

# CONCEPT PAPER: NEW YORK CITY FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT CENTER PROGRAM

**Strengthen your credit score**

When it comes to money, we could all use a coach sometimes.

NYC Financial Empowerment Centers provide FREE one-on-one professional financial counseling to support you in reaching your goals.

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Call 311 | Visit [nyc.gov/dca](http://nyc.gov/dca)  
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**NYC** Consumer Affairs  
Bill de Blasio Mayor | Lorelei Salas Commissioner

Financial Empowerment Center

Release Date: June 19, 2018

Bill de Blasio, Mayor

Lorelei Salas, Commissioner

## **A. PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

### **Organizational Background**

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) protects and enhances the daily economic lives of New Yorkers to create thriving communities. DCA licenses more than 81,000 businesses in more than 50 industries and enforces key consumer protection, licensing, and workplace laws that apply to countless more. By supporting businesses through equitable enforcement and access to resources as well as by helping to resolve complaints, DCA protects the marketplace from predatory practices and strives to create a culture of compliance. Through its community outreach and the work of its offices of Financial Empowerment (OFE) and Labor Policy & Standards (OLPS), DCA empowers consumers and working families by providing the tools and resources they need to be educated consumers and to achieve financial health and work-life balance.

Within DCA, OFE focuses on initiatives that support New Yorkers and communities with low and moderate incomes in building wealth and improving their financial health. OFE envisions a city that supports all residents and communities in building long-term financial stability and financial health regardless of their income or the income of their residents, and a city where all New Yorkers are empowered to make financial decisions that promote their long-term financial stability and financial health. OFE works to realize this vision by educating, empowering, and protecting New Yorkers and neighborhoods with low incomes so that they can build assets and make the most of their financial resources. Using a range of tools, including data and research, community engagement, convenings, and partnerships, OFE develops, offers, and advocates for innovative programs, products, and policies that support the financial health of all New Yorkers.

### **The Need for Financial Empowerment**

In April 2018, The Mayor’s Office for Economic Opportunity released its annual New York City Government Poverty Measure report, announcing that poverty is at its lowest level since the Great Recession<sup>1</sup>. Alongside steady economic growth in 2016, and with more New Yorkers holding jobs, the median household income in New York City has increased 7.8% since 2014. Income in the bottom 20th percentile has increased 4.0% from 2014, adjusted for inflation. A significant factor in the decline in poverty has been increases in the minimum wage. And while these great strides have been made to decrease the poverty rate for New York City, we know that still too many working adults struggle to make ends meet.

Nearly 60 percent of all households in New York City lack sufficient savings to sustain three months of living expenses in the event of a shock to income like the loss of a job or an unexpected medical expense<sup>2</sup>. In addition, nearly 12 percent of New York City households are unbanked, and of those who have a bank account, 25 percent are resorting to alternative—and often predatory—credit products<sup>3</sup>. While this kind of financial vulnerability is most intensely felt by those living on low incomes, even those above the poverty line struggle with debt and a lack of access to information and resources to help them achieve financial stability.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/18\\_poverty\\_measure\\_report.pdf](http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/18_poverty_measure_report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/CitywideFinancialServicesStudy/Financial-Security-Brief.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/CitywideFinancialServicesStudy/Research-Brief.pdf>

## **Financial Empowerment Centers**

The foundation of OFE's work lies in ensuring that consumers are armed with the best information to make educated decisions and take action about their finances. Our financial counseling and coaching programs provide critical services that help New Yorkers at different stages of their lives. One of OFE's signature programs, the Financial Empowerment Center Program ("Program"), was launched in 2008 in response to OFE's *Neighborhood Financial Services Study*,<sup>4</sup> which found that 72 percent of people surveyed in target neighborhoods had never received formal education on money management. New York City Financial Empowerment Centers ("Centers") provide New Yorkers with free, professional, confidential, and individualized one-on-one financial counseling and coaching. While the first Center was launched with the support of private funding, the City of New York invested more than \$2 million annually to manage and fund the Centers beginning in 2011, making it the first taxpayer-funded financial counseling initiative in the country.

