



Request for Proposals
Early Years Centres' Evaluation
December 2, 2014

Background

In 2013, the Department of Education was expanded to include an [Early Years Branch](#), thus creating the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD). The expanded mandate of the department was implemented in recognition of the need for an integrated system that supports the learning, care and well-being of children through the prenatal period to age 6 years and their families.

An integral part of this integrated system includes collaboration of service delivery partners whose mandate is to support young children and their families. The Early Years Centre model is a new policy direction that supports an integration of programs and services at the government level and at the community level. The Centres will provide support for young children in the early years (from birth to age 6) and their families, facilitating seamless access to programs and other supports.

An Early Years Centre is a first, important step to transforming the existing tangled web of child care, family support, and early intervention and child care programs into an effective, sustainable early childhood system. The vision of this new model is that over time, as integration and collaboration of key service providers become well developed and as programs and services increase, families will have seamless access to the services they need, when they need them. The Centres will bring together existing programs and services such as child care, family drop-in, early learning, parenting supports, health services, and early identification and intervention programs. The Early Years Centres will be strategically placed in elementary schools which are focal points in communities, publicly owned and mandated to provide education and information to young children and their families.

In 2013, the Early Years Branch established a collaboration with the [Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation](#) for the implementation of Early Years Centres in Nova Scotia. Four Early Years Centres were established in Yarmouth, Spryfield, Monastery, and Sydney Mines in the 2013-14 fiscal year. During the 2014-15 fiscal year, four additional Early Years Centres will be established in the remaining four school boards: the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, South Shore Regional, Annapolis Valley Regional and Chignecto-Central Regional School Boards.

Through the implementation of the Early Years Centre model, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school boards will collaborate with community partners, service providers and families to attain the following objectives:

- Improve outcomes for children prenatally through school entry
- Improve the integration of programs and services at the community level
- Increase collaboration between partners and service providers
- Increase access to programs and services for young children and their families

- Improve program quality
- Implement and learn from a new policy direction

Early Years Centres will utilize a community development approach in providing services and supports that respond to the needs of families. At minimum, all Early Years Centres in Nova Scotia will include three core services:

- play-based early learning program for children in the year before entering school
- family supports and resources
- regulated child care responsive to family needs

The Early Years Branch is working closely with and supporting school boards in planning, implementation and evaluation. Each Early Years Centre will be required to work with the Early Years Branch to evaluate the success of the model and to actively monitor progress on the establishment of the Early Years Centres.

Early Years Centres in Nova Scotia are following similar models as have been implemented in Toronto (Toronto First Duty) and New Brunswick (Early Childhood Development Centres).

Overview

The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to identify an evaluation team to conduct a process and outcomes evaluation of the Early Years Centres. The evaluation will inform the Early Years Branch and the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation as they assess and refine the model. The overall purpose of the evaluation is to examine if the program model and implementation are having an impact on the objectives and outcomes as described in the program logic model and evaluation framework. An Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC) has been established to support this evaluation project. To learn more about the EAC please [click here](#).

The [Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation \(NSHRF\)](#) has been identified to facilitate the RFP process including selection of the successful evaluation team. The NSHRF will take an active role in the on-going management of the project and will administer the project including facilitating agreement between the successful evaluation team and the project partners, distribution of project funds, monitoring of deliverables and reporting.

Project Description

The project partners (the Early Years Branch, the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation, the 8 Early Years Centres and the Evaluation Advisory Committee) wish to engage an evaluation team to work with them and the NSHRF, to conduct a process and outcome

evaluation for the implementation of the Early Years Centre model in NS. This model, and the evaluation approach, is informed by similar projects; Toronto First Duty and the New Brunswick Early Child Development Centres. The evaluation team identified through this RFP will be expected to develop a work plan for conducting the evaluation using the evaluation framework as a guideline for the work. The evaluation framework consists of a program description, logic model and potential evaluation questions, indicators and measures. The evaluation framework is meant to provide general guidance for the evaluation. It is meant to be flexible and should not be taken as prescriptive. The evaluation team is expected to communicate regularly on progress and engage the partners in decision making. The successful evaluation team will work with project partners to determine final implementation of the evaluation.

In addition, evaluation tools based on the framework have been drafted and will be finalized by the selected evaluation team in consultation with the project partners. The successful team will be required to use the indicators of change tool. This tool has been used in similar projects, for example, Toronto First Duty, but will need to be adapted for use in the NS context. Components and indicators for this tool have been drafted for the NS context. The successful team will be required to develop benchmarks for each indicator. These benchmarks should be developed collaboratively in consultation with the Early Years Centres staff and/or project partners.

Working Documents and Resources for Applicants

- [Evaluation Framework](#)
- Evaluation Collection Tools
 - [Document Review Checklist](#)
 - [Staff and Management Data Collection Tool](#)
 - [Indicators of Change NS context](#)
- Measures and tools from other jurisdictions
 - [Indicators of change tool New Brunswick](#)
 - [Indicators of change Toronto version](#)
 - [Other measures used by Toronto First Duty and referenced in the Nova Scotia Framework](#)

Similar projects have been conducted in other provinces and are well documented. See below related documents:

- [Toronto First Duty](#)
- [NB Early Child Development Centres](#)

Eligibility

A team approach to the evaluation project is required in all proposals.

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- It is preferred that the evaluation team lead be a researcher with an academic appointment at a university or affiliated research institution or an appointment (with research responsibilities) at an affiliated hospital/research centre/institute. A team lead located in Nova Scotia will be considered an asset;
- The evaluation team should include demonstrated evaluation expertise. The participation of a Canadian Evaluation Society Credentialed Evaluator is considered an asset;
- Demonstrated experience of the evaluation team in collaborating with provincial government departments is preferred;
- Demonstrated experience in early childhood development is preferred;
- Teams with members from multiple institutions are preferred;
- Demonstrated experience in system integration and collaboration is preferred;
- Demonstrated experience leading projects with multiple partners, in particular community based organizations is preferred;
- Demonstrated experience in working with school boards in Nova Scotia is considered an asset.

