



# Excellence COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

## **Excellence Community Schools**

### **R E Q U E S T   F O R   P R O P O S A L S**

Independent External Evaluation of a  
Charter Management Organization for the  
Federal Charter Schools Program Grant for the  
Replication and Expansion of High Quality Charter Schools

Released July 19, 2019

#### **Excellence Community Schools**

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**Request for Proposals for an Independent External Evaluation of a  
Charter Management Organization for the  
Federal Charter Schools Program Grant for the  
Replication and Expansion of High Quality Charter Schools**

**I. Introduction**

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Excellence Community Schools, Inc. (ECS) is a non-profit charter management organization (CMO) supporting a growing network of schools in New York and Connecticut. Our programs are based on a research-based, nationally recognized model, which originated in our flagship school, the Bronx Charter School for Excellence (Bronx Excellence). Bronx Excellence was the first charter school in the Bronx to receive a National Blue Ribbon award from the U.S. Department of Education.

Our current portfolio includes the following schools, which open PK/K-1 and grow one grade level each year:

- Bronx Excellence 1 (K-8): Opened Fall 2004
- Stamford Excellence (PK-4): Opened Fall 2015
- Bronx Excellence 2 (K-3): Opened Fall 2016
- Bronx Excellence 3 (K-2): Opened Fall 2017
- Bronx Excellence 4 (K-1): Opened Fall 2018
- Bronx Excellence 5 (K-1): Opening Fall 2019
- Norwalk Excellence (PK-1): State BOE Approved

Our fundamental goals of replicating our model is to avail greater access to high-quality educational programs to students and families in high-needs communities, and disrupting the longstanding narrative of inequality by closing persisting achievement gaps. Our long-term goal is to leverage the transformative power of education to elevate every student, family, and the surrounding communities that we serve.

In the fall of 2016, ECS became one of 15 operators nationwide to be awarded the Federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) Grant for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Charter Schools. We are currently completing our third year of the five-year grant. The grant year runs from October 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup>.

ECS is deeply committed to supporting and assisting all network schools in becoming high-performing learning environments where scholars are well-rounded, critical thinkers. To do so, we conduct research and evaluations of innovations and practices piloted in our schools. Our research designs, where possible, employ the gold standard controlled randomized trial design. Our research projects demonstrate our goals and commitment to education reform.

## **Evaluation Background**

ECS provides valuable resources and services to maintain the integrity and quality of our school model. As each school is launched and we expand our reach to more children, it is essential that we maintain the highest quality of standards to guide our scholars on a pathway to and through high school, college, and chosen careers. Essential to this is establishing a sound and sustainable strategy to attract, recruit, and retain top talent.

To offset the national teacher shortage and prevailing trend of high teacher turnover rates, ECS developed a relatively unique strategy for a sustained talent pipeline to ensure that we replicate and sustain the quality of our model as we expand. The initiative is called “Build the Bronx” and focuses on sourcing lifelong educators from the community and for the community. ECS has found, through research and experience, that individuals who reside in the neighborhoods in which they teach are more likely to be committed to and invested in the success of its schools. This strategy supports both the pipeline for high-quality instructional staff as well as the longevity and retention of highly valued employees.

“Build the Bronx” began with establishing relationships with teacher and school leader preparation programs at local and regional colleges and universities. These partnerships with post-secondary institutions opened ECS doors to pre-service education majors to conduct field placements, practicums, and student teaching hours at our schools. College students are able to learn from and about our model prior to graduation. Concurrently, CMO staff offers guest lectures at the universities, as well as field visits to our schools.

In addition to building a relationship with the field placement offices, ECS is also able to source graduates from these colleges post-matriculation. Graduates will already be familiar with our programs due to an acquaintance through guest lectures, field placements, student teaching, residencies, and fellowships. Teaching graduates start as our Education Associates/Teacher Residents, become our lead teachers, and with time and experience, join our career ladder with possible advancement into leadership positions. Not only do these strategies help to feed our talent pipeline. They also allow us to reinvest in and revitalize the communities we serve, while ensuring the longevity of our workforce.