Financial Empowerment Centers are located citywide in areas with a high concentration of poverty and need. Services are available to the public, free of charge, and are typically integrated within a host of public programs to improve multiple outcomes. Counselors work with clients during the initial session on a full Financial Health Assessment. Regardless of the defining issue or question, a counselor will probe the client's entire financial situation and together the counselor and client will define the client's financial goals tied to one or more Service Plans. The Service Plans enable the client to establish short, intermediate, and long-term goals and begin working to address those goals. Client outcomes are then tracked based upon the specific Service Plan chosen during the initial assessment. However, these are subject to change over time as the client identifies new goals or achieves sufficient outcomes in prior goals.

To build awareness of and facilitate access to OFE's financial counseling and coaching services, the Centers benefit from OFE's citywide public awareness campaigns and the City's 311 non-emergency call center, as well as OFE's centralized appointment scheduling system. Over the years, DCA has continued to enhance the services provided at the Centers, and the Program has continuously adapted to better serve client needs and ensure consistent performance and outcome standards. As an example, from 2015 to 2017, OFE collaborated with the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, Citi Community Development, and Parsons Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability (DESI) Lab to launch the *Designing for Financial Empowerment (DFE): Financial Counseling Services* project. The goal of the project was to research, design, and prototype a variety of solutions to overcome barriers in client retention and increase overall effectiveness at the Centers. Sustained engagement of clients is one of the most important goals of the Center model, yet it continues to present one of the largest challenges. Internal research conducted by OFE demonstrates that between three and five counseling sessions are typically necessary to begin to achieve results such as debt reduction—the most common goal that clients work toward at the Centers—and that, on average, the results increase with each additional session. As OFE continues to enhance its financial counseling model, it looks forward to incorporating the recommendations proposed throughout the DFE project, some of which are reflected in this concept paper.

Another example of an enhancement that OFE has made to the Program is the launch of an online scheduling platform in 2017 to reach a wider variety of clients. OFE's current appointment scheduling system supports OFE's broad base of clients to more seamlessly secure and confirm appointments, while providing an alternative to making appointments via the 311 call in system. Financial counseling staff, as

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Research-NFSS-FullReport.pdf>

well as a dedicated group of call center representatives, use the scheduling platform to schedule appointments with clients for counseling sessions. A few highlights of the system are its ability to schedule clients for counseling sessions at any location and across 40+ counselors' calendars; a customer-facing online platform including client ability to cancel or reschedule appointments, appointment confirmations, automated appointment reminders via email or text message; client search and filtering capabilities for appointment location, time, and language preferences; and ability for financial counselors to view appointments. Given the growth of demand for financial counseling services, OFE looks forward to increasing the efficiency of its current scheduling and client management processes, as well as to enhancing its customer relationship management system to provide more integrated and advanced services.

Today, there are more than 20 Centers located across all five boroughs. Each year more than 7,000 New Yorkers visit the Centers to meet with a trusted guide to help them set personal financial goals and develop strategies to achieve those goals, in addition to receiving help accessing safe and affordable financial services, building assets, navigating the oftentimes complex territory of debt management and credit building, and addressing financial emergencies. Since 2008, the Centers have helped more than 50,000 New Yorkers improve their financial health through more than 90,000 sessions, helping them reduce more than \$50 million in debt and increase their savings by more than \$4.5 million. OFE's Financial Empowerment Center model is widely considered the "gold standard" for financial counseling programs in New York City and beyond. Through funding and technical assistance from the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE), the OFE model of municipal financial empowerment programs has been replicated in twelve other cities to date and is slated for an additional 50 in the coming years.<sup>5</sup>

Looking forward, OFE intends to continue to address the dynamic needs of New Yorkers by adapting the model to increase access and better serve those who need financial empowerment services the most. While the core of the model will remain, OFE is expanding this important work through enhancing financial outcomes, refining milestones and financial health assessments, adding options in service delivery (e.g. mini sessions and phone/chat-based services), new options for client engagement through outreach and a continued focus on retention. Informed by research and community engagement, these proposed enhancements will enable the Centers to provide financial counseling and coaching services even more effectively and efficiently to more New Yorkers.

