



REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP)

Title: External Evaluator for the West Dallas STEM School Project

RFP #: SMU RFP BC3-2021

Date Issued: May 6, 2021

Final Proposal Due: July 9, 2021 by 3:00 p.m. (Central Time) *UPDATED*

RFP Issued By: Brian Cook, RFP Coordinator
SMU – Purchasing Department

Section 1 - Overview

Introduction

The Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University (SMU) is seeking an external evaluator who specializes in STEM education and community-based partnership evaluation for its West Dallas STEM School (WDSS) project in Dallas, Texas. The purpose of this RFP will be to enter a contract with the selected evaluator for a period of three (3) years upon agreement of both parties.

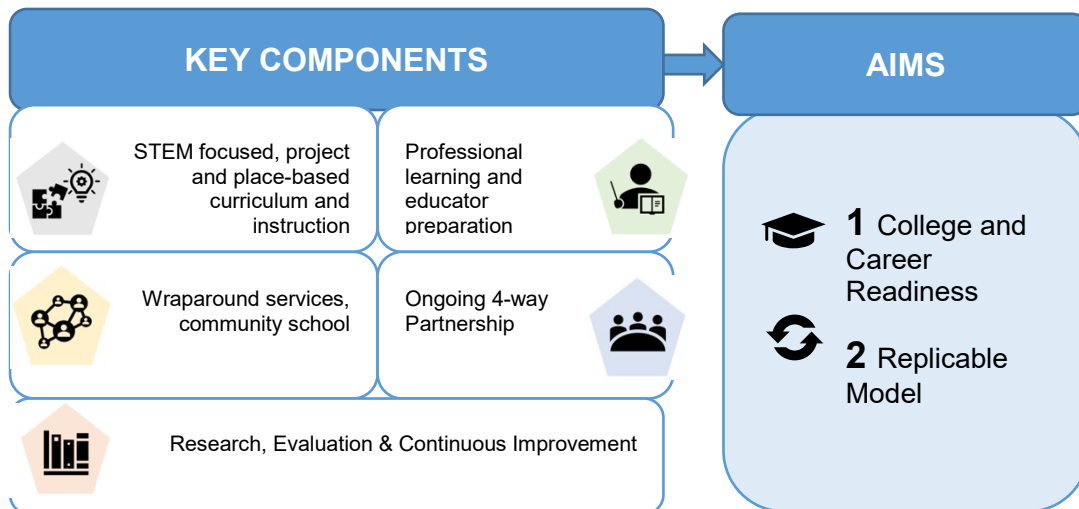
1.1 General Background

The [West Dallas STEM School](#) is a Dallas ISD PreK-8 public school opening in 2021 whose model consists of: (1) STEM focused curriculum and instruction, (2) integrated wraparound social service supports, (3) professional learning opportunities for school staff and nonprofit partners, (4) embedded and ongoing research and continuous improvement, and (5) a university-assisted community school model developed in partnership with the West Dallas community families and nonprofit organizations and STEM industry.

The Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University (SMU), in partnership with the Dallas ISD, Toyota USA Foundation and other industry partners, and the West Dallas community, designed the WDSS over the course of a three-year planning grant funded by Toyota. The school opens with Grades 7 and 8 in Fall 2021, followed by PreK, K, and Grade 1 the following year, with additional grades added as current students advance. This 4-way partnership has been an integral part of the planning phase and is expected to continue as part of the school model, adapting as teachers, parents, and families come onboard and shape dynamics of the school community.

The overarching aims of the partnership are to: (1) support student academic achievement at the WDSS such that students graduate college and career ready and (2) establish a replicable model for the school. The WDSS project has 5 interrelated key components that make up the school model:

1. STEM place-based and learner-centered curriculum and instruction;
2. A community school that partners with nonprofit organizations to provide wraparound social services to students and families;
3. Ongoing professional learning opportunities for in- and out-of-school professionals within a continuous improvement ecosystem and pre-service educator learning opportunities;
4. Embedded research and evaluation as tools for continuous and collaborative improvement, theory-testing and implementation, and documentation of program effectiveness; and
5. A community school anchored by a four-way partnership between Dallas ISD, SMU, STEM Industry partners, and the West Dallas community.