**ECS is seeking proposals from independent external evaluators to work with the CSP Project Director and other appointed personnel to design and conduct a rigorous assessment of our “Build the Bronx” campaign. The purpose of the evaluation is to examine the impact of the campaign, and relationship to factors that may include: student achievement; talent retention; staff performance; workforce diversity; community engagement; staff referrals; and, organizational sustainability. The goals, measures, and outcomes will be finalized in collaboration between CMO**

**and evaluation staff. The evaluation must meet *What Works Clearinghouse* standards, and culminates in a written report.**

ECS has released this competitive RFP to identify the individual or organization (referred to as the “External Evaluator” or “Evaluator”) whose proposal provides a compelling description of a potential evaluation that is most likely to align with our objectives. The Evaluator that is selected for this assignment will be responsible for working with the Project Director and select ECS Staff to gain a deeper understanding of the campaign, establish measurable goals on which to measure impact agreed upon by both parties, conduct a rigorous assessment of our progress and performance towards established goals based on collected data, and compose a thorough written report on the findings. ECS will provide any necessary consultation and furnish the Evaluator with available materials needed to conduct the evaluation. The Evaluator will initially be contracted to conduct an evaluation for our performance to date within the multi-year grant term. Contracted services for subsequent years will be determined based on the satisfactory performance and completion of the deliverables required within this RFP. The annual evaluations will culminate in a final summative evaluation at the conclusion of the grant. For the purposes of this RFP, the language of the terms assumes that the Evaluator’s contract will be renewed each year for the remaining duration of the grant.

**Scope of Work**

Upon selection, the Evaluator’s scope of work will include:

1. Meetings/communication with the CSP grant Project Director and other ECS staff to establish a cohesive plan to facilitate the evaluation(s)
2. Ongoing communication with the Project Director, and other ECS staff as needed, to compile data and information necessary for the evaluation
3. Drafts and a final document outlining the goals, established in collaboration with ECS, detailing the items for which ECS will be evaluated on an annual basis for the duration of the grant and at the conclusion of the grant, as well as a timeline for deliverables
4. Conducting a rigorous assessment of ECS’s progress and performance towards the goals annually and at the conclusion of the grant, which may include data analyses (i.e. paired t-test, regression and correlation analyses, etc.), a quasi-experimental design study<sup>1</sup>, or randomized controlled trials<sup>2</sup> that will meet What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quasi-experimental design study means a study using a design that attempts to approximate an experimental design by identifying a comparison group that is similar to the treatment group in important respects. These studies, depending design and implementation, can meet What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards with reservations (but not What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards without reservations).

<sup>2</sup> Randomized controlled trial means a study that employs random assignment or, for example, students, teachers, classrooms, schools, or districts to receive the intervention being evaluated (the treatment group) or not to receive the intervention (the control group). The estimated

5. Drafts and final report detailing ECS's progress and performance towards established evaluation goals on an annual basis
6. Drafts and final report detailing ECS's summative progress and performance towards established evaluation goals at the conclusion of the grant

## **II. Eligibility**

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ECS will review proposals from all individuals and organizations, which demonstrate the capacity to fulfill the terms of the scope of work outlined in this RFP. Minimally, the Evaluator must:

- Be an individual or organization that operates in full independence from Excellence Community Schools, Inc. That is, the selected Evaluator may not be an employee, relative, or affiliated associate of ECS, its staff, or affiliated organization whose relationship may pose a conflict of interest<sup>4</sup>
- Demonstrate experience facilitating a rigorous evaluation process in accordance with the conditions outlined in the scope of work, compliant with federal regulations, and meeting What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards
- Demonstrate the capacity to produce evidence-based, articulate, and organized reports described in the scope of work that present an authentic and truthful portrayal of ECS's progress and performance
- Demonstrate the capacity to establish and adhere to a timeline to conduct evaluation(s) and efficiently produce reports from the results
- Demonstrate experience and/or expertise to consult with ECS for the evaluation process and the resulting deliverables
- Previous track record of successful experience working with CMOs on federal CSP grant evaluations is optimal, though not required. Minimally, previous experience conducting external evaluations and meeting What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards is preferred
- Propose an annual cost structure for the scope of work that falls within the affordable parameters of the grant
- Demonstrate discretion and confidentiality to protect and safeguard ECS and its intellectual property, including confidential information,

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effectiveness of the intervention is the difference between the average outcome for the treatment group and for the control group. These studies, depending on design and implementation, can meet What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards without reservations.

<sup>3</sup> What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards means the standards set forth in the What Works Clearinghouse Procedures and Standards Handbooks (Version 4.0, October 2017), which can be found at the following link: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Handbooks>

<sup>4</sup> No employee, officer, or agent may participate in the selection, award, or administration of a contract supported by a Federal award if he or she has a real or apparent conflict of interest. Such a conflict of interest would arise when the employee, officer, or agent, any member of his or her immediate family, his or her partner, or an organization which employs or is about to employ any of the parties indicated herein, has a financial or other interest in or a tangible personal benefit from a firm considered for a contract. The officers, employees, and agents of the non-Federal entity may neither solicit nor accept gratuities, favors, or anything of monetary value from contractors or parties to subcontracts.