## **B. PURPOSE OF THE RFP**

As a result of the Request for Proposals (RFP), OFE anticipates selecting one or more qualified community groups, non-profit organizations, and/or other local service providers with the capability to manage a counseling staff working with large volumes of consumers to achieve significant outcomes in appropriate financial capability plans. OFE anticipates that services will be provided in all five boroughs (Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island). While open to all New York City residents, the targeted participant population will be New Yorkers with low and moderate incomes.

The RFP for the Financial Empowerment Center Program seeks to identify highly qualified and experienced vendors (referenced as "Providers" in this document) with the capability to build upon OFE's current Financial Empowerment Center model and lessons learned through recent projects. Providers should be able to manage a financial counseling staff that will provide high quality, client-centered one-on-one financial counseling and coaching services to New Yorkers and help clients achieve

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<sup>5</sup> [http://cfefund.org/cfefund-project/financial\\_empowerment\\_center\\_replication\\_initiative/](http://cfefund.org/cfefund-project/financial_empowerment_center_replication_initiative/)

financial health outcomes. Namely, OFE aims to achieve four primary goals through the Financial Empowerment Center model:

- 1) Offer more flexible, client-centered financial counseling and coaching services across a variety of client archetypes and needs.
- 2) Increase community outreach and engagement efforts between providers and residents, in an effort to engage clients with a variety of needs.
- 3) Increase retention amongst all clients at the Centers across the City.
- 4) Develop referral systems with a range of other programs to drive traffic to the Centers.

Proposers will be expected to demonstrate the organizational capacity to manage this undertaking; develop an implementation plan for the Centers, including: recruitment of qualified staff, coordination of staff training (with OFE approved instructors and materials), management of the daily operations of one or more Financial Empowerment Centers, promotion of the Centers, outreach strategies that include linkages to other City services as well as non-profit and community based programs, and other community-based strategies such as peer ambassadors, as well as being responsive to community needs; and commit to participate in ongoing program evaluation through the collection and reporting of data. Providers will also be expected to participate in quarterly financial counselor meetings as well as contribute to the learning community in NYC and nationally around financial counseling and coaching strategies and best practices.

### **C. PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

To ensure that NYC residents have access to high-quality services, OFE closely oversees performance and programmatic integrity at the Centers. OFE provides a centralized infrastructure to support ongoing management of the Centers, including a client relationship management database (CRM), outreach and marketing materials, an online scheduling system, and a Call Center connected to 311 to facilitate booking appointments. OFE monitors and audits the database and scheduling system, reviewing progress regularly with the Providers. OFE also provides comprehensive marketing support via traditional advertising campaigns and social media. Finally, to ensure that clients across the City have access to the same high standards of service, OFE has set the bar for quality professional instruction, partnering with the City University of New York (CUNY) to offer an accredited course in personal finance as a counselor certification. OFE will monitor and enforce strict model fidelity at all Centers citywide. The Financial Empowerment Center model is structured in the following way:

#### *1. General Operations*

Centers are strategically located to serve a significant geographic area either through a community-based organization or at a stand-alone site. Certified counselors provide information and guidance that increase clients' financial knowledge and improve their financial capability across the following areas: budgeting, banking, credit, debt, savings, and taxes.<sup>6</sup> To assess progress, the Financial Empowerment Centers track seven standardized outcomes and dozens of milestones (e.g. track spending, dispute inaccuracy on credit report, etc.) across the above areas of financial health. Counseling services are available free of charge, without income or immigration status restrictions, to anyone over 18 years of age who lives or works in New York City.

