

**Evaluation Design of Unified Courts for Families – Mentor Court Project:
Bidders' Teleconference Questions and Answers: April 26, 2002**

ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING

American Institutes for Research
Berkeley Policy Associates
Coyote Moon Consulting
DPK Consulting
Justice Management Institute
Kate Harrison Consulting
KPMG Public Sector Advisory Services
Mercer Government Human Services Consulting
MGT of America
National Council on Crime and Delinquency
National Center for State Courts
New Family Center
The Phoenix Group
Policy Studies, Inc.
Sherwood Consulting
The Urban Institute

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OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION AND NEEDS FOR PROPOSAL:

Alexa Hirst is the project manager for the evaluation portion of the Unified Courts for Families – Mentor Courts project. She is a senior research analyst in the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC).

In this RFP process, the AOC is looking for a contractor to work very closely with the mentor courts project team and the courts to design an evaluation plan and begin to implement that evaluation plan by collecting baseline data at the six mentor court sites that are selected to receive funding. This will involve a great deal of ongoing work with the AOC. This is not just a research project. The AOC will be running the court implementation and project design piece as well as the evaluation.

There will be weekly conference calls throughout the planning phase with the AOC and the evaluator. The project is in a very formative stage. Therefore, the contractor must be someone who would be able to work in consultation with the AOC and with the courts as they develop their action plans.

The role of the AOC evaluation project manager is to work with the Mentor Court Team and oversee the development of the project plan. The AOC evaluation project manager will serve as a conduit of information among evaluators and other AOC staff and the courts. I will need to know what the project needs are, and what the research needs are.

It is very important to note that the AOC expects a very rigorous evaluation. In your proposals, please present evidence of your competence in this area – for example in data analysis and statistical modeling. The evaluation design cannot be exclusively qualitative. Knowledge of the courts is a competitive asset, but not sufficient to ensure selection for this contract. A successful application will illustrate, through examples and/or references to prior work, the evaluation skills essential to this project.

OVERVIEW OF THE UNIFIED COURTS FOR FAMILIES PLANNING GRANTS AND THE MENTOR COURTS PROGRAM

For the description of the planning and implementation phases of the Unified Courts for Families – Mentor Courts Program, please refer to the Application Guidelines for courts on the CFCC website: <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/grants/other.htm>.

QUESTIONS RECEIVED AND ANSWERS:

Question 1. Regarding the planning phase, what role and responsibilities does the AOC expect the evaluation contractor to have with respect to conducting the needs assessments prior to the planning symposium?

Answer: All courts that receive a planning grant must conduct a needs assessment and complete a needs assessment questionnaire, which the AOC will provide, prior to the planning symposium. This needs assessment will help courts determine, for instance, what coordination is needed, what services are available, and what combinations of court divisions have the most crossover cases. The evaluator will help design the needs assessment tools that the courts use. The purpose of this exercise should be alignment of project goals and evaluation plans. A key question for the evaluator will be: How will we measure what difference the project makes?

Question 2. Regarding the planning phase, what role and responsibilities does the AOC expect the evaluation contractor to have with respect to participating in the planning symposium in Fall 2002?

Answer: The purpose of the planning symposium is for the courts to learn about successful unified family court models from other jurisdictions, to plan and strategize as a group about project designs, and to develop strategies to overcome identified obstacles. By November 29, 2002, each court will submit to the AOC an action plan for unifying or coordinating its cases involving families and children.

The evaluator will work with CFCC staff to facilitate thinking and discussion around measurable objectives, and develop ideas about data indicators that can be used in measuring progress toward goals and objectives. This symposium should be used as a time for the contractor to develop a strong relationship with the courts, grow more familiar with project goals and operations, and identify key research questions. All of these activities will feed into the evaluation plan.

Question 3. Will the contractor that develops the evaluation design be precluded from bidding on the full evaluation of the six mentor courts?

Answer: The background for this question is that the current RFP notes that the AOC plans to release a second RFP for the completion of the evaluation in the Winter of 2002. No, the contractor who develops the evaluation design is *not* precluded from bidding on the RFP for the full evaluation of the six mentor courts. Neither does being selected for the evaluation design piece *guarantee* being selected during the second RFP stage.