- student and staff data, and any other sensitive or proprietary materials that the Evaluator may observe or encounter
- In accordance with Federal Procurement Standards, §200.321, ECS must take all necessary affirmative steps to assure that minority businesses, women's business enterprises, and labor surplus area firms are solicited, considered, and acquired whenever possible and as needed
  - Please note that if onsite presence and/or potential interactions with students is required for the evaluation, contracted evaluators will be required to provide proof of insurance, as well as submit to background checks required of all contractors

### **III. Submission Requirements**

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The following lists and describes the sections required for submission. Please clearly label each section for submission.

- **Cover Letter** (Attached as Appendix A)
- **Applicant Background:** Introduction of the individual or organization, including a brief history/background of experience; Biographies (names, titles, and credentials) of individual(s) assuming the assignments and their role(s); and, capacity to successfully execute the scope of work, particularly as it relates to meeting the What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards
- **Proposed Scope, Approach, and Methodology:** Based on information furnished in the Evaluation Background, provide at least one possible sample focus and preliminary plan for evaluation of what will be evaluated and how. Include goals, tasks, deliverables, analyses, timeline, and management approach. Suggest which tasks will be completed by the Evaluator, which will be completed by ECS staff, and which will be a collaborative effort. (This is not intended to be the final evaluation plan, but rather, provides ECS with insight on the Evaluator's vision of the process.)
- **Proposed Budget and Fee Schedule:** Detailed and itemized pricing and payment schedule for evaluation of the first three years, fourth and fifth year, and final summative evaluation. (Please note that a contract may or may not be awarded to the applicant with the lowest fee/price).
- **Proposed MOU:** Proposed form of contract or Memorandum of Understanding between ECS and the Evaluator, if available
- **Previous Publications /References:** Links to publications showing evidence of previous work or evaluations. If not available, ECS will accept references and contact information (names, phone and email) for individuals/organizations who can accurately attest to the Evaluator's credentials and experience for similar work within the past 5 years.

### **IV. Submission and Selection Process**

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- Individuals and organizations interested in applying should indicate their intent by email to Ms. Aya Wakamatsu, Director of Development

and CSP Project Director for ECS, by **5:00 pm EST July 29, 2019**. Please include the words, "CSP External Evaluator RFP" in the subject line, and provide contact information for the individual or lead member of the organization submitting the proposal.

- Any questions or concerns may be submitted to Aya Wakamatsu by email at [awakamatsu@excellenceschools.org](mailto:awakamatsu@excellenceschools.org). Ms. Wakamatsu will respond to or address any inquiries within 24 hours of receipt, or as soon as her schedule permits.
- Completed proposals should be submitted electronically by **5 pm EST Monday, August 19, 2019** to Aya Wakamatsu via email at [awakamatsu@excellenceschools.org](mailto:awakamatsu@excellenceschools.org). If file sizes exceed email submission capacity, candidates may submit a Dropbox or Google Folder link to the email address above containing all materials required and relevant to the proposal.
- Proposals should be typed and submitted in a legible font (such as Arial, Times New Roman, Calibri, etc.) and size (11-12 point). All documents and attachments should be submitted in Word, Excel, or PDF form optimized in size for electronic transmission.
- Due to our aggressive timeline to identify and contract with an external evaluator, we will not be able to accept proposal submissions after 5 pm on Monday, August 19, 2019.
- Please note that if any work requires physical presence on school grounds or access to student data or images, the applicant may be required to submit to requisite screenings and background checks for the safety of our scholars, along with provision of appropriate insurance documents.

Proposals will be reviewed as soon as they are received based on the guidance provided in the scoring rubric (attached as Appendix B). Qualified candidates will be contacted for phone, virtual, and/or in-person interviews. ECS hopes to make a final decision no later than September 13, 2019. All candidates will be notified in writing of the acceptance or declination of proposals shortly thereafter. ECS will work with the chosen Evaluator to finalize contract terms immediately upon selection.

## **V. Rights Reserved**

Due to our abbreviated timeline, ECS will not be able to accept any proposals after the August 19<sup>th</sup> deadline, except in the sole discretion of ECS and its Chief Executive Officer. ECS reserves the right at its discretion to reassign the submission deadline upon notice to all applicants if it is deemed necessary. ECS also reserves the right to re-open the RFP if the applications received by the deadline do not meet the selection criteria. ECS may request applicants to submit additional information when deemed pertinent to the selection process. ECS reserves the right to cancel the RFP, or reject, in whole or in part, any and all proposals received. Applicants will be notified in writing in the unlikely event that this should occur.

