

**RFP#102: Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness
and Resiliency in Education) Program Evaluation**

TO: Bidders and Interested parties
FROM: Department of Mental Health (DMH)
DATE: September 29, 2023
RE: RFP Questions and Responses

ISSUE DATE: 09/18/2023

QUESTIONS DUE: 09/29/2023, 4:30pm ET

RFP RESPONSES DUE BY: 10/20/2023, 4:30pm ET

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- 1) How many school districts/LEAs will the State be supporting as part of Project AWARE?**
 - a) 3 LEAs: Barre Unified Union School District (BUUSD) in Washington County, Southwest VT Supervisory Union (SVSU) in Bennington County, and Caledonia Central Supervisory Union (CCSU) in Caledonia County.

 - 2) How many total schools do those LEAs represent?**
 - a) From the VT proposal: Together these communities support 7,174 students in 20 schools.

 - 3) What is the approximate student enrollment across all LEAs supported by the grant?**
 - a) From the VT proposal: Together these communities support 7,174 students in 20 schools.

 - 4) How many additional partners (e.g., community mental health agency partners) will be closely involved in the project? (I.e., from whom we may need to collect required data?)**
 - a) The regional Designated mental health Agency (DA) will be partnering with their LEA as follows:
 - i) Washington County Mental Health (WCMH) for BUUSD;
 - ii) Northeast Kingdom Human Services (NKHS) for CCSU; and
 - iii) United Counseling Services (UCS) for SVSU.
 - b) A Technical Assistance entity will be identified through a procurement process.
 - c) Each LEA will be offered the opportunity to partner with the following entities:
 - i) Center for Health and Learning (CHL) to provide an array of Umatter® Suicide Prevention trainings for LEAs and community;
 - ii) Vermont Care Partners (VCP) to provide mental health awareness training: Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) and Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA);

- iii) Up for Learning guides students in at least one elementary, middle and high school in each LEA in Youth Participatory Action Research projects;
- iv) Northeastern Family Institute to provide training and support on implementing Trauma Responsive Schools within the VTmtss framework;
- v) Outright VT to support Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) groups in each LEA and to provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff about building inclusive school culture for LGBTQIA+ students.

5) Will the State be engaging the allowable activity related to implementation of a school-based student suicide awareness and prevention training policy?

- a) VT did not select to include this allowable activity in our proposal. There are other efforts related to proposing a model suicide prevention school policy that are underway in Vermont.

6) What districts/LEAs are being funded?

- a) See 1) above.

7) Would the state be willing to share its proposal to SAMHSA with us?

- a) SAMHSA posts the abstracts for all awarded projects here:
https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grants-dashboard?f%5B0%5D=by_nofo_number%3ASM-23-001&page=0%2C1
- b) VT Project AWARE 2023 narrative proposal can be found [here](#).

8) Would the state share key evaluation reports/products from its first AWARE grant?

- a) A sample annual progress report to SAMHSA is now posted with the RFP [here](#).

9) Would the state be willing to share any other materials to help clarify how the current AWARE project expects to do the following “This award continues the work that Vermont began under Project ARARE (2018-2023) and will leverage lessons learned from that prior project”.

- a) See response to #7

10) Can the bidder receive all points for the historically marginalized group and women-owned enterprises if the bidder subcontracts with such an enterprise?

- a) Businesses can register [Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises | Buildings and General Services \(vermont.gov\)](#), and can have sub-contractors do so as well. Bidders can then explain how they meet or plan to meet this qualification in their response for the reviewers' consideration.

11) The only page limit for the Technical Response appears to be 2pp. for the organization description as specified in 4.3.1. Would the state confirm that there is not an overall page limit for the Technical Response?

- a) That is correct. Bidders are encouraged to be clear and concise in their responses so that

reviewers can score accordingly.

12) We are hoping that further details re: the state's Project AWARE award and programmatic plans for this new performance period will be made available. This RFP includes high-level information about goals, but further information on the specifics of the state's intervention plans would be extremely helpful in shaping an evaluation proposal.

a) See response to #7

13) Worker Classification Compliance requirement – Is this form included in the RFP (Referenced in Bid Submission checklist, pg 12 of RFP)?

a) Please submit the certificate of compliance with the response to the RFP.

b) For bid amounts over \$250,000 that are awarded a contract, the Subcontractor Reporting Form must be completed before the contract is executed and updated as additional subcontractors are hired.

