



Request for Qualifications

Participation in a University/Government Research Partnership

Initial RFQ Posting: Wednesday, August 15, 2018

Deadline for Questions: 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 21, 2018

Submission Deadline: 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 28, 2018

Allegheny County Department of Human Services
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Definitions

Unless the context indicates otherwise, the following capitalized words are defined as follows for purposes of this RFQ:

1. Agreement: A contract negotiated between Allegheny County and the Qualified Applicant to provide Contract Services
2. Allegheny County: A home rule county and political subdivision of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
3. Applicant: The individual or organization an Application in response to a RFQ
4. Application: The response submitted to a RFQ
5. College: Either a school/division comprising a University or a separate, accredited institution of higher learning
6. DHS: [Allegheny County] Department of Human Services
7. DHS Data Warehouse: a centralized electronic repository of social services data that integrates sources both internal and external to DHS
8. Partnership: the University/Government Partnership to be established through this RFQ
9. Qualified Applicant: The Applicant(s) determined by DHS to be qualified for participation in a research partnership
10. Response Form: The Word document in which Applicants respond to requested information about this RFQ
11. RFQ: Request for Qualifications
12. University: an accredited institution of higher learning located in the United States

The RFQ at a Glance

Purpose

Allegheny County, on behalf of its Department of Human Services (DHS), is soliciting Applications from universities and colleges to join DHS in a University/Government Research Partnership that will use DHS and its academic partners' resources to understand, improve and evaluate initiatives and perform research that is in alignment with the values of DHS and directly benefits the residents of Allegheny County. Participation in this Partnership is an opportunity for academic partners to inform the DHS research agenda and have access to DHS resources including data, technical assistance and subject matter expertise. DHS envisions that projects by Partnership members could include use of data, tests of new hardware or software by DHS staff, or research that involves human subjects as well as DHS staff and clients (as appropriate).

This Partnership is not intended to replace the existing avenues for academic research using DHS data. Researchers that are not part of the Partnership will still be able to submit requests for DHS data. The Partnership we envision will be an opportunity for researchers to work more closely alongside DHS staff on our research agenda and projects that directly benefit the residents of Allegheny County.

Award Details

Through this RFQ, DHS will select Qualified Applicants for participation in an initial Partnership. The exact number will depend on the number and qualifications of Applications received. Qualified Applicants will be part of the Partnership for three years, at which point DHS may renew the Qualification or ask the Qualified Applicant to re-apply. DHS will re-issue this RFQ annually so that new Applicants may be considered for Qualification.

There is no funding attached to this initiative. Qualified Applicants will join DHS as part of the University/Government Research Partnership and be asked to send a representative to quarterly steering meetings. Before beginning specific projects, DHS and the Qualified Applicant(s) working on the project will assess whether a Data Use Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and/or other document is appropriate for the work to be performed. DHS may also assist Qualified Applicants in securing funding for projects as necessary and appropriate.

Who can apply

All accredited universities and colleges located in the United States are eligible to submit an Application in response to this RFQ. Applicants need not have worked with DHS previously in order to apply. We will accept applications from Universities as a whole, from schools/colleges/departments within Universities, or from individual researchers/teams. However, if multiple Applications will be submitted from parts of the same institution, we encourage Applicants to consider submitting a single application together, or to explain why multiple applications are appropriate. We are looking for a broad range of Applicants representing the following disciplines: Public Administration, Social Work, Public Policy, Business and Public Health, among others.

What we don't want

We are not interested in proposals for specific projects but are looking to identify Applicants interested in building an ongoing relationship with DHS to collaborate on a mutually beneficial research agenda.

What's important to us

We are seeking Applicants who have the skills and commitment to develop long term relationships to use DHS's considerable resources to test, evaluate, create new services and approaches, and improve our programs to benefit the residents of Allegheny County.

Ideal Applicants will be aligned with our mission and will bring resources and techniques that complement and enhance our own. We expect Qualified Applicants to contribute in kind resources as well as financial support for projects, where appropriate.

Qualified Applicants must be able to work collaboratively with DHS staff and other Qualified Applicants and make staff available for meetings, workshops and trainings.

Qualified Applicants must be reasonably available, able to respond to both quick turn-around and long-term projects, and flexible enough to work well in an environment where things may change frequently or stall for periods of time.

Qualified Applicants must be able to communicate knowledge in an easily understandable way and must be diligent about documentation and knowledge transfer.

Long-term commitment to the Collaborative is critical. Flexibility, humility and a sense of humor are also helpful.

Timeline

Deadline for Applicants to submit questions about this RFP is 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 21, 2018.

Applications must be submitted by 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 28, 2018.

Applicants will be notified of their selection status in November, 2018.

Who we are

On behalf of Allegheny County, DHS is the issuing office for this RFQ.

DHS is the largest department of Allegheny County government and provides publicly-funded services to more than 200,000 people annually, in areas including child welfare, behavioral health, aging, intellectual disability, homelessness and community services.