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<sup>6</sup> Financial counselors are not expected to prepare clients' tax returns, but rather support clients in accessing free and low-cost tax preparation services and integrate clients' tax refunds or liabilities into the service plan.

A Center is generally staffed by one or two counselors. Each Center should have the capacity to serve clients during days and hours that meet the needs of the community (including ample evening and weekend hours). Centers should be located within areas of highest need (low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, serving unbanked populations, etc.) or in centralized locations that are convenient for clients (e.g. business districts in Manhattan). OFE will weigh proposed Center locations when selecting Providers.

As a best practice, Centers have been co-located within social service organizations or at City programs that already serve a high number of target clients and commit to referring a high volume of clients to the Center. Integrating financial counseling into social service delivery often creates a “Supervitamin” effect, whereby clients who receive financial counseling tend to be more successful and achieve better outcomes in the host site’s program (e.g. clients in a workforce development program who receive financial counseling may find employment faster and retain employment longer than those who do not receive financial counseling). Applicants are encouraged to read the following report and consider ways in which proposed Centers would have this effect with host sites or other referral organizations: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dca/downloads/pdf/partners/Research-SupervitaminReport1.pdf>.

Centers must have an adequate volume of traffic to enable counselors to maintain a full caseload. Providers are expected to drive traffic to the Centers by building on any marketing campaigns run by DCA for the Centers, and by conducting more local and/or targeted outreach, in addition to ensuring robust referral relationships with organizations that host the Centers. All locations must operate at least one full-day each week and may operate multiple days at a single Center if justified by client volume. As a best practice and to foster client retention, OFE recommends that sites should be open at least 2 days per week. Applicants will have the opportunity to propose for more than one Center.

## *2. Centralized Management Team*

The Program is managed from a Centralized Management Team (“Team”) housed within DCA. The Team oversees the citywide Center network, provides system-wide data analysis and reporting, receives seamless “hot transfers” from 311, and centralizes scheduling.

OFE uses a centralized scheduling system for appointments, which allows for appointments to be booked from a central hotline/call center location. Counselors, and other Provider and host site staff, also have the ability to book appointments. In addition to 311, clients may book appointments for themselves online.<sup>7</sup> The online scheduling system also allows for staff from referring organizations to identify themselves and provide additional details and their contact information when assisting clients to book appointments. Providers are expected to work in close coordination with the Team, and OFE expects that all Providers maintain updated calendars during all hours of operation of the Centers in the scheduling system. OFE also expects that Providers update appointment statuses (completed, no show, cancelled, etc.) by the end of each workday.

In addition to continuing the Centers’ core model, OFE will be making several enhancements to the model, which will be reflected in the upcoming RFP. One enhancement will include the addition of a “hotline”, jointly managed by DCA and Providers, which will consist of phone and online chat, enabling New Yorkers to quickly connect to financial counselors and coaches remotely. Providers will be expected to dedicate financial counselors’ time to staff these platforms. Helpline/online chat and phone-based

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<sup>7</sup> <https://booknow-dca.appointment-plus.com/#/>

financial counseling services will be available during Center regular business hours (including nights and weekends), allowing New Yorkers with limited mobility or who prefer to access the service remotely, to receive support over the phone with limited support available via the internet. Although the current model allows for follow-up counseling appointments to be conducted by phone, the expansion of phone-based counseling capabilities and the addition of internet-based functionality are currently under development.

### 3. *Financial Counseling and Coaching Sessions*

Centers offer clients customized counseling and coaching based upon the needs and goals identified in an initial intake or assessment. Areas of service include (but are not limited to): household budgeting and money management, debt reduction and management, establishment and improvement of credit, appropriate banking products, savings and asset building, and support with tax preparation. Centers provide strategic referrals to social or legal service providers (including dedicated, free-of-cost, legal aid services from a local legal aid services provider) or more advanced asset-building assistance (e.g. homeownership, entrepreneurship<sup>8</sup>, post-secondary education, etc.).

