

**THE CITY OF NEW YORK
HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION
REVISED
CONCEPT PAPER on
PARENT PLEDGE PROJECT**

SUMMARY

Prior to the release of the RFP for the Parent Pledge Project, the Human Resources Administration's ("HRA") Office of Child Support Enforcement ("OCSE") developed a concept paper to outline the Agency's goals and program approach for not-for-profit organizations interested in providing free or low-cost mediation services to low-income parents voluntarily seeking to establish child support and co-parenting agreements. This is a revised Concept Paper for the Parent Pledge Project. The Agency received feedback regarding the Concept Paper that was originally released on February 11, 2013. HRA has taken that feedback into account and restructured the program.

The goal of the Parent Pledge Project is to facilitate a community-based approach to bring parents together on a voluntary basis to address parenting and child support issues. Under this initiative, trained mediators will provide custodial and non-custodial parents with an opportunity to discuss their child support and co-parenting rights and responsibilities in a non-adversarial environment. The mediator will help parents establish voluntary child support agreements and/or separate co-parenting agreements. The child support agreements will conform to the Child Support Standards Act (CSSA) and will be capable of being filed with, reviewed by, and approved by the New York State Family Court ("the Court").

Through this initiative, OCSE is seeking up to three (3) appropriately qualified organizations to provide services that facilitate discussions about child support and co-parenting with parents and help prepare legally acceptable agreements to be filed in and approved by the Court. Organizations that submit winning proposals in response to the forthcoming RFP will be awarded contracts and be certified by OCSE to assist families in establishing voluntary child support agreements. Agreements prepared by certified organizations will receive expedited processing by the Court. This means so long as a family appears at the Court to file a petition for child support before 1:00, the Court will meet with the parents same day. All other parents who file a petition for child support will receive a court date about six weeks in the future to appear in Court.

PURPOSE OF PARENT PLEDGE PROJECT

As of November 2011, 41 percent of children are born out of wedlock nationwide. The likelihood of a child born to a single parent growing up in poverty is high. Fifty-four percent of never married, female-headed households live in poverty. In New York City, in 2010, 45 percent of the children living in single parent households live in poverty compared to 19 percent

of the children living in households with married couples. For poor single-headed households, child support comprises 40 percent of a household income.¹

In addition to the financial benefits children receive from having the support of both parents, research shows that children perform better on every social indicator when they have a father actively involved in their lives. “Children whose fathers are stable and involved are better off on almost every cognitive, social, and emotional measure developed by researchers. For example, high levels of father involvement are correlated with sociability, confidence, and high levels of self-control in children. Moreover, children with involved fathers are less likely to act out in school or engage in risky behaviors in adolescence.”² Research has established that fathers who pay child support are more likely to be involved in their children’s lives and are more motivated to obtain and retain work.

New York City Custodial Parents have the option of seeking child support enforcement services from the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE). In 2012, OCSE collected \$739 million on behalf of nearly 175,000 families in NYC and providing on average \$5,939 per family. Nevertheless, OCSE estimates that over 200,000 children in single-parent families below 150 percent of the poverty line in NYC are not connected to the child support program and are not benefitting from its services.

This initiative seeks to address these issues by reaching these families to develop voluntary co-parenting arrangements and child support agreements outside of court within the family’s own community. It is anticipated that this approach can lead to increased involvement from fathers and more regular child support payments. Voluntary agreements may also allow for a discussion of co-parenting issues and therefore lead to more positive parental engagement and positive outcomes for children. It is expected that the selected vendors would offer flexible hours, outside of regular business hours, including some evenings and weekends to prospective families.

PROGRAM MODEL

Target Population

The target population for this initiative is low-income mothers and fathers with a child born out of wedlock. At providers’ discretion, providers may also serve divorced parents as well as parents who are currently married, but separated from their child’s other parent. Families with children receiving cash assistance cannot be served under this initiative, as these families are required by law to develop an order payable through OCSE. Providers may directly recruit and identify participants to whom they will provide services. Alternatively, Providers can establish structured referral relationships with one or more organization(s) serving low-income parents. OCSE anticipates promoting the initiative through a variety of venues, including HRA’s website, the NYCDADS website, OCSE events, and citywide advertising campaigns.

