

Request for Proposals: External Evaluation of Ready to Lead Leadership Academy

INTRODUCTION

The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University (NLU) invites and welcomes contract proposals from experienced evaluators to assess the effectiveness of the *Ready to Lead* (RTL) Leadership Academy designed for new directors or assistant directors of center-based early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs in Illinois. Please take time to carefully read and become familiar with the request for proposals (RFP) requirements.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Since 1985, the McCormick Center has been building the leadership capacity of the early childhood workforce. Funded by grants from philanthropic foundations and contracts with government agencies, the McCormick Center has received national recognition for its work in defining the competencies needed for effective early childhood program administration and delivering high-quality leadership and management training and technical assistance.

At the McCormick Center, our mission is to “empower leaders and advance the field to promote excellence in early childhood education.” Through professional development, evaluation, research, and public awareness, we promote best practices in program administration. By working with states, professional organizations, and directly with early childhood practitioners, we raise the bar on program quality by expanding program leadership.

Ready to Lead was created in 2018 as a four-month leadership academy to meet the unique needs of newly-appointed early childhood administrators and there have been seven cohorts completed over 42 months. The McCormick Center’s research on the developmental career stages of directors demonstrates the unique demands and needs of newly-appointed or novice administrators. These novice directors are described as spending their time “putting out fires” and struggling to navigate responsibilities in areas for which they have no prior experience such as human resources, coaching and supervision, program operations, strategic planning, and fiscal management. The majority of novice administrators have formal education and training in teaching practices but lack education and training in the essentials of leading an ECEC organization. Specialized learning experiences in leadership strategies and program management are vital for new administrators. In turn, administrators who receive early career support are more likely to remain in the field, improve the quality of their programs, and continue to grow professionally. RTL provides professional learning on foundational leadership practices and fills the knowledge and skills gap. This RFP seeks an external evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the RTL model in increasing the self-efficacy and competency of new administrators as well as achieving improved staff retention, commitment to the field, and support of ongoing professional learning for staff.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

This project aims to contribute to the literature in the ECEC field demonstrating the need for specialized professional development for newly-appointed administrators and success of a four-month leadership academy in supporting those administrators.

While presenting a clear picture of the characteristics and needs of novice administrators, the evaluation should focus primarily on 1) the effectiveness of the various components of RTL as model (e.g., delivery modality, duration, curriculum, professional learning community practices, etc.) to meet those needs in general; and 2) the extent to which quantitative and qualitative data provide evidence of RTL's ability to meet the desired outcomes to increase the self-efficacy and competency of new administrators and to improve staff retention, commitment to the field, and support of ongoing professional learning for staff.

More specifically, the evaluation will employ a mixed methods approach to explore the following questions:

1. How well does the RTL model meet the unique needs of novice ECEC administrators?
2. What changes in self-efficacy resulted from participating in RTL?
3. What gain in competencies resulted from participating in RTL?
 - How are these gains demonstrated?
4. What long-term outcomes are achieved from participating in RTL, including administrators' commitment to the field, retention of staff, and support for the professional learning of teaching staff?

TIMELINE

The evaluation will take place between November 2022 and March 2023. The months of November through December will include meetings with the McCormick Center's RTL team, becoming familiarized with the RTL model, preparing a literature review, and cleaning and organizing data. The final round of data collection will conclude mid-December at which time the evaluator should begin analyses. A first draft of the evaluation should be submitted by February 1, 2023, and final manuscript submitted by March 31, 2023.

DELIVERABLES

1. Evaluation research schedule
2. Evaluation framework with detailed methodology, tools, and work plan
3. Meetings with McCormick Center staff
4. Crafting, submitting, and obtaining approval of NLU's Institutional Research Review Board Application for Faculty and Staff Research
5. Protocol to assure the secure storage, use, and transmission of data, specifically addressing:
 - How and where will the data be stored, for how long will it be kept, what safeguards will be put in place for data with identifying information
 - A description of physical (if applicable) and electronic security
6. Draft evaluation report by February 1, 2023
7. Final evaluation report by March 31, 2023, that incorporates quantitative and qualitative evidence. The report must answer each evaluation question and should be precise, written in APA format, and contain the following components:

- Cover page
 - Table of contents
 - Introduction and literature review (topics covered should include: the unique characteristics and needs of novice ECEC administrators; the role of targeted professional development and leadership training in job satisfaction, quality improvement, administrator retention, and the relationship between self-efficacy and job performance)
 - Methods
 - Results (overall results, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, impact, and relevance to the field)
 - Discussion (summary of overall outcomes and impact of RTL, lessons learned, limitations of the evaluation, and recommendations for future research)
 - References
 - Appendices
8. Executive summary outlining the key purpose of the evaluation, main points of analysis, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations (no more than two pages in length).

BUDGET DETAILS

Our budget for this evaluation is \$60,000. While we, of course, prefer the most cost-effective solution, all proposals that fall reasonably within this range will be considered and weighed based on their merits. All invoices for this project must be billed by April 30, 2023.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Materials about you:

1. A brief explanation of your interest in this project
2. Overview of your experience and qualifications including:
 - Specialized coursework or degree(s) in relevant areas of study
 - Evidence of expertise in mixed methods research and statistical analyses
3. CV or resume
4. History of relevant publications or work with similar projects
5. Any key differentiators about you

Materials about the evaluation:

1. Overview of how you will meet each of the deliverables
2. Proposed evaluation timeline
3. Identification of statistical software to be used for analyses
4. Detailed projected budget with pricing of any optional elements line-itemed
5. Terms and conditions

RFP PROJECT TIMELINE DETAILS

RFP Sent: [September 30, 2022]

Responses Due: [October 21, 2022]

Finalists Selected & Contacted: [October 28, 2022]

Winner Selected & Contacted: [November 4, 2022]

Project Kick-off: [November 7, 2022]

RESPONSES DUE: 10/21/2022

Send proposals to: Robyn Kelton, Research & Evaluation Manager, robyn.kelton@nl.edu

MCCORMICK CENTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP OVERVIEW

Founded in 1985 on a \$600 grant, Dr. Paula Jorde Bloom led the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University from a start-up to a driving force nationwide for improving the quality of early childhood education through our dedication to building the leadership capacity of the early childhood workforce.

We empower individuals to build the leadership and management skills they need to create and sustain exemplary programs for young children. Through professional development, evaluation, research, and public awareness, we promote best practice in program administration. By working with states, professional organizations, and directly with early childhood practitioners, we raise the bar on program quality.

The McCormick Center is a thriving part of National Louis University and has locations in Chicago, Lisle, and Wheeling, Illinois. The McCormick Center has over 65 employees and has an operating budget of over \$6 million.

OUR AUDIENCE

The primary audience for this evaluation is decision makers, including funders, policymakers, researchers, and state administrators. The secondary audience is leaders in early childhood education, including early childhood administrators, family child care providers, trainers, and technical assistance specialists. Each of these groups can be further divided into more specific groups within the field of early childhood education.

Thank you for your interest in responding to this RFP. We look forward to your response.

If you have any questions, please contact Robyn Kelton at robyn.kelton@nl.edu