1.2 Current Operating Environment

The mission of the Simmons School of Education and Human Development at SMU is to integrate theory, research and practice of education and human development; promote academic rigor and interdisciplinary collaboration; educate students for initial certification and professional practice; and nurture collaboration across the academic community. Through interdisciplinary work and research in education, counseling, dispute resolution, applied physiology, and wellness, the Simmons School aims to change how we think about education and spark innovation that can address the challenges of an increasingly changing, diverse world. The Simmons School is committed to bridging research and practice and community partnership through the Center on Research and Evaluation and the Budd Center on Involving Communities in Education.

The Dallas Independent School District (ISD) is comprised of 230 schools that serve approximately 154,000 students across 12 counties in North Central Texas. Dallas ISD is the second-largest public school district in Texas and the 14th-largest in the nation. Spanning 384 square miles, the Dallas ISD serves a diverse urban population of 6.5 million North Texas residents. The Office of Transformation and Innovation oversees and supports the district's 45 choice schools, which cover a range of program models including Performing and Visual Arts, Montessori, Personalized Learning, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

The Toyota USA Foundation is a charitable organization that supports innovation in STEM education. Its ongoing commitment to serving diverse and underserved populations is reflected in its portfolio of long-term, sustainable partnerships that focus on workforce readiness, inclusive mobility, financial inclusion and community resilience.

West Dallas is a 11.5 square-mile community located west of downtown Dallas where economic and education inequity persist. The unemployment rate in West Dallas is almost double that of the city and state. In zip code 75212, the average unemployment rate in 2017 was 11%. However, the unemployment rate was 17% for African American, 7% for Latinx, and 6% for White residents. In 2017, 48% of residents between the ages of 16 to 29 years of age were unemployed and this statistic is likely much higher due to the economic and employment impact of COVID-19. The high concentration of poverty in the West Dallas community undoubtedly effects the broader needs of children and families, of which education is just one part. Within West Dallas, 58% of the students were identified as at-risk (compared to 49% for Dallas ISD) and 94% were identified as economically disadvantaged (compared to 89% for Dallas ISD).

Low enrollment and chronic poor school performance saw two elementary schools closed and consolidated with other schools in the neighborhood in 2017. In 2020, the Pinkston Feeder Pattern schools served 6,065 PreK-12 students, a 9.7% decline in enrollment between 2016 and 2019. West Dallas also includes a charter school that serves 2,074 PreK-12 students, and two private schools serving over 400 PreK-8 students. In addition, Dallas ISD operates a magnet school in West Dallas that serves over 450 students throughout the district who meet admissions requirements. Although nearly 81% of Pinkston High School students graduated in four years in 2019, only 11% of Pinkston students were “college ready” according to ACT/SAT college readiness scores.

Section 2 – Proposal Submittal

2.1 Questions and Inquiries

All inquiries concerning the RFP should be directed to:

Brian Cook, RFP Coordinator
SMU - Purchasing
Email: brianc@smu.edu
Phone: 214-768-0099

Questions should be submitted in writing via email. Written questions should be directly tied to the RFP and should be asked in consecutive order, following the organization of the RFP and referencing the RFP section. General questions will be shared with all those firms participating in the process. Short procedural inquiries may be accepted by telephone or email by the Proposer, however, oral explanations or instructions given over the telephone shall not be binding upon the University.

2.2 Bidder Responsibility

The Proposer assumes sole responsibility for the complete effort required in this RFP. No special consideration shall be given because of the Proposer's failure to be knowledgeable of all the requirements of this RFP. By submitting a proposal in response to this RFP, the vendor represents that it has satisfied itself, from its own investigation, of all the requirements of this RFP.

2.3 Cost Liability

SMU assumes no responsibility and bears no liability for costs incurred by proposers in the preparation and submittal of proposals in response to this RFP.

2.4 Revisions to this RFP

In the event that it becomes necessary to clarify or revise this RFP, such clarification or revision will be by an Amendment. Any RFP Amendment will be emailed to all participants. Any amendment to this RFP shall become part of this RFP.

