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Collaboration for  
Early Childhood  
*Strong Start, Bright Future*

**Request for Proposals (RFP) for  
Occupational Therapy Consulting Services**

**RFP Due Date:** Monday, December 4, 2023, by 9am

**Contact:**

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The Collaboration for Early Childhood seeks to partner with **Occupational Therapy** professionals to design, deliver, and evaluate innovative training and coaching supports to early care and education programs, serving children ages birth to five.

### **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION**

The Collaboration for Early Childhood is a community-driven organization that cultivates the development of the whole child, birth to age five, by engaging families, local organizations, early childhood educators, caregivers, and health providers, to create equitable, nurturing, and interconnected systems of support. We envision communities where every young child has the care, relationships, and resources needed to thrive and to begin school safe, healthy, and empowered to succeed. We function as a collective impact organization, which means we partner with organizations and entities across our community to work together to strengthen the resilience and accessibility of our early childhood care and education system.

Our work centers on building communities that can support each child and family in their journey to enter kindergarten. Our approach is comprehensive and falls into four primary, interconnected program areas: Community Engagement, Family Engagement, Early Learning, and Health & Development. Through our work in these four areas, we partner with early childhood directors and educators, child health professionals, families with young children, and the broader community, to move together toward the shared goals of connecting families to supports and services that help prepare children for success in kindergarten and beyond and reducing and eliminating the impacts of systemic inequities that, for many children, begin very early in life.

The Collaboration is seeking an individual consultant or consultants to perform the services set forth herein who are committed to our core values of:

- **Collaboration:** We work with partners in a way that is mutual and respectful; encourage listening, knowledge-sharing, and joint-problem-solving; allow each party to strengthen its own capabilities by learning from others; and realize a shared commitment to more equitably serving the needs of young children, families, and early childhood professionals.
- **Whole Child:** We meet each child (and adult!) where they are and support all aspects of the child's development – physical, social, emotional, cognitive – while respecting each child as a member of the community and as an individual, including the child's ability, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, race, and religion.
- **Equity:** We ensure that a diverse range of voices contribute to the Collaboration's efforts, particularly the important work of dismantling systemic barriers that have historically limited access to high-quality services and supports for children and families who have been marginalized, while celebrating the range of backgrounds, experiences, and identities that comprise an inclusive community.
- **Community-Driven:** We engage local families and early childhood professionals to gather their wisdom and perspectives, utilizing the findings to ensure that the Collaboration's work is continually and culturally responsive to the expressed needs, hopes, and interests of young children, families, early childhood professionals, and communities in which they live.
- **Organizational Professionalism:** We operate with honesty, integrity, and accountability, in a way that is continually informed by research and community input; reliably, responsibly, and respectfully deliver high-quality work and effective outcomes; and transparently report progress and adjust strategies to ensure continuous improvement in impacting the children, families, early childhood professionals, and communities with whom we work.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The world is still navigating, recovering from, and processing, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on ourselves, our families, and our communities. The experiences of our young children during these years have resulted in different patterns of development that require innovative forms of support. Many young children's in-person and social group interactions have been limited, and their resulting behavior patterns require a shift in our understanding of children's current needs related to social and emotional development. We've heard from early learning professionals both anecdotally and through focus groups that they need guidance and resources to better support children's social and emotional, fine motor, and self-regulation skills. This is the case in both center-based and home-based early learning programs.

We propose strengthening early learning professionals' responses to the current developmental needs of the children in their care through materials and professional development opportunities. The project would begin with developing and delivering "sensory kits" for early learning programs that will include materials that develop children's regulation and coping skills. To help early childhood educators appropriately utilize the materials in these kits with the children in their programs, we seek to partner with Occupational Therapists to provide personalized support and strategies to educators through training and coaching, coupled with parent/caregiver-facing workshops and written information about the project. Through this approach, early childhood educators will be empowered with strategies to make use of the provided sensory materials to respond to the current needs of children in their programs, working in partnership with parents/caregivers. This is essential for some children, yet beneficial for all children in early learning programs, thus making early learning environments more equitable. Our goal is to provide early learning professionals with more tools in their existing toolboxes to reframe their thinking about what has become "the new normal" of development in early learning environments and build from there.