Question 4. For budgeting purposes, in what city will the Fall 2002 planning symposium be held?

The exact time and location of the Fall 2002 planning symposium have not yet been set – but current plans are to hold it in September or October 2002. For the purposes of preparing a cost proposal, please assume that the conference will be two days long and will be held in San Francisco.

Question 5. For this proposal, how detailed do you want the evaluation design? Would you like design options to be presented or a design selected?

Answer: The AOC does not expect a detailed evaluation design for this proposal. Given that the unified courts are not yet in place and that their models are not yet set, the RFP does not ask you to design an evaluation at this stage. Keep in mind that this is not just a research project – the evaluation model that you come up with should be aligned with the project plans for the courts. Please describe how you would approach this task, what repertoire of evaluation skills you could bring to the task, and your capacity to implement alternative methodological approaches.

The focus of your response in this regard should be your **approach** to designing this evaluation. I would like your response to address the questions in section 4.3.2 of the RFP: One very important issue is how you would work with the courts and with the AOC to design an evaluation. I am interested in, generally, what approach you might take to this task and a statement about your relevant experience.

You should present your ideas about what type of evaluation design you think might be suited to this project and why you think so, keeping in mind that the AOC needs **rigorous** outcome measures at the end of the project. You should also provide, if possible, examples of your work that illustrate how you've used those types of designs.

Question 6. How many courts do you anticipate being involved in the preliminary 6-month planning phase?

Answer: Basically, any court that applies for a planning grant will receive funding. Because of the generally high level of interest in this project from the courts and the relatively broad criteria required to get planning grants, the AOC anticipates that many of the 58 county courts in the state will apply for and receive planning grants. For a similar recent project, about 40 courts applied for and received funding. It is anticipated that approximately the same number of courts will apply for this planning grant funding, but it could be significantly fewer, or as many as all 58. The state courts are organized into three regions (Northern/Central, Bay Area/Northern Coastal, and Southern), so a regional approach to working with multiple courts may be possible.

Question 7. How are courts able to use their planning grant money?

Answer: See page 4 of the Application Guidelines for the courts (available on the CFCC website, as referenced earlier). The Application Guidelines list six ways that the courts may use the planning grant funds: (1) assessing needs, (2) hiring a facilitator, (3) salaries for court staff, (4) travel costs, (5) costs of developing an action plan, and (6) other related costs.

Question 8. Would you consider it be a conflict of interest for the evaluator to also work as a consultant to the courts as they conduct their needs assessments and develop their action plans?

Answer: Yes. An evaluator would not be able to fairly assess the mentor courts if he or she had worked with one or more of those courts on their action plans.

Question 9. Is the budget and/or budget justification included in the 15-page narrative?

Answer: Please note that there is an error in the RFP [section 4.5], which refers bidders to section 5.0 for "specific directions for response." The specific directions are within section 4.5 of the RFP.

No, the budget and/or budget justification does not count toward the 15-page narrative limit. The 15-page narrative limit includes only (a) a statement of purpose, (b) a general evaluation plan [see description in section 4.3.2], and (c) description of process for refining the evaluation plan and collecting baseline and formative evaluation data.

Question 10. How many courts have or are currently moving toward a unified family court in California today? Where are these Courts located?

Answer: About 6 to 10 courts have some level of unification plan in place statewide. However, this has not been a statewide initiative in the past, and there is not a commonly accepted definition of unified family courts. This is part of what we'll be learning during the planning phase. For planning purposes, you should assume that most courts are just beginning this process and please note that the AOC does **not** have any particular model of unification/coordination in mind. However, other jurisdictions around the country and internationally have implemented unified family courts, so it is quite possible to do a web search to familiarize yourself more with the models.