14) Can you clarify the contract start date and end date for each year of the evaluation contract?

a) In general, the federal project fiscal year cycle is September 30 to September 29. The Year 1 Project Budget Period for DMH is: Start Date 09/30/2023 – End Date 09/29/2024.

b) For the Evaluator contract:

i) Initial contract for Years 1 & 2: The contract is targeted to start on or before 12/31/2023 and go through 9/29/2025. The start date will be determined once contract negotiations are completed and to allow for the standard timeframe for the State review process. The initial contract period is intended to cover the first two years of the project with a delayed start due to compliance with the State procurement process, thus it will be less than 24 months.

ii) Future Years: if continued, the contract cycle will follow the federal project fiscal year cycle of 9/30 – 9/29.

15) What is the anticipated start date for the evaluation contract for FY24 and will the end date for FY24 be September 30, 2024 (so less than 12 months)?

a) Please response to # 14

16) Do you want proposed evaluation contract budget amounts for FY26 and FY27 or only for FY24 and FY25?

a) Budget should be for FFY24 and FFY25 as that is the focus of this RFP. There is an option to renew, but it is not a guarantee.

17) How many LEAs are participating in the project?

a) Please see response to # 1

18) Each year, approximately how many meetings are expected to take place in person? Remotely?

a) Anticipate one half- or full day in person meeting annually.

b) For virtual meetings, we anticipate monthly meetings with the evaluator, LEAs, DAs and partners. Additionally, at minimum monthly meetings with the State team for planning purposes, potentially more frequently in the initial start-up phase.

19) Please clarify the periods of performance for this RFP and how they align to the federal grant years. We see that the Year 1 budget should start in December 2023 but aren't clear when Year 1 ends and Year 2 begins (and same for subsequent possible years).

a) Please see response to # 14

20) Does a business need to be registered in Vermont prior to submission or upon award?

a) The business needs to be eligible to register and must be registered prior to being awarded a contract. This does not need to happen prior to proposal submission. A tax identification form (W-9) signed in ink within the past year must be included with your submission.

21) Where do you prefer we list growth and investment margins in the required budget form (different state entities have expressed different preferences)?

a) This can be reflected in the budget submittal form, as well as the technical response if further explanation and clarity are warranted.

22) Is there an incumbent evaluator from the last round of Project AWARE funding? If yes, can you disclose who it is?

a) WestEd provided evaluation services for Project AWARE 2018

23) Are there any publicly available evaluation or implementation reports available from the prior Project AWARE (2018-2023)? If yes, can these be shared?

a) See response to #8.

24) Will the same organizations from Project AWARE (2018-2023) be funded again?

a) No, see response to #4.

25) How many implementation sites and staff are expected to be funded under Project AWARE?

a) see response to #1, 4 and 7.

26) To what extent is implementation of Project AWARE consistent across funded organizations or sites (e.g., are all sites implementing the same activities)?

a) Please see project narrative linked in response to #7. There is the same high-level implementation plan, but each LEA will tailor some aspects based on their local needs assessment, as required by the NOFO.

27) Can Vermont share the approved project deliverables/approach that was submitted/approved by SAMHSA?

a) See response to #7.

28) Do you anticipate that data collection tools will need to be created from scratch, or will tools be modified from existing sources?

- a) Some tools may be modified from existing sources to incorporate lessons learned from AWARE 2018, while some may need to be created.

29) Are data collection tools needed in languages other than English? If so, which languages? Is translation and interpretation expected to be included in the evaluation budget or will Vermont provide translation and interpretation?

- a) Some data tools, such as training evaluations, may need to be provided in languages other than English and the costs for translation services should be included in the evaluation budget.

30) Are incentives allowable to support data collection efforts (e.g., survey or focus group participation?)

- a) Please refer to the SAMHSA NOFO, see link in the RFP announcement.

31) Are out of state vendors allowable?

- a) Yes, but vendor must be registered in Vermont as a business prior to a contract being awarded.

32) To what extent is in-person engagement desired (vs. virtual)?

- a) Please see response to # 18 for a rough estimate

33) In the budget form, is a fully loaded hourly rate acceptable in lieu of salary, fringe, and indirect broken out?

- a) An hourly rate is acceptable in lieu of salary and fringe being broken out. Indirect expenses will need to be broken out separately.

34) Are there existing centralized data systems for Project AWARE evaluation data (e.g., SAMHSA required data)? If not, is data system development an expectation of the evaluator?

- a) No, this would need to be determined by the evaluator.

35) Is there an internal review process required for research materials (for example surveys, focus group guides, recruitment material, etc.)? If yes, please describe.

- a) Yes, the Vermont Project AWARE State Team will be in communication as research materials are being developed and give a final review before surveys and interviews are conducted.