Counselors work with clients to evaluate the client's full financial situation and define one or more financial goals and create an action plan. This will enable the client to establish short, intermediate, and long-term goals and begin working to achieve those goals. Client outcomes are tracked based upon the client's stated goals, and will form part of the contractual goals for each Provider. However, these are subject to change over time as the client identifies new goals or achieves sufficient outcomes in prior goals.

The outcomes are:

- Banking: Open or transition to a safe and affordable bank account
- Banking: Bank account is open 6 months later
- Credit: Establish credit score
- Credit: Increase credit score by at least 35 points
- Debt: Decrease total debt by at least 10%
- Savings: Increase savings by at least 2% of net annual income (or the equivalent of one week's net salary)
- Savings: Establish regular savings habit (3 months)

In addition to the outcomes that OFE has tracked and measured for the past 10+ years, OFE will be adding new outcomes that reflect measurable steps and behavioral changes that New Yorkers can undertake to improve their financial health. These new outcomes will be tracked alongside their predecessors and may include: behavior-based outcomes (e.g. established new savings strategy), unique client goal-based outcomes (e.g. save \$500 for child's graduation celebration), budgeting outcomes (e.g. bring bills current, keep bills current for six months), and multi-year outcomes (e.g. improve credit score one letter grade) and increase in self-efficacy/self-confidence in managing one's finances via surveys

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<sup>8</sup> OFE has a partnership with the NYC Department of Small Business Services through the Small Business First initiative to support entrepreneurs with personal financial counseling services.

(e.g. the Center for Financial Security’s Financial Capability Scale<sup>9</sup> or the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau’s Financial Well-Being Scale,<sup>10</sup>) or another scoring system OFE may select or develop.

In addition to empowering clients to work toward financial goals, the Centers should also serve as a mechanism for connecting clients to other City programs and services including [free tax preparation](#), access to financial products and services, and referrals to support services. As a public service, the Centers are critical to connecting New Yorkers to other City programs and to providing comprehensive wrap-around financial empowerment services and income supports to clients in order to holistically support them to achieve their financial goals.

The Center model also has specific requirements for counseling sessions. The Program defines a financial counseling session as either an individual or group counseling session, and each has certain parameters, which are detailed below:

#### **Individual (Full) Counseling Sessions**

- Duration: Minimum of 30 minutes
- Content:
  - Client completes a Financial Health Assessment (FHA) in the first session
  - At least one milestone, or action step, must be completed each session

#### **Group Counseling Sessions**

- Group composition: Maximum of 8 clients per counselor
- Duration: Minimum of 30 minutes
- Content: At least one milestone, or action step, must be completed each session

To enhance the Financial Empowerment Center model, OFE is considering supplementing its current service delivery model with “light touch” elements (**i.e., Mini Counseling Sessions**) that allow financial counselors to engage new clients and reconnect with current clients with the goal of supporting client retention and aiding in outcomes achievement. A description of a potential light touch service is as follows:

#### **Light Touch Counseling Sessions**

- Duration: Minimum 10 minutes
- Content: Shorter FHA; at least one milestone or action step must be completed each session

OFE anticipates Providers may utilize mini sessions at outreach events, pop-up (i.e. temporary or impermanent) sites, or referral organization locations<sup>11</sup> (e.g. NYC Human Resources Administration [HRA] Job Centers). They could also be used as a mechanism in client follow-up and retention. OFE plans to set a maximum percentage of mini vs full financial counseling sessions, as well as setting and tracking goals for the “conversion rate” of those who enter the service with a mini session who then go on to engage in full counseling sessions. OFE expects that the majority of sessions will be “Individual (Full)” counseling sessions, which will be reflected in Providers’ contractual goals.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://fyi.uwex.edu/financialcoaching/measures/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/data-research/research-reports/financial-well-being-scale/>

<sup>11</sup> With OFE’s approval



An additional enhancement to OFE's Financial Empowerment Center model will be the inclusion of contractual goals related to client retention. Client retention is critical to the model, as sustained engagement in the service is closely associated with clients achieving financial outcomes. As mentioned above, internal research shows that it typically takes between three to five counseling sessions for clients to achieve debt-reduction outcomes, for example.