2.5 Proposal Acceptance/Rejection

SMU reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, to accept or reject any or all the items in the proposal and to award the Preferred Agreement in whole or in part as deemed to be in the best interest of SMU. SMU reserves the right to negotiate with any vendor if such action is deemed to be in the best interest SMU.

Section 3 – Submission Guidelines and Proposal Requirements

3.1 Submission Guidelines

All questions and comments in reference to this RFP must be submitted electronically via email to the SMU Purchasing Department. The Purchasing Representative is Brian Cook and his email address is brianc@smu.edu.

Responses must be electronically submitted as stated above no later than 3 p.m. (CT), on June 4, 2021 to SMU Purchasing representative Brian Cook at brianc@smu.edu.

3.2 RFP Schedule ***UPDATED 05/21/2021***

May 6, 2021	Request for Proposal Issued
June 4, 2021	Deadline for Vendors Submit Questions to SMU
June 16, 2021	SMU Response to all Vendor Questions Provided
July 9, 2021	Responses Due by 3 p.m. (Central Time)
July 12-16, 2021	Follow Up Meetings (If needed)

3.3 Proposal Requirements

Responses should follow the outline provided in the RFP sub-sections 3.4 and 3.5.

The Proposer should have recent experience with and provide evidence to demonstrate the following:

- Educational evaluation and measurement, especially academic outcomes, in formal and/or informal PK12 education programs (e.g., STEM, out-of-school time, and/or community school models)
- Evaluation of multisector collaborations (e.g., collective impact models, community coalitions, research-practice partnerships, etc.)
- Design and execution of mixed-methods evaluation
- Management of large, complex, and multiyear datasets
- Quasi-experimental or other causal research designs
- Negotiating data sharing agreements with school districts
- Successful submission and approval of human subjects research proposals to a range of review boards—K12 school district and institutes of higher education
- Consistently meeting deadlines
- Reporting findings for a variety of audiences, including lay and academic

The following experiences and capabilities are preferred:

- Skills collecting and analyzing a variety of data sources (such as surveys, focus groups, interviews, naturalistic inquiry, social network, analytics, etc.)
- Experience working with higher education institutions and/or academic partners
- Experience working with state education agency (SEA) data sets

3.4 References

3.4.1 Provide references from 1-2 of Proposer's clients from the past three (3-5) years for services that are similar in scope, size, and complexity to the Services described in this RFP. Provide the following information for each client:

- Client (company) name and address
- Contact name with email address and phone number
- Time period from contract start to completion
- Short description of evaluation work performed

3.4.2 Provide a brief sample from a key deliverable that illustrates the visual "look and feel" of the quality of your work for a client.

3.5 Required Submittals

3.5.1 Provide a two-page CV for the project lead and up to two key project personnel.

3.5.2 Provide a PDF document (maximum 10 pages) that summarizes the Proposer's approach to execute the [Statement of Work \(Exhibit A\)](#). Include relevant evaluation frameworks or approach, planned method to address evaluation aims and answer the orienting questions. Outline key tasks, milestones, and deliverables, along with associated timelines that the Proposer feels are needed to accomplish the evaluation aims. In addition, include a total proposed budget (not to exceed \$250,000 total for the 3-year contract) that specifies broad categories such as staff time, benefits, overhead, supplies and travel. A line-item budget is not required.

3.5.3 Provide a brief statement on any potential conflicts of interest that may be present among Proposer, Dallas Independent School District, the University, and Toyota Foundation. Note: Stated conflicts may or may not affect University's final decision.

3.6 Payment Terms

University's standard payment terms are "net 30 days." Invoices will be accepted by University as follows, the full amount of the contract divided into equal annual payments:

1. 50% of annual amount upon execution of this Agreement,
2. 25% of annual amount at midpoint of academic year, and
3. remaining 25% of annual amount upon completion of the annual report.

Each invoice shall be due and payable by SMU thirty (30) days after satisfactory completion of Services and acceptance and approval of the Services and of such invoice by SMU.