36) What are the flow-down provisions (if any) from the federal assistance grant to the contract the state will issue the successful bidder with respect to restrictions on the use of funds?

- a) The restrictions on the expenditures of federal funds in appropriations acts to the extent those restrictions are pertinent to the award CFDA #93.243 Vermont Project Aware 2023 as well as 45 CFR Part 75 as applicable.

37) Under RFP Section 1, Overview, Paragraph 1.7, Source of Funds, is the state required to enforce 2 CFR 200.400(g) on a for profit successful bidder?

- a) In the context of this federal regulation, [Non-Federal entity \(NFE\)](#) means a State, local government, Indian tribe, Institution of Higher Education (IHE), or nonprofit organization that carries out a Federal award as a recipient or subrecipient. This does not apply to a for-profit contractor.

38) What data collection activities are most local and state staff planning to execute?

a) Please see VT Project AWARE proposal, section D, linked in response to #7.

39) To what extent will the evaluation team have access to data and specimen collected through each grantee's evaluation?

a) Please see VT Project AWARE proposal, section D, linked in response to #7.

40) Will any data collection, reporting, or tracking systems need to be utilized from the prior grant cycle?

a) While there may be lessons learned from the prior cycle, the tools, processes and systems are not required to be the same for the new AWARE award period.

41) Did you work with an evaluator in the prior grant cycle? If so, who was the evaluator and what was the scope of the evaluation?

a) See response to #22

42) Do you have any public reports or dissemination products from prior evaluations of this initiative?

a) Please see response to #23

43) Do you anticipate any in-person components for the evaluation (e.g., data collection, trainings, meetings)?

a) Regarding meetings, please see response to #18

b) The evaluator may find it useful to participate in an in-person meeting with each LEA in the first year.

c) For standard data collection, the evaluation would not need to be conducted in-person by the evaluator. For example, while most training activities may be provided in person, attendance logs and evaluations may be collected in hard copy by the training entity and submitted to the evaluator.

44) How often do you anticipate project meetings may occur?

a) Please see response to #18

45) Have the participating school districts already been selected? If so, which districts were selected?

a) Yes, please see response to #1

46) Does the State have a preferred data collection tool or platform?

a) No

47) Will the vendor be responsible for hosting the data or obtaining licenses for platforms that may be required?

a) Yes

48) How frequently does the State anticipate collecting data from SU/SDs? I.e Weekly, Monthly,

Quarterly?

- a) Anticipate monthly.

49) To what extent does the State anticipate needing to collect student-level data to fulfill federal requirements and/or provide the analysis required to fulfill federal requirements?

- a) Data will be collected in aggregate without individual student identifying information.
- b) Please see VT Project AWARE proposal, section D, linked in response to #7

50) Is the state able to provide a copy of its grant application/award from SAMHSA?

- a) Please see response #7

51) To what extent does the State anticipate travel to LEAs or state agency will be required to complete this project?

- a) Please see response to #18

52) Roughly what percentage of LEAs (SU/SDs) will participate? When do you anticipate LEAs will receive funding and begin programming required under the grant?

- a) Please see response to #1.
- b) The State anticipates activities and funding to the LEAs to begin no later than 12/31/2023. The initial phase will entail local needs assessment and development of an implementation plan which will be submitted to SAMHSA by 3/30/2024; programming and activities will be driven by the implementation plan.

53) What style of data collection tools does the State expect to be delivered? Surveys, Webforms, Websites, Applications, etc.

- a) Please propose the methodology to best meet the project activities and performance measurement requirements. See response to #7 and the NOFO linked in the RFP for details.

54) Is the data collected from current collection tools stored in a database? If so, what database and/tool is being used?

- a) Project AWARE 2018 data is stored in the current evaluator's secure file sharing system called "Box".

55) Do regional LEAs/DAs currently report data to a centralized location at the State? If so, what methods and tools are used to facilitate that data movement?

- a) AWARE related data is currently reported directly to the evaluator, not through a centralized location at the State.
- b) For non-SPARS data, LEAs submit data throughout the year to the Agency of Education. DMH does not hold the detail for those processes. Designated mental health Agencies submit data to the Department of Mental Health through secure email or data transfer (encrypted when necessary for confidentiality).

56) Does the State have an analytics environment that will have access to the data needed to complete this work?

- a) Not for the data required for SAMHSA SPARs reporting. The State has other data that may

provide context to support programmatic and evaluation activities.

57) Does the state have a preferred business intelligence (BI) tool for reporting (e.g. Tableau, Power Bi, Looker)?

- a) The State uses Power BI for other data reporting but is open to bidders proposing other solutions for Project AWARE 2023.