More information about DHS is available at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/human-services/index.aspx>

Section 1: Why We Are Issuing this RFQ

DHS has a national reputation for innovative uses of data for information-sharing, decision-making and risk assessment. The foundation of DHS's data capability is the Allegheny County Data Warehouse, a centralized electronic repository of social services data that brings together and integrates client and service data from a wide variety of sources both internal and external to the County. It was created by consolidating publicly-funded human services data (e.g., behavioral health, child welfare, intellectual disability, homelessness and aging) and, over time, expanded to include data from other sources. It now includes 21 categories of data.¹

We are fortunate to be geographically located near to many institutions of higher education with vast resources, diverse expertise and a desire to collaborate on projects that serve the public good. DHS currently collaborates with many individual researchers and organizations on an ad hoc basis. However, as the number of ad hoc collaborations has grown over time, the amount of effort to coordinate these projects has increased and limited our ability to implement changes to service delivery. Additionally, we often collaborate with multiple individual researchers, including students, within the same university department without formal coordination, meaning that individual research projects are often completed without contributing to broader institutional knowledge.

Through the issuance of this RFQ and the creation of a formal mechanism to engage research partners, we hope to better support projects aligned with the needs, priorities and interests of DHS. We are confident that the long-term relationships established through this Partnership will allow us to offer researchers stronger support from DHS program and technical staff and will ultimately lead to implementation of research findings that address local needs. Additionally, the Partnership will allow Qualified Applicants with complementary resources and skills to work more closely with each other. We expect the Partnership to identify opportunities for two or more Partners to collaborate on inter- and intra-disciplinary projects.

Section 2: What We Are Looking For

DHS plans to create a Partnership with Qualified Applicants who will participate in a variety of meetings, trainings and projects as directed by DHS. Together, DHS and the Qualified Applicants will convene a Collaborative Steering Committee (one to two members from each Qualified Applicant's organization) that will meet on a regular schedule (quarterly or more often as necessary). This Steering Committee will develop a research agenda and ultimately project plans that identify key personnel (from DHS and Qualified Applicants), timelines, deliverables and responsibilities.

In addition to participating in the Steering Committee meetings, Qualified Applicants will do the following:

- Provide dedicated staffing

¹ For a full list of data sources as well as additional information about the Data Warehouse, please see www.AlleghenyCountyAnalytics.us

- Produce work products that can be shared with DHS to disseminate to our stakeholders, e.g., published on our public-facing website, presented to executive leadership at DHS, and shared with our funders
- Work jointly with other Collaborative members
- Propose research projects
- Conduct analyses of national importance using DHS’s integrated data
- Learn about DHS, our practice and our data, and ensure that this information is shared and disseminated within your organization
- Share findings with DHS prior to sharing publicly
- Bring additional resources, besides staffing, including funding when appropriate
- Co-design analytic approaches as well as final products for dissemination with DHS
- Provide implementation support as appropriate

To facilitate the work of the Collaborative, DHS will do the following:

- Identify a set of research projects that are of high priority and interest to DHS
- Train Qualified Applicants on our inventory of data and our service system and provide access to staff as necessary
- Convene regular steering meetings of the Collaborative to discuss current projects, propose new projects, and facilitate connections among Qualified Applicants
- Coordinate joint work within and between Qualified Applicants’ organizations to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of projects
- Provide dedicated staff resources to monitor progress and provide technical and programmatic assistance
- Provide structured internships and capstone projects for students of Partner organizations²

Section 3: Application Requirements and Evaluation Criteria

Applicants must meet the following evaluation criteria and must address their qualifications by responding to the specifically-requested items or questions in the Response Form. Applicants should download and type their responses directly into the Response Form available on the Active Solicitations webpage at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations. The maximum score that an Application can receive is 75 points, as outlined in the following sections.

A. Background (30 points possible)

- Demonstration of interest and/or experience in conducting research on topics related to improving local government/social services (30 points)

B. Infrastructure (45 Points Possible)

- Named resources (academic/administrative staffing, materials, etc.) that will be dedicated to this project (15 Points)

² These structured opportunities will be in addition to the internship and project opportunities DHS already offers, and are not intended to replace any existing program

- A governance structure within your organization that will support this project, integrating other faculty, students, etc. (15 Points)
- Activities (such as internships/fellowships) that will support this project (15 Points)