Section 4 – Evaluation and Selection Process

4.1 RFP Evaluation Committee

Each proposal will be evaluated by a WDSS RFP Evaluation Committee comprised of representatives from the multi-partner project. The RFP Evaluation Committee will initially review all proposals for completeness and compliance with the terms and conditions of the RFP. Proposals clearly inconsistent with the RFP requirements will be eliminated from further consideration. Proposals that pass the completeness and compliance review will be evaluated against the Basis of Selection outlined below. The RFP Evaluation Committee will make recommendations to the project PI who will make the final decision on hiring. The PI reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals. The Proposer recognizes this by submitting a proposal.

4.2 Basis of Selection

The RFP Evaluation Committee will evaluate proposals and select an individual or firm based on a best value analysis involving the following factors.

- The individual or firm's plan to meet the requirements in [Exhibit A: Statement of Work](#) including the quality of the proposal, responsiveness to SMU requirements and adequacy of information provided.
- The individual or firm's relevant experience, qualifications, and previous success in executing evaluation work and the requisite data sharing, management, and protection requirements associated with student data (described in Section 3 above).
- The firm's ability to demonstrate quality of work and superior customer service (described in Section 3 above).
- The proposed cost of evaluation services; not to exceed \$250,000 total for the 3-year contract)
- Any other factors relevant to the firm's capacity and willingness to satisfy the University's service needs.

Exhibit A: Statement of Work



Date	May 3, 2021
Project Name	External Evaluator for the West Dallas STEM School Project
Department	Simmons School of Education and Human Development
Project Owner	Dean Stephanie Knight
Compiled by	Annie Wright, Yetunde Zannou, Katrina Martinez

Summary

This document accompanies the Request for Proposals for an External Evaluator for the West Dallas STEM School Project document. This Statement of Work outlines evaluation aims, available data and anticipated reporting needs. A successful RFP submission will detail a Proposer's planned approach to the evaluation work described in this Scope of Work.

In responding to the RFP, Proposers should submit a pdf document (maximum 10 pages) that includes relevant evaluation frameworks or approach, planned method to address evaluation aims and answer orienting questions. Outline key tasks, milestones, and deliverables, along with associated timelines that the Proposer feels are needed to accomplish the evaluation aims. In addition, include a total proposed budget that specifies broad categories such as staff time, benefits, overhead, supplies and travel. A line-item budget is not required.

Introduction

The Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University is invested in a long-term partnership to improve education in West Dallas. The Toyota USA Foundation awarded Simmons a 3-year planning grant to partner with Dallas Independent School District (ISD), Toyota, and the West Dallas community to co-design a PK-8 STEM-focused school. A second 3-year implementation grant was awarded to this partnership to implement the proposed plans for the West Dallas STEM School (WDSS), opening in Fall 2021 with Grades 7 and 8. Simmons seeks an external evaluator to monitor and report on project outcomes over the course of the 3-year implementation phase spanning AY 2021 to AY 2023.

Project Objectives

Equity and innovation are key principles that undergird this project. A central theme of the work is that access to innovative STEM learning is inequitable, which has implications for student opportunities to learn and future career opportunities. Investing in STEM education boosts students' potential and, in turn, our economy. The national average wage for STEM occupations was \$87,570, nearly double the national average wage for non-STEM occupations. STEM education provides opportunities for future success, particularly for students in historically under-resourced communities, and will offer a diverse pipeline to STEM-industry employers. This is especially true here, as Texas is projected to have the second-highest percentage of the nation's future STEM job opportunities.

Unlike their more affluent peers, many students in West Dallas do not experience the type of rich learning opportunities that a STEM-focused education provides, which are relevant not only in STEM careers but in life. The WDSS aims to address this opportunity gap and ensure that all students who attend have the necessary resources to succeed in college, career, and life. We believe that gaps in college and career readiness will be closed through collaborative design between education, research, industry, and community; through principled implementation of an innovative STEM curriculum; and within a school-community ecosystem that values and practices continuous improvement. To meet these goals, the school will leverage the strategic four-way partnership between SMU, Dallas ISD, Toyota USA Foundation and the broader STEM industry, as well as members of the West Dallas community including residents, families, businesses, faith and elected leaders, and a robust nonprofit network.