#### *4. Counselor Recruitment and Training*

All Providers are expected to recruit and hire staff for their Centers, with assistance from OFE. All financial counselors and coaches will have at least a bachelor's degree and a minimum of two years of work experience, with preferred background in finance, financial education, counseling/coaching, or social service delivery. Financial counselors should have particular expertise in one of the following areas: financial services, social work, financial planning, coaching/mentoring, teaching, or other related fields. Providers should use best efforts to hire multilingual financial counselors, speaking English as well as one of the New York City priority languages: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Korean, Bengali, French and Urdu. Managers and supervisors should ideally have prior experience as a financial coach or counselor. All staff assigned to the program and new hires are subject to approval by OFE.

All counselors and managers must successfully complete the CUNY 45-hour accredited course in personal finance as a counselor certification, as referenced above. While the course is required for Center counselors and managers, other program support staff are encouraged to complete the course, as well. The curriculum covers basic content knowledge and skill development in the following areas:

- Counseling and client management
- Negotiation and client advocacy
- Diagnoses of personal financial complexities, particularly focused on individuals and families with low and moderate incomes
- Money management and budgeting
- Banking and basic financial transactions
- Credit and debt management
- Bankruptcy
- Investments, long term savings, and retirement planning
- Homeownership and foreclosure prevention
- Benefits and insurance
- Consumer rights and protections

With sufficient notice, OFE reserves the right to change and/or update the course that is required by all counselors and managers.

#### *5. Communications and Outreach*

All Center locations and Center staff will be branded as a NYC Financial Empowerment Center. All communication materials will reflect this branding, following protocols set by DCA and OFE. Applicants should detail how Center branding integrity will be maintained in host site organizations, for example, how each location will incorporate branded signage on site, how Center staff present themselves in public, etc.

To ensure that all New York City residents have equal access to the financial counseling services, OFE employs a variety of municipal tools in promoting and marketing the Centers. OFE will continue to

leverage available infrastructure including 311 (the City’s non-emergency call center), [www.nyc.gov](http://www.nyc.gov), and traditional public awareness campaigns, including social media, to raise awareness about the Financial Empowerment Centers citywide.

Providers are expected to drive traffic to the Centers by building on any marketing efforts implemented by DCA for the Centers, and by conducting more local and/or targeted outreach, in addition to ensuring robust referral relationships with organizations that host the Centers. Proposals submitted in response to the upcoming RFP are expected to include a detailed outreach plan for proposed Financial Empowerment Center(s). Outreach should take a targeted and comprehensive approach by leveraging Applicant’s pre-existing partnerships, links to community leaders, and participation in local events. Applicants should also propose strategies for forming new relationships within the community where the Center is located. In addition to outreach activities conducted by each Provider and Center location, referral sources will include 311, friend and family referrals, walk-in clients, and other referral streams negotiated by OFE and the Provider with other City agencies and community organizations.