Question 11. Regarding Section 3.1, page 5. The RFP mentions the evaluation plan should include “a model of a theory of change.” Can you elaborate on what you mean by system change? What are the parameters? Is the goal of a theory of change to help clarify the intervention or the court administrative system? By system, are you referring to changes in the court system under study or broader systemic changes related to interface with human services or other related criminal justice agencies, e.g. social services, mental health, police?

Answer: The design for the project envisions that it will involve systemic change in the way the court conducts business, as well as the way in which it coordinates services for families with other agencies (for example, community-based organizations, Child Protective Services, probation). The project should involve a close collaboration among multiple partner agencies. Therefore, although the main focus of the project will be changes to the court system, the “system” being studied will also include collaborative partners that are not part of the courts.

You should work with the courts to define measurable outcomes. The two key areas the evaluation should focus on are systemic changes to the courts and outcomes for children and families. You may refer the Planning Grant Application for Courts [at the website referenced earlier] for general discussion of outcomes.

If the confusion was over the term “theory of change,” another commonly used term is “logic model.”

Question 12. What are your concerns about administrative burden and what do you think the evaluator can do to address any concerns the courts may have? [Clarified that this means the administrative burden for courts to implement this program].

Answer: The administrative burden to the courts in terms of implementing the program should not generally be the evaluator's concern. The AOC Mentor Court Team will be directly working with the courts as they implement the program and will be dealing with these issues.

There may be an administrative burden to the courts as evaluators collect data. Therefore you consider this as you develop your methodology. The AOC would like the data collection to be as non-invasive as possible and to collect data that is useful for the courts. Your plan should present ideas about how you will use this data to provide feedback to the courts.

Keep in mind that the courts are voluntarily participating in the planning phase and the mentor court phase. The benefits of both phases to the participating courts should be substantial, so it is likely that the courts will willingly take on any administrative burden.

Question 13. The State does not have an indirect cost rate. What is the permissible amount of indirect costs?

Answer: The State does not accept indirect cost rates. All indirect costs need to be embedded in your project costs. The rates should be proposed fully burdened (meaning the proposed rate(s) is inclusive of the base direct, indirect and any overhead or profit, so the AOC does not contract or pay separate elements of cost and price).

Question 14. Is one of the tasks of the evaluator to help develop the criteria for selection of the six pilot/mentor courts? Do you have criteria in mind for the selection of the pilot courts?

Answer: The evaluator will not determine the criteria for selecting the mentor courts. However, the AOC does want the evaluator to have input into the process of developing these criteria. The Mentor Court Team does want to make sure that the courts are designing a project that has measurable goals and outcomes.

One milestone toward completing the general evaluation design should be the creation of an evaluation framework early in the process. This will help the AOC to design the selection criteria.

Question 15. Have you contracted with an evaluator previously for similar type of work?

Answer: The Center for Families, Children & the Courts has contracted in the past for research work. Other divisions within the AOC, for example, Executive Office Programs, have also done so. Program evaluations are a growing sector of work within our agency. Our goal is to establish a strong reputation and track record in this area. Therefore, the contractor must be capable of conducting a very rigorous evaluation.

Question 16. You have clearly indicated that you want a rigorous evaluation. Does this conflict with your goal of collecting formative evaluation data?

Answer: The mentor courts are not competing against each other. Each will be measured against their own objectives, although many of these objectives will be similar. The goals of a rigorous evaluation do not conflict with those of a formative evaluation. The AOC does not have a specific model in mind, and it is expected that the six mentor courts will modify their

procedures over time in order to implement fully their action plans. It is expected that the evaluator would collect formative evaluation data and provide feedback to the courts and the AOC about system operations and areas for improvement.

Question 17. Are DVBE requirements included in this solicitation?

Answer: Yes. The AOC has sent out an addendum to the current solicitation for the DVBE [Disabled Veterans Business Enterprise] requirement. It is also available on the website with the RFP and this Q&A. The state has a 3% participation goal for DVBEs. This is not a requirement, but it is a goal.

Question 18. What do you plan to do about the 10% hold-back that's mentioned in the attachment to the RFP? Is this negotiable?

Answer: The 10% holdback is standard language. If applicable to the contract type, it may be reserved at the State's discretion.