All work for the partnership and project centers on two key aims:

1. Support student academic achievement such that students graduate **college and career ready**
2. Establish a **replicable model** for the school as well as the partnership

Situated within a broad commitment to equity and innovation, there are five key components of the school that must be considered when designing the outcome evaluation:

1. The WDSS will be a **STEM-focused** school that provides a learner-centered and inquiry-based curriculum for students in grades PreK-8 in service of content and relevant industry skills gain.
2. The WDSS will be a community school, recognizing that academics alone cannot help students achieve their full potential long term. Close collaboration with co-located and nearby non-profits to provide **wraparound services** is essential.
3. The WDSS will be a **professional learning ecosystem**; WDSS staff, leaders and teachers will benefit from professional development opportunities and data provided by Simmons faculty and staff, and Simmons' students will receive authentic and quality teacher preparation experiences.
4. The WDSS will be an active site for **research, evaluation, and continuous improvement**. New knowledge will be generated and disseminated, active formative monitoring of key components of the school will support iterative improvements, long term impacts will be measured, and data will be rapidly and responsibly used to support learning objectives for students and adults alike. Accruing evidence and ongoing documentation will contribute to a replicable model.
5. As part of the overall community-school model, the WDSS will continue its **innovative four-way partnership** to create and nurture the conditions that will help us achieve the partnership's long-term objectives.

External Evaluation

Complex projects require complex evaluation strategies. The WDSS project utilizes a wide range of evaluation tools, including ongoing *formative evaluation* to make timely adjustments to the model and its implementation; *outcome evaluation* to assess the effectiveness of the model in achieving a range of equitable outcomes for students and other outcomes for school staff, parents, and partnering nonprofits; and *impact evaluation* that begins to answer questions about how outcomes for WDSS students compare to those who did not attend the WDSS.

SMU's Center on Research and Evaluation (CORE) has led WDSS evaluation efforts to date during the planning phase, which has included annual reporting, data collection, and development and maintenance of a project Wiki to archive resources that will be needed for future replication. During the planning phase, CORE has also led a number of "data infrastructure" activities, that include prototyping a data system and dashboard to facilitate long-term data storage, access and display; securing Institutional Review Board permissions at the university and research approvals with the school district; developing a project logic model including short and long-term process and outcome indicators; developing initial tools and data collection plans for the inaugural year of the school (AY 2021).

Going forward, CORE will serve in a formative evaluation and continuous improvement capacity, as a "data engine" on the project, maintaining data collection permissions and activities, and ensuring that data are available to project stakeholders as needed. This may include: regular brief reporting to WDSS principal, staff, non-profit providers and SMU faculty partners who will utilize incoming data for rapid, iterative improvements; frequent reporting to funders and other stakeholders; provision of approved datasets to SMU researchers working on numerous projects associated with WDSS and approved provision of data to our external evaluator partner. **Importantly, SMU CORE and others within Simmons will be responsible for both primary and extant Dallas ISD data collection in alignment with our IRB and district Research Review Board approvals and Data Sharing Agreement. Deidentified data for approved variables will be made available to the external evaluator for planned analyses.**

Simmons seeks an external evaluator to participate in this highly collaborative partnership to focus on the outcome evaluation. The external evaluator will be primarily responsible for outcome and impact analyses and will incorporate necessary contextual data and process evaluation data needed to meaningfully interpret results. An external evaluator will serve a critical "third-party" role, assisting all project partners

by taking an objective and rigorous lens, helping to determine not only whether project objectives are being met but also *how, for whom, and under what circumstances*.

While we invite Proposers to propose additional or adapted evaluation questions, the following are orienting outcome evaluation questions that an external evaluator will be asked to address:

1. What are short- and long-term outcomes for WDSS students and stakeholders?¹
2. What implementation, contextual, and individual factors explain variability in student outcomes?
3. How do WDSS student outcomes differ from those of non-WDSS students?

Numerous research and evaluation resources were developed during the planning phase, which we anticipate an external evaluator will utilize. Additionally, we invite an external evaluator as a substantive thought partner who can add value and modifications to existing plans. For example, a working logic model and specified data have been identified; substantive collaboration and co-design work across partners during the planning period informed the existing indicators and planned data collection. The current indicators align with a theory of change that was collaborative developed through Community Visioning workshops and match a range of committed reporting needs from multiple funders. Therefore, while we expect that the external evaluator will utilize the bulk of this model as well as the planned data, additional indicators or data elements may be warranted.