Indicators of success of this project include survey data indicating that behaviors that are perceived to be disruptive within early learning programs have decreased and that responsive strategies using sensory kit materials and information from trainings provided are effectively being used by early educators. Further indications of success will be data from focus groups that indicate that early educators feel more confident and equipped to respond to the current developmental needs of the young children in their care.

## **SERVICES TO BE PERFORMED**

The selected consultant(s) will work with a cohort of programs, including center-based and in-home early care and education programs serving children birth to age five, in communities in West Suburban Cook County and on Chicago's West Side: Berwyn (including Stickney), Bellwood, Broadview, Chicago (Austin Neighborhood), Forest Park, Maywood, Melrose Park, Oak Park, and River Forest.

We anticipate reaching a total of 30 early childhood programs/home-based childcare programs, with 15 located in Oak Park/River Forest and 15 located in Berwyn, Bellwood, Broadview, Chicago's Austin Neighborhood, Forest Park, Maywood, and/or Melrose Park. The work in Berwyn, Bellwood, Broadview, Chicago's Austin Neighborhood, Forest Park, Maywood, and/or Melrose Park is grant-funded and will conclude June 30, 2024. The work in Oak Park/River Forest will continue through December 31, 2024. The initial Occupational Therapy Consulting contract will cover work through June 30, 2024, with the potential to renew annually thereafter, working with the initial cohort as well as adding in additional partners.

It is possible that one Occupational Therapy Consultant can cover the full scope of this work; it is also possible that the Collaboration will partner with more than one provider, depending on provider capacity. We encourage you to share details about your capacity in your application materials.

The work will include, in partnership with Collaboration staff:

- **Designing sensory kits:**
  - Design sensory kits for use in early learning environments with children 0-5 to support children in developing regulation skills, making recommendations about supplies and items to purchase.
  - Develop accompanying written materials describing items in the kits and how they may be used (activity cards; best practice guidelines; etc.).
  - The Collaboration will cover the cost of all sensory kit materials (\$500 per kit for center-based classrooms; \$350 per kit for home-based programs).
  
- **Developing and delivering training and coaching to teachers/providers:**
  - Training content will include 6 total hours of content (offered 1x during the daytime and repeating the content again in the evening); training may be delivered in-person, virtually, or hybrid, depending on the prevailing needs of the training cohort.
    - 2 hours: A general overview of regulation, self-regulation, and co-regulation for both children and adults; observing and understanding children's behavior as communication; understanding children's (and adult's) sensory needs and the positive impact of thoughtful, individualized sensory diets for children in classrooms/programs;
    - 2 hours of content on of social emotional development including 7 key aspects of social emotional development (Building positive relationships; schedules and routines; setting and using behavior expectations; supporting emotion and behavior regulation; self-care; helping children solve problems; executive function)
    - 2 hours of content on use of kit materials and other relevant topics.
  - As follow-up to the training, the Occupational Therapy Consultant(s) will visit their assigned cohort of programs to observe in classrooms and provide coaching support to teachers/providers (modeling use of materials from the sensory kits; answering questions in support of successful implementation of content from the training; coaching teachers/providers through situations that arise during the course of observation; etc.). We anticipate that each program will be visited approximately 1-2 times (1 hour per visit) following delivery of training content.
  - Determine an approach to and parameters around addressing teacher/provider questions and needs for support outside of scheduled training/coaching sessions.
  - The Collaboration will cover all costs associated with stipends for participating educators/providers; food for training sessions; and any costs associated with training space rental.
  
- **Developing and delivering training to parents/caregivers:**
  - Recognizing that partnership between parents/caregivers and teachers/providers is essential and supports children's wellbeing, the Occupational Therapy Consultant(s) will design and deliver 1 hour of training (virtual) for parents/caregivers to support the connection between home and school, including helping parents/caregivers understand regulation, sensory needs, and social emotional development and how these are being supported in the early learning environment.

- ***Designing evaluation and outcome measures and monitoring project impact:***
  - Design a pre-project survey for early educators to include information about the types of behaviors they are currently observing, the level of disruption they perceive these behaviors to cause in the program, the strategies they are currently using in response to these behaviors, and their sense of confidence and self-efficacy in assessing challenging situations and responding in ways that address what children need. This will help identify targeted strategies to focus on during the program.
  - Design a follow-up survey for participating early educators to determine their perceptions about whether observed behaviors have decreased, whether the level of disruption has decreased, and whether the strategies they learned are proving effective over time.
  - Design questions for a provider/teacher focus group to collect data on the effectiveness of the sensory kit materials and training support offered through the pilot program.
  