In order to build upon traditional communications and marketing efforts and given the potential benefits of peer-to-peer outreach, OFE will be looking for how Proposers incorporate a peer-to-peer component to their proposed outreach and engagement strategy, where appropriate. Options for peer-to-peer engagement include engaging community residents (especially current and former clients of the Center) to serve as “credible messengers”<sup>12</sup> in outreach and engagement activities designed to promote Center services and refer new clients to the Program. This type of community outreach may also include a plan to engage current and prospective clients in celebratory client recognition events, as outlined in the Designing for Financial Empowerment project, which produced a guide for staging such events.<sup>13</sup>

## 6. Protocols

All Financial Empowerment Centers must adhere to programmatic protocols determined by OFE in partnership with the selected Providers. The protocols will determine appropriate actions to take regarding industries licensed by, regulated by, or otherwise relevant to DCA. Issues and industries include:

- Credit Scoring
- Debt Settlement
- Debt Collection
- Foreclosure proceedings and mortgage scams
- Fraudulent or predatory practices, especially predatory lending

OFE may add or remove protocol topics throughout the program period. OFE’s Operational protocols also ensure consistency in delivery across all Centers.

## 7. Evaluation & Reporting

All Centers must use the client management database developed by OFE. The database tracks individual client achievement towards personal financial goals and measures overall program success to identify the most successful service partnerships and provide data on the financial circumstances and behaviors

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20024744>

<sup>13</sup> <http://dfe.nyc/our-journey-fec/>

of clients. OFE is currently developing a new CRM tool that will be used by Providers selected as a result of the upcoming RFP.

Providers are required to maintain updated records in the database. Data should be entered at the close of each financial counseling session or at the end of each day. All updates for each week (Monday to Sunday) are required to be completed based on the deadline mandated by OFE (e.g., by 12:00PM on the following Wednesday or Friday at 5:00PM each week). OFE generates quarterly data reports from the database which reflect key data indicators such as clients served, sessions conducted, and client outcomes achieved. Providers are expected to submit semi-annual and annual narrative reports reflecting progress towards goals, partnerships, challenges and proposed solutions. Providers are also required to participate in additional monitoring and evaluation of the program. This includes, but is not limited to: site visits, surveys, interviews, organizing focus groups, administrative records review, and other data collection and evaluation as determined by OFE and the City of New York. Providers must also commit to participate in regular meetings and trainings.<sup>14</sup> OFE may also conduct research, including collecting client consent forms and data, and specialized reporting with a focus on clients representing specific demographic groups, program participation, focus on service plan, credit score analysis, or other research focuses.

Entities selected as contactors for the New York City Financial Empowerment Center Program must be prepared to comply with the monitoring, evaluation, and reporting requirements as defined by OFE.

## *8. Logistics*

Proposers are expected to include a detailed site selection plan in their proposals. This plan should clearly identify proposed Center locations, the neighborhood(s) served, including a justification of the need in the neighborhood(s), and if possible, a quantification of individuals and families living at 200% of the poverty line in the area. The plan should also include a neighborhood profile with information about key resources located near the proposed site, including mainstream financial services, NYC Free Tax Prep (or Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)) sites, social service providers, legal services, etc. Proposers should carefully consider the requirements and priorities described in the concept paper and RFP when proposing locations.

Any proposed locations must allow for space conducive to private or semi-private counseling. These areas must be equipped with standard, modern technological capabilities (including computer equipment, multi-line telephone and voicemail, high speed internet access/Wi-Fi, and access to printing, faxing, and scanning or reproduction equipment). Sites should also have access to a locked cabinet where Center staff can store client documents.<sup>15</sup> Although spaces may differ in set up or look, each Center should be able to accommodate approximately 150 square feet of private counseling space *per counselor*, plus an additional 300-500 square feet of meeting and waiting room space (which could be shared). All sites should provide access to classroom or training facilities on a regular basis (at least monthly) to allow counselors to conduct workshops and/or group counseling sessions or events. Proposals should include a detailed description of proposed office space, capacity for counselors, meeting room, and a reception and waiting area.

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<sup>14</sup> OFE holds quarterly financial counselor meetings to provide training, updates, and networking for financial counselors and managers. Attendance at quarterly meetings is mandatory.