Timeline

The scope of the requested external evaluation encompasses the first three years of the school opening. This 3-year evaluation period will include the following grade levels annually:

- Year 1 (2021-2022): Grades 7, 8
- Year 2 (2022-2023): Grades PK, K, 1, 7, 8
- Year 3 (2023-2024): Grades PK, K, 1, 2, 7, 8

Simmons plans for a long-term collaboration with the WDSS. The school will be fully enrolled from PreK to grade 8 in AY 2027. While we expect an ongoing need for external evaluation, this RFP focuses only on the initial 3-year period. However, we welcome proposals that take a long-term view and consider longitudinal implications for design.

During the 3-year evaluation period, Proposers should expect that approximately the first 4-6 months of the work (target July to December 2021) will involve planning and onboarding. During this time, the external evaluator will learn extensively about the project, review existing project documents, and will become familiar with research and evaluation aims and local context. A large part of this time will involve learning about expectations for reporting, operationalizing key outcomes, becoming familiar with available data for analyses, and developing detailed analysis plans. A key interim deliverable for this initial phase likely includes: an outcome evaluation plan submitted to project partners for approval that includes alignment with existing logic model, a data collection plan, milestones, and key dates for the remainder of the contract.

The initial planning phase will also give the external evaluator an opportunity to secure necessary research and data-use credentials and permissions including Human Subjects Research (Social Sciences) certification(s) and research approval and data sharing agreements with Dallas ISD and participating nonprofit organizations as needed to collect extant and primary data. [Note: SMU has research approval for the WDSS project which covers a wide range of research and evaluation activities. Proposers will not be expected to develop a new proposal; instead, modifications to SMU's existing proposal may be made to accommodate changes the external evaluator wants to propose. Proposers will be expected to have the capacity to sign a data sharing agreement with Dallas ISD similar to, but

¹ Stakeholders include: Parents, School staff, Nonprofit organization staff and representatives from Project partners (e.g., Dallas ISD, SMU, industry, West Dallas community)

independent from, SMU's data sharing agreement.]. Once a plan and appropriate permissions are in place (target January 2022), Proposers should expect to launch into an active evaluation phase.

Available Data

CORE at SMU will collect primary and secondary (extant) data. Following initial review of the WDSS project plan (including logic model and data collection plan) we would welcome applicants to request or recommend additional data to be collected. CORE will provide all data to the external evaluator for analyses upon execution of the external evaluator's data sharing agreement with Dallas ISD.

Data will be made available to the external evaluator as it is available. Primary data collection will begin in Fall 2021. The external evaluator should expect to receive batches of data at least at the end of every school semester (more frequent data delivery may be possible). Initial extant baseline data (from years prior to 2022-23) should be available at the onset of the contract, as soon as a data sharing agreement is in place. Subsequent extant data will be provided to project partners, including the external evaluator, *at least* every 9 weeks. [Note: End of year data (namely, STAAR data for students) is typically available mid- to late Summer following the end of each school year.].

Anticipated Reporting

We encourage Proposers to propose timelines and descriptions of planned reports and include the following as anchors for minimum reporting requirements:

- Initial Outcome Evaluation Plan
- Baseline Report
- Annual Report
- Final Report

Evaluation reports should include, at a minimum, an Executive Summary written such that a wide range of stakeholders (not just academics) can access and interpret the information, and sections on Methods (including the sample, data sources and analytic methods), Results, and Discussion. A more detailed technical report that describes analytic details should accompany the evaluation report.

Budget

The maximum allowable budget is \$250,000 total for the 3-year contract.

Additional Considerations

Simmons anticipates that the bulk of external evaluation work can be completed remotely. Proposals that include future in-person meetings or presentations are welcome and proposed budgets should be inclusive of anticipated travel costs.

Proposals that include sub-contractors will be considered. These proposals should include sufficient description of the sub-contractor's qualifications as well as a rationale for their inclusion in the bid.

Proposers should include a statement describing their approach to race, diversity, inclusion and equity especially as it pertains to project context and aims.