Section 4: How to Submit an Application

4.1 Submission Process

- Applicants should take time to review and understand the RFQ in its entirety including:
 - The background (see Section 1: Why We Are Issuing this RFQ)
 - The narrative (see Section 2: What We Are Looking For)
 - The requirements (see Section 3: Application Requirements and Evaluation Criteria)
 - The evaluation process (see Section 5: How We Will Evaluate Your Application)
- Applicants must use the Response Form to develop your Application. Type your responses to each requested item directly into the Response Form. It is available at our Active Solicitations website with the RFQ announcement at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations.
- Applicants should not send any attachments other than those specifically requested.
- Make sure to complete each section of the Response Form and to stay within any word counts or page limits that may be specified in the Response Form.
- Applications must be submitted electronically to DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us no later than 3:00 p.m. Eastern Time on Friday, September 28, 2018.**
- Please make sure to get your Application in before the deadline! If your Application is late, it will be rejected and will not be presented to the evaluation committee for review and scoring as described in Section 5 below.
- You will receive an email when your Application is received. If you do not receive this notification within 48 hours of submitting your Application, please contact DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us

4.2 How to Contact DHS about this RFQ

- All inquiries and questions must be submitted via email to DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us
- All information about the RFQ, including answers to questions, changes and clarifications will be posted at our Active Solicitations website at www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/solicitations
- Please be sure to check this website regularly for answers to questions, additional information or changes to the RFQ or the RFQ process.

4.3 Other Information

- The issuance of this RFQ does not obligate the County to enter into a Partnership with any Applicants. The County reserves the right to reject any and all Applications.
- Applicants are responsible for all costs related to the preparation and submission of an Application.
- Applications become the property of the County and may become part of any subsequent Agreement between the Applicant and the County.

- d. The Successful Application(s) will be posted online in the DHS Solicitations Archive after an Agreement has been fully executed by the County and the Qualified Applicant(s).
- e. Applicants also should be aware that all documents and materials submitted in response to this RFQ are subject to requests made pursuant to Pennsylvania's Right-To-Know Law and that the County may have to make submitted documents and materials available to a requestor after an award of an Agreement is made.

Section 5: How We Will Evaluate Your Application

Applications will be evaluated by an evaluation committee convened by DHS. The evaluation committee will assign scores based on the evaluation criteria in Section 3: Application Requirements and Evaluation Criteria using the scale listed in Section 5.1 b.

5.1 Evaluation Model

The evaluation process will consist of the following steps:

- a. An Evaluation Committee will be formed by DHS and may consist of some or all of the following:
 - Content experts from within DHS, selected for their expertise and/or experience
 - Representatives of foundations, educational institutions, community and civic organizations, businesses and/or non-profit agencies
- b. All Evaluation Committee members will individually review and score each Application. Each Evaluation Committee member will award points for each response on an Applicant's Response Form according to their expertise and best judgment of how the Application submitted by that Applicant meets the evaluation criteria in Section 3 using the following scale:
 - 0 – Not addressed in Application
 - 1 – Poor
 - 2 – Below expectations
 - 3 – Meets expectations
 - 4 – Exceeds expectations
 - 5 – Outstanding
- c. The Evaluation Committee members then will meet collectively to discuss the individual scores and evaluations of each committee member.
- d. At any time during the review process, DHS may contact an Applicant to discuss any areas of the Application needing clarification or further explanation.
- e. The Evaluation Committee will submit its recommendation for award of an Agreement to the Director of DHS for his approval.
- f. **The County reserves the right to reject any and all Applications.**
- g. All Applicants will be notified of their status following the final determination of which Applicant(s) will be qualified.
- h. Applicants who are not qualified and who are interested in receiving feedback regarding their submission may request a phone call at DHSProposals@alleghenycounty.us.

5.2 Other Requirements

For an Application to be eligible for evaluation, it must be:

- Received by the due date/time
- Properly formatted and include responses to all requested information

Applications which do not meet the above requirements will be automatically rejected and will not be presented to the evaluation committee.

Section 6: What Happens after an Applicant is Qualified?

6.1 County Obligation

Qualification is not a guarantee of a project. A Qualified Applicant may or may not be selected for any projects.

6.2 Selection Process

DHS may assign specific projects in one of two ways:

1. Projects may be sole-sourced to the most appropriate Qualified Applicant, based upon the following criteria:
 - Experience in the specific topic area
 - Evaluation scores
 - Availability and ability to complete the project within a designated time frame
 - Projected cost based on hourly rate and an estimate of hours required
 - When applicable, DHS's previous experience with the Qualified Applicant in a similar situation
2. Projects may be assigned through a task order process. Task orders will generally be used for more complex projects. If a task order process is used, details will be sent to all Qualified Applicants, along with a description of the evaluation/selection process.

6.3 Qualification

Qualification through this RFQ does not necessarily mean that a Qualified Applicant will be selected to complete a specific research project.

After qualification by DHS, Qualified Applicants will be invited to participate in the quarterly Steering Committee meetings, and may be selected to perform specific research tasks/projects. If selected for a specific project, Qualified Applicants may be required to enter into an Agreement with Allegheny County, on behalf of DHS, or to sign an MOU. There is no funding available from DHS for any research projects implemented by Qualified Applicants through participation in this Partnership.

Qualification obtained through this RFQ to join the University/Governmental Research Partnership will be effective for three years with the potential for renewal at the discretion of the County.