Submission of a proposal in response to this RFP constitutes acceptance by the applicant of the terms and conditions contained herein. ECS strongly recommends that applicants thoroughly review the criteria of the RFP to ensure the completeness and accuracy of proposals. ECS reserves the right to reject any incomplete proposals, which do not minimally adhere to the application requirements. Failure to do so shall be at the applicant's own risk. No warranty is made or implied as to the information contained in this RFP.

Applicants must notify ECS by email of any concerns discovered upon review of the RFP prior to the submission deadline.

All expenses incurred in preparation and submission of a proposal will be at the applicant's expense.

ECS will select an applicant based on credentials and ability to demonstrate capacity to successfully fulfill the criteria of the RFP. Under no circumstances will ECS discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity or expression, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or any other factor not directly related to the applicant's ability to fulfill the RFP criteria. Similarly, ECS will accept serious applications only, and will not accept proposals that either directly or implicitly suggest a potential for discriminatory practices or views.

The contract for the External Evaluator will be conditioned on successful negotiation between the applicant and ECS. The contract term shall be to evaluate ECS's progress and performance for the first three years of the grant. Subsequent contract renewals will be at the sole discretion of ECS and will be based on the successful execution of the scope of work.

**APPENDIX A: COVER PAGE**



**Excellence Community Schools**  
 2090 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 605  
 New York, NY 10027

**2018 Charter Management Organization External Evaluation RFP**

**Cover Page**

<b>Name of Applicant</b>	
<b>Address</b>	
<b>City</b>	<b>County</b> <b>Zip Code</b>
<b>Contact Person</b>	<b>Telephone</b>
<b>E-Mail Address</b>	
<p>I hereby certify that I am the authorized signatory and that the information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, complete and accurate. I further certify, to the best of my knowledge, that any ensuing evaluation and activities will be conducted in accordance with all applicable Federal and State laws and regulations, application guidelines and instructions, Assurances, Certifications, the terms and conditions outlined and that the requested budget amounts are necessary for the implementation of this project. It is understood by the applicant that this application constitutes an offer and, if accepted by Excellence Community Schools or renegotiated to acceptance, will form a binding agreement. It is also understood by the applicant that immediate written notice will be provided to the Excellence Community Schools' Director of Development if at any time the applicant learns that its certification was erroneous when submitted or has become erroneous by reason of changed circumstances.</p>	
<b>Authorized Signature</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>Printed Name:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

**APPENDIX B: SCORING RUBRIC**

**External Evaluator RFP Scoring Rubric**

This scoring rubric is designed to provide guidance to the applicant and ECS staff in determining the best candidate for the contract. Other factors may be taken into consideration when making a final determination for selection, including quality of any communication that might take place between candidates and ECS staff, quality of previous evaluations/references, etc.

<b>Requirement</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>Cover Letter</b>	Not included	Complete					___ / 1
<b>Applicant Background</b>	Not included	Provides incomplete applicant history, background, and capacity.	Provides applicant history, background, and capacity, but does not demonstrate compelling alignment.	Provides compelling applicant history, background, capacity, and potential for meeting WWC standards.			___ / 3
<b>Scope, Approach, Methodology</b>	Not included	Provides incomplete and misaligned focus and plan, goals, tasks, deliverables, timeline, and /or management approach	Provides partially complete or unfeasible focus and plan, goals, tasks, deliverables, timeline, and /or management approach	Provides mostly complete or feasible focus and plan, goals, tasks, deliverables, timeline, and /or management approach	Provides complete potential focus and plan, goals, tasks, deliverables, timeline, and management approach	Provides compelling potential focus and plan, and feasible and reasonable goals, tasks, deliverables, timeline, and management approach	___ / 5
<b>Budget and Fee Schedule</b>	Not included or incomplete	Provides budget/fee schedule that is outside of affordable range	Provides project budget/fee schedule that is within allocated range				___ / 2
<b>Draft MOU</b>	Not included or not feasible	Included with feasible terms with or without minor revisions					___ / 1
<b>Previous Experience</b>	Not included or no experience	Some prior experience, unrelated	Some prior experience demonstrated through publications and/or references aligned to ECS' organizational needs	Extensive prior experience demonstrated through publications and/or references aligned to ECS' organizational needs			___ / 3
<b>TOTAL</b>							___ / 15