¹ Sorensen, E. (2010, December) Child Support Plays an Increasingly Important Role for Poor Custodial Families, Urban Institute

² Anthes, E (2010, May/June). Family guy. Scientific American Mind

Program Outcomes

The Provider would assign a trained mediator to each case. The role of the mediator is to help parents communicate and to work with them to develop child support and/or co-parenting agreements that support the well-being of their children. The mediator will provide legal information as it pertains to the CSSA, to which the child support agreement must conform. The mediator will also provide explanation and support on how to file the child support agreement in Court, and the benefits of doing so, in order to maximize the number of agreements that are filed. In the event of non-compliance with the order, the custodial parents may return to the mediator to obtain additional support to resolve the disagreement, file a violation petition with the Court to enforce the order judicially, or file a child support application with OCSE to receive child support services.

For those families who go to the Family Court before 1 pm, a Family Court Support Magistrate will meet with both parents to ensure both parents entered into the agreement voluntarily and understand their rights and responsibilities. Provided the agreement meets the Court's legal standards, the Court will convert the child support agreement into a court order. For those parents who arrive at the Court after 1 pm, the Court will review the document and may likely call the parents into Court to ensure both parents entered into the agreement voluntarily and understand their rights and responsibilities. Both parents will receive a copy of the order in the mail. If the agreement is flawed, the court reserves the right to request both parents appear before the court.

The mediator will also facilitate discussions about other aspects of co-parenting beyond the payment of financial support. Depending on the needs and interests of the parents, topics may include the extent and type of communication between the parents and between the parents and the child, sharing of parenting time and responsibilities, sharing of decision-making and sharing school and medical information. The co-parenting discussion will not be incorporated into the child support agreement, but could result in a separate agreement. The co-parenting arrangement may be a factor in determining whether there is a basis for deviating from the standard CSSA formula. The co-parenting agreement would not be filed with the Court, but would be retained by both parents for future reference. In cases where the parents are far apart in their views on how to co-parent, it may be recommended that they go to court to obtain a custody and visitation order.

The RFP envisions that a typical session would take on average 3-5 hours to complete. This is based on the assumption that many of the parents have little income or assets; they will bring their financial documents to the mediation session; and the co-parenting discussion will center around the topics described above. Providers are encouraged to provide services directly or establish relationships with other community-based organizations so parents can be referred to parenting classes that may reinforce the discussion around co-parenting that occurred in mediation.

Program Activities

To achieve the desired outcomes for the target population under the Parent Pledge Project, OCSE anticipates that Providers will deliver the following activities:

- Provide mediation by trained mediators who are:

- Impartial
 - Able to recognize domestic violence or efforts to coerce or intimidate
 - Knowledgeable in the subject of child support, including the requirements governing the CSSA
 - Knowledgeable in the areas of co-parenting
- Provide documentation that mediators have taken basic mediation training; custody and visitation specialty training; and training on child support and the Parent Pledge Project model. OCSE is available to provide introductory training on the program model and information on the services provided by OCSE. However, the Provider is expected to ensure that the child support expertise of its mediators is beyond what is offered in OCSE's introductory training. The mediators will need to be able to know how to apply the CSSA; when it is appropriate to deviate from it, and how to explain the basis for the deviation in a way that meets the expectation of the Court. Contact the referred parent(s) to schedule an intake appointment. Reach out to the other parent if only one parent is referred.
 - Screen for domestic violence, and reject parents if it is deemed to be unsafe to proceed with an agreement.
 - Prepare a legal child support agreement document that is acceptable to the Court and conforms to the CSSA, including legal requirements governing deviations from the CSSA formula. A template for preparing child support agreements will be provided to Providers by HRA OCSE. Any changes to the document must be approved by HRA OCSE
 - Provide clear information and instructions on:
 - Parental rights and responsibilities
 - How to file the child support agreement with the Court
 - The importance of retaining proof that child support payment was made and received
 - Options if there is noncompliance with the child support agreement.
 - Facilitate discussion about other aspects of co-parenting beyond the payment of financial support and develop co-parenting agreements.
 - Provide appropriate and sufficient supervisory and administrative support. The Provider will ensure that a supervising attorney reviews agreements for accuracy and specificity, addresses legal issues that may arise based on mediation, and ensures that case progress and program standards are met.
 - Provide mediation services at the Provider's own location or other appropriate community-based setting.
 - Report on a set of basic demographic and program outcome data, as determined by OCSE.