<sup>15</sup> OFE expects that all Providers keep retention of hard copies of client documents to an absolute minimum. With the new CRM, OFE anticipates there will be no need for hard copies of client documents to be stored.

As stated previously, integrating financial counseling services into or linked with community services is a key component of the model. This is both a strategic way of encouraging cross-referrals between programs and is a cost-effective way to operate financial counseling services. Ideal Financial Empowerment Center sites are co-located with other types of services provided by the Applicant or other organizations.

#### **D. SERVICE AREAS**

OFE anticipates selecting qualified community groups, non-profit organizations, and/or other local service providers with the capability to manage and implement free, high quality one-on-one financial counseling and coaching for individuals that live and work in New York City. It is anticipated that across providers, Center services will be available in all five boroughs (the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island). The targeted population will be New Yorkers with low and moderate incomes within each borough.

#### **E. PLANNED METHOD OF EVALUATING PROPOSALS**

##### *1. Evaluation Procedures*

The evaluation committee will evaluate and rate all responsive proposals based on the evaluation criteria set forth in the RFP: demonstrated quantity and quality of successful relevant experience; demonstrated level of organizational capability; and quality of proposed approach.

##### *2. Expected Contractor Qualifications*

The evaluation committee anticipates that qualified Applicant organizations will have demonstrated capacity to manage this program, including experience providing one-on-one financial counseling and coaching to New Yorkers with low and moderate incomes, successful track record in achieving financial capability outcomes or impacts, organizational capacity to oversee both the operations and financial management of this program, a capacity to manage program expansion, and experience working in one or more low- or moderate-income communities in New York City. Applicants should have at least three years of experience running successful financial counseling or coaching programs.

#### **F. PROPOSED TERM OF CONTRACT(S)**

The anticipated contract start is December 1, 2019, for an initial period of up to three years, and will include two (2) three-year options to renew, for a maximum of nine years, pending the availability of funding. OFE reserves the right, prior to contract award, to determine the length of the initial contract term and each option to renew, if any.

#### **G. FUNDING INFORMATION**

OFE anticipates awarding multiple contracts ranging in size from \$100,000 to \$800,000 annually per provider to cover the cost of direct counseling and coaching services. Services will be provided in all five boroughs (Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island). Applicants may propose to operate a single Center or multiple Centers. **Awards cannot exceed 40 percent of total organizational income for**

**the program year.** In the case where the Applicant is part of a large entity, the “organization” refers to the Executive Director’s program.

OFE anticipates that the total available annual funding for all contracts awarded from this RFP will be one million, nine hundred thousand (\$1,900,000).

The final total allocation amounts depend on the availability of funds and are subject to change. OFE reserves the right to award more or less than the full amount of funding requested by the Applicants. Applicants should not exceed the anticipated maximum budget in their responses.

**H. Anticipated procurement timeline**

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|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| a) Concept Paper Release Date:                   | June 19, 2018     |
| b) Expected Request for Proposals Issuance Date: | August 15, 2018   |
| c) Expected Proposal Submission Deadline:        | October 1, 2018   |
| d) Expected Award Announcement Date:             | December 15, 2018 |
| e) Expected Contract Commencement Date:          | December 1, 2019  |

**I. USE OF HHS ACCELERATOR**

To respond to the forthcoming NYC Financial Empowerment Centers RFP, vendors must first complete and submit an electronic prequalification application using the City’s Health and Human Services (“HHS”) Accelerator System. The HHS Accelerator System is a web-based system maintained by the City of New York for use by its Human Services Agencies to manage procurements. Only organizations with approved HHS Accelerator Business and Service Applications for one or more of the following will be eligible to propose:

- Life Skills
- Financial Counseling
- Outreach

**J. QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

OFE is accepting questions or comments on this concept paper before the RFP is released. Questions or comments should be sent by August 3, 2018 to:

[DCABIDS@dca.nyc.gov](mailto:DCABIDS@dca.nyc.gov)