Applicants should note that this is an evaluation project and as such is not considered research. The project partners are interested in collaborative research projects associated with the development of the Early Years Centres, however these projects would be separately negotiated. Any research conducted would need to be peer reviewed by a provincial or national health research funding body and comply with nationally recognized standards including Tri-Council compliant ethics review. Funding for such research projects is not available but the project partners will consider in kind support on a case by case basis.

Deliverables

The evaluation team selected through this RFP will be asked to:

1. Produce an annual report which identifies progress towards evaluation milestones.
2. Produce separate reports as per the phases of the evaluation as identified in the evaluation framework. Please see Project Description for more information.
3. Produce a final evaluation report. This report should include the evaluation team's assessment of the project's success against the identified objectives, lessons learned (including elements that supported success and those that created challenges to

success), and any considerations for broader implementation of the Early Years Centre model.

Applicants should note that in the first year regular quarterly meetings with the Evaluation Advisory Committee, the Early Years Branch and the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation are expected. Frequency of formal meetings will then be agreed to by the partners and the evaluation team.

Representatives of the evaluation team will be expected to travel regularly to the Early Years Centres located around the Province. Representatives of the evaluation team will be expected to attend meetings in Halifax in person.

Intellectual Property Rights

The Province of Nova Scotia and the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation hold the intellectual property rights of print and electronic materials produced by the evaluation team. Reproduction of any print and electronic materials in whole or in part for non-commercial use is encouraged, providing full acknowledgement is given to the Province of Nova Scotia and the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation. Where print and electronic materials indicate another copyright holder, permission to reproduce that material must be obtained directly from that copyright holder.

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The evaluation team is encouraged to consider academic publication related to this project. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation must receive the final text of any such article two months in advance of publication.

Application Requirements

Applicants are expected to demonstrate the following in their proposal:

- Understanding of the RFP requirements;
- Clearly delineated methodology for implementing the evaluation framework as described in the Project Description Section above;
- Appropriate project timelines, work plan and approach, including identification of key personnel; and appropriate budget detailing key personnel.

Budget: The maximum budget that will be considered for this proposal is \$100,000 per year with no more than \$400,000 over the 4 year project.

Applications should include the following:

- A work plan describing the approach to implementing the evaluation, timelines, key personnel, and supports required from the project partners;
- A detailed description of the proposed evaluation team including team member roles, experience and qualifications.
- A detailed budget which must include all travel for the evaluation team within the maximum budget. The budget maximum is inclusive of HST. Any travel for project partners including the Evaluation Advisory Committee should not be included.

Short listed applicants may be invited to meet with project partners prior to final decisions being made.

Evaluation Criteria

The following are **mandatory requirements**. (Proposals not meeting these criteria will receive no further consideration during the evaluation process):

- Applicants must possess an acceptable level of experience or qualifications to successfully complete the project and CVs must be provided for key personnel. Any team member with an academic appointment must provide Canada Common CV; other team members may provide a standard professional CV. The team must demonstrate a minimum of three years of relevant experience;
- Applicants must provide a minimum of two references relevant to their capacity to meet the goals of this project. These references must be related to similar projects completed within the past five years. At least one reference must relate to the demonstrated experience of the team to conduct an evaluation project of this nature and scope (multiyear, collaborative, provincial);
- Applicants should demonstrate some ability to conduct the evaluation project in French in the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial or provide a plan to provide service in French for this centre; and
- Since applications will be evaluated based on the best value for money expressed in the proposals, applicants should include all anticipated project costs in the budget. A detailed budget must be submitted outlining personnel, administrative and all other costs associated with the completion of this project.

The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals that satisfy the mandatory criteria:

| Factor | Value |
|--|--------------|
| Expertise of Applicant(s) Profile of key personnel – CV (Common CV if the team member has an academic appointment) demonstrating qualifications and years of experience, adequacy of staff resources to complete the project; record of competence in undertaking similar work; anticipated level and type of involvement of key personnel in project. Preference is for applications from teams that demonstrate collaboration between sectors and institutions (for example research and evaluation, multi-institutional). A plan to engage students would be considered an asset. | 20 |
| Project-Specific Expertise Knowledge and experience in conducting program evaluation; knowledge of early childhood development as a critical stage; knowledge of education system and support for families provincially, nationally and or internationally | 30 |
| Overall Approach Proposed Clear and appropriate approach to conducting evaluation and analysis; adequacy of proposed work plan to address project objectives; recognition of potential challenges and strategies to overcome these challenges. | 40 |
| Project Costs/Budgets Lower half of bids receive full point value | 10 |

Detailed Time Frame

The Early Years Centre Evaluation Project will commence in **January 2014** and is targeted for completion in **September 2019**.

RFP will be posting date: **December 2, 2014**

Proposals must be submitted by: **December 29th, 2014 at 2:00pm AST**

Short listed candidates should be available to meet with project partners (if required) on: **January 9th, 2015**

Successful applicants will be notified by: **January 14th, 2015**

Successful applicants should be prepared to meet with project partners: **January 19th, 2015**

Annual report deadlines and other milestones will be confirmed at the first quarterly meeting of the EAC and the successful applicants.

Proposal Submission and Contact Information

Proposals are to be submitted electronically to the NSHRF via email. Please send all required application components to leslie.power@novascotia.ca before **December 29th, 2014 at 2:00pm AST**.

Questions related to this RFP should be directed to leslie.power@gov.ns.ca or 902-424-4193