Question 19. What is going to happen to the courts that take part in the planning phase but do not receive funding as one of the six mentor courts?

Answer: The AOC will work with the courts that are not chosen as mentor courts to seek other funding sources, including grant funding and budget change proposals (BCPs), to implement their action plans.

Question 20. Is there a small business preference requirement?

Answer: No.

Question 21. Do contractors have to use State of California rates for travel?

Answer: No, but all travel must be included in the budget, and it is recommended that you budget the state rate, if possible.

Question 22. Can you provide us with a list of state rates for travel?

Answer: Yes (see Attachment A for the state travel rates and policies).

Question 23. Given the current problems in the California budget, can you tell us if the funds are locked in for both halves of the evaluation?

Answer: The AOC has funding for the first year [this RFP], but subsequent years are subject to the availability of funding.

Question 24. What about the funds for the mentor court project? Are those locked in for the planning phase and the mentor courts phase?

Answer: Funding for both the planning phase and the mentor court phase has been approved for this year and is subject to availability of funds in subsequent fiscal years.

Question 25. How much funding is available for subsequent years of the evaluation?

Answer: The AOC anticipates that a similar level of funding will be available: \$200,000 per year.

Question 26. Would we have to re-bid each year for the funding?

Answer: You would have to re-bid for the second RFP. It is likely that there will be a re-bid each year, but it will be expedited for continuation. This process allows the AOC to maintain our control over timeliness and quality.

CLOSING COMMENTS

The AOC is looking for a well designed evaluation that demonstrates conceptual rigor. Please provide information in your proposal about any similar quantitative or mixed-method evaluations that you have performed. Also be aware that this is not the type of project in which the evaluator works a step removed from the program that is being evaluated. The evaluator will be expected to work closely and collaboratively with AOC staff and the courts that are involved in the project.

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
INFORMATION ON TRAVEL EXPENSE CLAIM REIMBURSEMENT**

AIR TRAVEL AND OTHER METHOD OF TRAVEL: Actual costs will be reimbursed by the least expensive means of transportation (includes airplanes, trains, buses, transportation to and from airports, limousine, shuttle, and taxi fares, bridge tolls, and parking). A private automobile may be used if it is the least expensive means or there are special circumstances. Private automobile reimbursement is 34¢ per mile and limited to the lesser amount of either what it would have cost to fly or cost of mileage.

To be eligible for lodging and/or meal reimbursement, expenses must be incurred in excess of 25 miles from headquarters. All items may be claimed for the **actual amount of expense** up to the maximum allowed. If the provisions below do not require submission of a receipt for a given item of expense, it is the traveler's responsibility to retain receipts and other records of the expense and have them available for audit, if needed. Lodging, meals, and transportation costs, such as airline tickets, that are either provided by the State or included in conference fees, shall not be claimed for reimbursement.

LODGING: The AOC Executive Office, per their delegated authority, has established the California Statewide lodging rate for regular travel and conferences at the actual receipted cost up to a maximum rate of \$110, plus tax and energy surcharge. When required to conduct official State business and obtain lodging in the counties of Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara, reimbursement will be allowed for the actual receipted cost up to a maximum rate of \$140, plus tax and energy surcharge (rate change effective January 1, 2002).

MEALS: Breakfast is reimbursable for travel before 7:00 a.m.; dinner is reimbursable for travel after 6:00 p.m. Lunch is not reimbursable for one-day trips, except for Judicial Council members and advisory committee members who are not State employees. **Meals will be reimbursed for actual costs up to the amounts listed below and only if listed separately** on the Travel Expense Claim form. Receipts are not required.

Maximum Allowable: Breakfast - \$6.00; lunch - \$10.00 (overnight trips only); and dinner - \$18.00.

INCIDENTALS: Reimbursed for actual costs up to \$6 if travel exceeds 24 hours.

OTHER BUSINESS EXPENSES: Phone calls must include the place and party called. If calls exceed \$2.50, support by vouchers or other evidence. Emergency purchases of equipment or supplies, and all other charges in excess of \$1.00 require an explanation.