what extent could the provider have access to any of the data generated by their work? Could a provider conduct its own analysis with the data? If not during the life of the contract, could it later link data generated from the project to its own post-school outcome data?**

At the conclusion of the project, the study team will produce a set of restricted-use files containing de-identified data that can be used for additional analysis by those who obtain a restricted-data license from ED. As noted in response to Question 2.2., the provider should not plan to collect any data on student or parent outcomes as part of this project. The provider’s only role in data collection is to gathering implementation data and supply these data to the study team. Collection of data on all study outcomes and data analysis will be the sole responsibility of the study team.

## **4. Budget**

**4.1. The 3M is divided across all the provider(s) right? But there is the comment about instructor salary being paid for by AIR?**

The anticipated total funding amount of \$3,000,000 will be subdivided across all selected providers for Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. Because of the additional intensity of and activities in Strategy 2, the study team expects that the subtotal of funding for the provider(s) of Strategy 2 will be higher than the subtotal of funding for providers(s) of Strategy 1. Instructor salaries will be paid for by AIR, and should not be included in the provider’s budget.

**4.2. Could you clarify or confirm that the provider should budget nothing related to instructor salaries or travel (because AIR will directly cover these expenses)? This seems to be what the RFP indicates.**

Correct. The provider should not budget for (a) the salaries of the local instructors who will be hired by participating districts and the study team to deliver Strategy 1 or Strategy 2 to students and parents; (b) lodging, travel, and meal costs for these instructors to attend trainings; or (c) the costs of training facilities. These costs will be paid by AIR, as stated on pages 25 and 38 of the RFP. However, provider training staff will need to conduct the instructor trainings, which, for budgeting purposes, are assumed to occur in Washington, DC (per pages 19 and 20 of the RFP). Hence, the provider should budget for lodging and travel costs for its own training staff, as well as any compensation for the time that provider staff spends traveling. These costs will be paid for by the provider and should be included (along with all other provider costs) in the provider's business proposal as part of itemized statement of the total costs for carrying out the requirements of this RFP through a fixed-price subcontract.

**4.3. Which organizations split the grant money? That is, are schools/school districts or others besides the selected provider splitting \$3,000,000?**

The total funding amount of \$3,000,000 will be subdivided across the selected providers for Strategy 1 and Strategy 2 only. This amount will not be shared with schools/school districts or other entities.

**4.4. What is the budget we can reasonably expect if we are selected as a Strategy 1 provider? We have identified with a general outline \$1.2M.**

The anticipated total funding amount of \$3,000,000 will be subdivided across all selected providers for Strategy 1 and Strategy 2. Because of the additional intensity of and activities in Strategy 2, the study team expects that the subtotal funding for the provider(s) of Strategy 2 will be higher than the subtotal funding for the provider(s) of Strategy 1. The study team cannot assess the appropriateness of a provider's specific budgets for each strategy without the full details of the provider's technical and price proposals.

**4.5. Given there are required dates of face-to-face contact and the standardized travel per diem rates, and that AIR "will pay for associated travel costs," should these be estimated in the budget?**

Since the quoted text is from Section C.8 of the RFP, the study team assumes that this question refers to an in-person presentation that is part of the RFP/provider selection process. Proposal finalists will be asked to present their proposed program(s) and plans for training and implementation supports to the expert review panel, the study team, and ED staff. The provider does not need to estimate the costs of travel for such a presentation, and these costs should not be included in the provider's budget. However, the proposed budget should include all relevant travel costs expected to be incurred by provider staff after the project begins.

**4.6. My understanding is that a response to this RFP would require a single dollar amount. Is that correct?**

The business proposal should include the total provider costs for all tasks and deliverables. Costs should be presented both as a single dollar amount and, as indicated on pages 38 and 39 of the RFP, broken out by tasks/subtasks and by major cost line items.

**4.7. In the proposal price, what are the limits on indirect costs? That is in terms of overhead, profit, and ancillary business cost of doing business.**

There are no specific limits on indirect costs, profit rates (fee), or fringe benefit costs. However, price will be a factor in selecting providers, and these cost line items may affect a provider's total price.

**4.8. Are transportation and/or stipends provided for students engaging in after school, weekend, and summer activities?**

Such stipends are not expected to be a part of the provider's budget. But if based on experience, the provider believes these to be important to the program design and achieving fidelity to the program model, please provide a justification and propose specific plans for student transportation/stipends, budgeting them as a separate option for potential inclusion in the study.