- ***Maintaining records:***
  - Keep logs of all project-related activities, including time spent preparing and delivering training; coaching visits with providers/teachers; communication with project partners; etc.
  
- ***Collaborating with project partners:***
  - The selected consultant(s) will meet with Collaboration staff regularly to assess progress and make collaborative adjustments to the project as indicated.
  - The Collaboration may engage students in professional Occupational Therapy therapy training programs to support the work via service learning, observation, internship, etc.; our selected Occupational Therapist Consultant(s) will support the work of these students, engaging them in the project as appropriate (supporting them in observing the in-classroom work; engaging them in modeling and coaching activities as appropriate; supporting them with developing and delivering aspects of training for parents/caregivers and/or teachers/providers; etc.).
  - The Collaboration may engage partners at Start Early to beta test a new app, [Reflectable](#), with participating teachers/providers, to support between-session learning and reflection on children's social emotional development. The selected consultant(s) may partner with Start Early and Collaboration staff to support participating teachers/providers with incorporating the app into their regular routines.

## RFP REQUIREMENTS AND SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED ACTIVITIES

- RFP released: November 7, 2023
- Question submission deadline: Thursday, November 16, 2023, by 5pm
- Proposal response due date: Monday, December 4, 2023, by 9am
- Conversations/interviews with select applicants: December 11-15, 2023
- Selection announcement: Wednesday, December 20, 2023
- Contract start date: January 1, 2024
- Final deliverable due date: June 30, 2024, with the possibility to extend some aspects of the work through 2026

## PROPOSAL CONTENT

There is not a minimum or maximum length expected for the proposal. We anticipate that there will be a range of proposal lengths, and ask that you answer these questions succinctly but in a way that feels like a clear and comprehensive reflection of your approach, values, and expertise. We request that all proposals be organized in the order described below:

1. Please share what drew you to apply for this opportunity. What about the project is particularly exciting for you?
2. Please share information about the philosophy and values that guide your work, including the role that equity plays in your approach and how your approach aligns with our other core values.
3. Please detail your experience in providing Occupational Therapy services, including direct services to children ages birth to five. Please share any specific experience you have working with children in milieu or group settings.
4. Please detail your experience addressing social emotional and behavioral challenges through an Occupational Therapy lens.
5. Please describe your experience with training and coaching others, with particular emphasis on your experience working with adult learners, including supervising interns/externs, providing training or coaching, etc. To give us a sense of how you might approach training, please share with us: how would you describe the concept of *regulation* to a group of early childhood teachers/home daycare providers?
6. Please describe how you envision completing the work outlined in this proposal - are you a solo provider? Are you applying on behalf of a team of providers? Would you have capacity to take on all the work outlined in this RFP, or do you propose to cover a portion of the work?
7. Fees – Please provide a firm estimate of fees, using the budget template on p. 7 (or the included Excel document), for the services to be provided January 1 - June 30, 2024.
8. Additional Information – Provide a copy of your resume or C.V.; if applicable, please also include a copy of the resume or C.V. for other professionals who will be included on your team for this project.

## KEY CONTACTS

Mary Reynolds                      Executive Director                      (708) 613-6122                      mreynolds@collab4kids.org

Requests for additional information, questions, and the return of the completed proposal should be directed to Mary Reynolds. Email is the preferred method of communication, but we're happy to follow up with phone calls/Zoom meetings. Thank you for your interest in helping the Collaboration advance our mission!

**Budget Template (also provided as an Excel document; either format is fine)**

Activity	Total Hours	Hourly Rate (if applicable)	Total Cost
Consultation to design sensory kits and accompanying materials			
Design 6 hours of professional development training; deliver 12 total hours of training to providers			
Provide follow-up coaching to providers (1-2 hours per provider, cohort of up to 30 providers)			
Design and deliver 1 hour of training for parents/caregivers.			
Design evaluation measures to monitor program impact and outcomes.			
Maintain project records.			
Collaborate with project partners, including staff from the Collaboration for Early Childhood.			
Other (please provide details).			