The forthcoming RFP will outline HRA's expectations and staff requirements for this procurement.

ANTICIPATED NUMBER OF CONTRACTS

The Agency anticipates to award up to three (3) contracts from this RFP to provide mediation services to low-income families with funding capacity for 450 cases.

SERVICE AREAS/ CASELOAD OPTIONS

Services provided under this RFP will be delivered citywide to 450 families. Each contractor is expected to provide mediation services to 12-13 families per month and aim to outreach to at least 50 families per month. These numbers may be adjusted if there are fewer than three contracts awarded from this RFP.

Contractors are expected to have the capability to serve areas throughout the city. Greater consideration will be given to contractors who propose citywide. HRA reserves the right to skip over one or more proposals based on geographical areas to achieve geographic diversity.

FUNDING AND PAYMENT STRUCTURE

It is anticipated that the total available annual funding for all contracts awarded from this RFP will be \$300,000.

The final total allocation amounts depend on the availability of funds and are subject to change. The Agency reserves the right to consider geographic location of sites throughout the city in selecting contractors. Proposers should not exceed the anticipated maximum budget in their responses.

The Agency expects that the contracts awarded under this RFP will be 85% line item and 15% deliverables-based. The line item portion may include direct personnel costs for coordinator, attorney, direct supplies and up to 10% overhead. The deliverables-based portion of the contract is anticipated to be \$100 per family for each case served. This is a flat fee regardless of the number of sessions or hours provided. At least one session must be completed to receive this fee. Vendors will be required to submit invoices to the City for these costs.

We anticipate that the payments made by the City will allow the vendors to provide the services to participating families earning at or below 200 percent of poverty at no additional cost to the participating family. A minimal fee may be charged to the families earning more. The fee should be on a sliding scale basis, and with a maximum cap. Proposers should include their fee structure, if fees will be charged in their price proposal.

The RFP will contain detailed information regarding the anticipated payment structure.

PERFORMANCE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The contractors selected under this RFP will be required to submit monthly reports on their recruitment and service efforts by providing the following:

Outreach

1. The number of outreach sessions conducted
2. The name of the organizations
3. The number of participants in attendance

Services Provided

4. The number of clients screened
 - a. # accepted
 - b. # rejected
5. the number of hours provided per family
6. the number of sessions provided
7. the location where the mediation has taken place
8. # of families who returned for assistance due to noncompliance

Outcome

9. whether a child support agreement was signed
10. whether a co-parenting agreement was signed
11. whether the family filed the agreement with court

In addition to monthly reporting requirements, contractors will be required to explain variances and efforts to correct for shortfalls in recruitment.

PROPOSED TERM OF THE CONTRACT

It is anticipated that the term of the contract(s) awarded from the forthcoming RFP will be a two (2) year term from August 1, 2013 to July 31, 2015, with an option to renew, of up to two years, contingent on additional funding.

HRA anticipates that the total contracted caseload will be higher in future years than the caseload indicated above. Any option by the agency to renew a contract will be based on a monitored review of the contractor's performance and will be contingent upon the availability of funds. HRA reserves the right, prior to contract award, to change the length of the initial contract term and each option to renew, if any. In addition, HRA likewise reserves the right, prior to the renewal term, to renegotiate the payment structure of the initial contract term.

PLANNED METHOD OF EVALUATING PROPOSALS

Proposals will be evaluated pursuant to the evaluation criteria set forth in the RFP. It is anticipated that the evaluation criteria will be:

Evaluation Criteria

Quality and effectiveness of proposed approach, including outreach strategy
Demonstrated quantity and quality of successful relevant experience
Organizational Capability

HRA will award contracts to the responsible proposers whose proposals are determined to be the most advantageous to the City, taking into consideration the price and such other factors or criteria set forth in the RFP.

USE OF HHS ACCELERATOR

The HHS Accelerator initiative, launched by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and led by the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Linda I. Gibbs, is reengineering, simplifying and speeding the contract process for Client and Community Services (CCS) by implementing a series of policy reforms and building a web-based system to centralize processes and reduce paper-based redundancies. Starting in early 2013, nonprofit organizations and other CCS Providers will benefit from the following features of the HHS Accelerator online system:

- 1) Document Vault: A secure online repository for Providers store and share administrative documents. Providers can share documents with each other, City agencies, other public and private funders or use for internal centralized storage purposes.
- 2) Prequalification Application: An application reviewed by central HHS Accelerator unit once every three years to determine Providers' eligibility to compete for City of New York CCS Contracts. This process replaces individual City agencies requesting this same information each time an organization competes for City contracts through the current Request for Proposals (RFP) process. The application comprises two sections:
 - Business Application, which requests information and documentation on organizational background and capacity, such as organization contact information, mission and staff, tax and charities filings, leadership and board, and policies and procedures
 - Services Application, which requests information and documentation on the Services organizations are capable of delivering

The forthcoming Parent Pledge Project procurement will utilize the HHS Accelerator prequalification process. Organizations that wish to participate in this procurement must complete the HHS Accelerator Business Application and Services Applications for one or more of the following: Case Management, Child Support Enforcement, Conflict Resolution/Mediation, Financial Counseling, Legal Services, Life Skills or Parenting Services.

In addition to the Human Resources Administration, the following City agencies that administer CCS contracts will be users of the system: Administration for Children's Services, Criminal Justice Coordinator, Department for the Aging, Department of Corrections, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Homeless Services, Department of Housing Preservation and Development, Department of Probation, Department of Youth and Community Development and Small Business Services.

Future phases of HHS Accelerator will allow Providers to submit Proposals to City CCS procurements and manage budgeting and invoicing through this common user interface. By participating in the HHS Accelerator Parent Pledge Project procurement, approved Providers will be prequalified to submit proposals to relevant procurement opportunities from the 11 above-listed CCS City Agencies in the system when this functionality becomes available in the latter part of 2013. To learn more about HHS Accelerator, please visit www.nyc.gov/nonprofits and click on "Faster Simpler Procurements."

I. PROCUREMENT TIMELINE

Expected HHS Accelerator Application Due: June 25, 2013

Expected RFP Release: July 10, 2013

Expected Proposal Submissions Due: August 15, 2013

Expected Award Selection Announcement: October 15, 2013

Expected Contract Start: November 15, 2013

II. FEEDBACK ON CONCEPT PAPER

Please submit all comments to this concept paper no later than to accoprocurements@hra.nyc.gov. OCSE is particularly interested responses to the following:

- The number of hours of mediation the Provider anticipates will be required to facilitate discussions of child support and co-parenting and to help parents develop a child support and/or co-parenting agreements. Is the three hour average assumed in this concept paper realistic and if not, what is the basis for assuming a different number of hours.
- The value and feasibility of the collection of a limited set of basic demographic and program outcome data and recommended data elements.
- The number of parents Providers anticipate they can serve on an annual basis.
- Whether or not you would charge parents a fee and if so how much?
- Do you anticipate using the new HHS Accelerator process will be beneficial to your organization in terms of making the contracting process more efficient and easier? If not for your organization, the contracting process in general?