STEP

Sector Training Evidence-Building Project

Letter of Interest (LOI) Questions

Thank you for your interest in STEP. To be considered for this opportunity, please complete the LOI via the Microsoft Form found [here](#).

You will find a list of the questions you will be asked to complete below. LOIs must be submitted **by 11:59pm ET on Friday, November 15, 2024**.

Section 1 – Project Information

1. Project name

2. Point of contact for research team (the lead applicant) including name, title, organization/firm/institution, and email address

3. Point of contact for sector program provider (the partner organization) including name, title, organization, and email address

4. Are you applying for a Track A or Track B grant?

    a. Track A: implementation research, non-experimental research designs (e.g., descriptive or pre-post studies), or secondary data analyses

    b. Track B: experimental or rigorous quasi-experimental designs

5. Which research method(s) are you planning to use? Please select all that apply.

    a. Experimental design

    b. Rigorous quasi-experimental design (e.g. comparison group studies)

    c. Non-experimental design (e.g. outcomes study or pre/post design)

    d. Qualitative implementation research

    e. Quantitative implementation research

    f. Cost analysis

    g. Participatory action research

    h. Secondary data analysis

    i. Other _____

6. What is the total amount of funding being requested and over how many years?

   a. Roughly how much of your budget will go to the research team?

   b. Roughly how much of your budget will go to the organization operating the sector program being evaluated?

Section 2 – Assessing Project Eligibility

7. [Track B grants only] Will your project be able to measure participants' earnings, either at their initial job post-training or in the longer-term? [*Must select "yes" to proceed*]

   a. Yes

   b. No

8. [Track B grants only] What data source(s) will you use to measure participants' earnings? Please select all that apply. [*Must select at least one to proceed*]

   a. Administrative data (for example, data from a credit reporting agency or a state employment agency)

   b. Survey data (from a survey administered by the research team or an external firm, and not the sector program provider)

9. Which group of research questions does your project fit under? [*Must select at least one to proceed*]

   a. Building evidence on the **key elements** needed to implement or expand access to effective sector programs, including program components, target populations, or approaches to scaling or strengthening overall program models.

   b. **Evaluating the effectiveness** of sector programs that have not been rigorously evaluated and can expand understanding of the sector model, including programs targeting less common occupations and industries, serving specific target populations, or adapting to serve more job seekers.

10. Have both partners in this project (the research team and sector program provider) agreed to enter into a partnership with one another if selected for STEP?

    You may submit a letter of commitment from the sector program provider noting their commitment to this project as part of your LOI. It can be emailed to STEP@mdrc.org **by 11:59pm ET on Friday, November 15, 2024**.

    See the RFP for more details on the expected commitment of the research team and the sector program provider.

Section 3 – Researcher Eligibility and Information

11. Please list the names, organizational affiliations, and proposed roles of all key staff on the research team.

12. Does one or more of your research team members have experience implementing your proposed methodologies? [*Must select "yes" to proceed*]

    a. Yes

    b. No

13. Please describe your research team members' experience implementing your proposed methodologies in 3-5 sentences.

14. Does one or more of your research team members have experience working in or doing research on workforce development, training programs, or programs targeting people with low incomes? Please describe in 3-5 sentences.

In addition to completing this form, please email one example of prior work one of your team members has done that used your proposed methodology to STEP@mdrc.org **by 11:59pm ET on Friday, November 15, 2024**. It does not need to be a published memo, report, or journal article.

Section 4 – Sector Program Provider Eligibility and Information

15. Is the organization operating the sector program (and that is a partner on this project) a nonprofit?

    Organizations operating the sector programs being studied must be nonprofits. Sector programs primarily run by technical or community colleges, for profit organizations, or public agencies are not eligible for STEP. Nonprofits that run sector programs and partner with other organizations to offer services, including those not eligible to be the lead organization, are eligible for STEP. [*Must select "yes" to proceed*.]

    a. Yes

    b. No

16. Does the sector program that will be evaluated target and serve people who are low income?

    We do not have a strict definition of "low income" for STEP. Please use a definition that makes sense for the sector program you are evaluating. Your definition may be based on participants' wages or income; a defined measure such as the Federal Poverty Level or living wage; a proxy measure such as being eligible for means-tested federal programs like SNAP or TANF or being Pell-eligible; or another measure that makes sense in the program's context. [*Must select "yes" to proceed*.]

    a. Yes

        i. Please provide your definition of low-income.

    b. No

17. In which sector(s) does the organization operating the sector program provide training? Please only list the target sector(s) of the training(s) that will be evaluated as part of this project (e.g. advanced manufacturing, IT, health care).

18. For which occupation(s) do these trainings prepare individuals? Please list the occupations participants can obtain directly following training completion, and not downstream occupations that the training does not directly prepare participants for.

19. What credentials or certifications does the training result in? These can be industry recognized or program specific credentials.

20. Please describe why the sector program provider (the organization running the sector program being evaluated) and the sector program itself are well-positioned to be supported by an evaluation in partnership with external researchers.

    The **sector program provider's** readiness can be demonstrated by noting past or current evaluation efforts the organization has been involved in, the strength of the relationship between the organization and the researcher, or the organization's data infrastructure, among other related factors.

    The **sector program's** readiness can be demonstrated by noting how the program aims to improve employment outcomes, how long the program has operated, the program's participation and employment-related outcomes, how the program adapts to industry and employer input, or the program's screening and supportive services offerings, among other related factors.

    You do not need to speak to all of these dimensions. Please limit your response to no more than 500 words.

Section 5 - Program Data Reporting

21. Please fill out the following to the best of your ability.

    a. In 2023, how many people enrolled in the training program(s)/track(s) being evaluated?

    b. In 2023, how many people completed the training program(s)/track(s) being evaluated?

    c. In 2023, how many people in the training program(s)/track(s) being evaluated were placed in a job in the target sector?

        i. How do you define placement in a job in the target sector? For example, after being employed for 30 days or verifying with a letter from an employer, etc.

22. What is your data source for these numbers? For example, data collected directly from participants or data collected from external organizations, such as state agencies or credit bureaus.

Section 6 – Project Narrative

Please briefly describe your proposed project, its importance to the field, and how it contributes to building evidence about sector programs, including:

- A description of the sector program(s) you will be evaluating. For example, the program services or components, the program length, how the target sector/occupations were selected and the quality of the target occupations, the program's relationship with employers, specific populations targeted, and other relevant characteristics.

- Clearly stated research questions and how they align with the project's prioritized research questions and evidence building goals

- The methodological approach or research design, a brief rationale of why that design is appropriate for your proposed research questions, and your proposed key outcomes and data sources

- What makes your project a good fit for STEP, including how it speaks to STEP's three priorities of:

  o Having an equity-focus: can be related to project team diversity, participatory research methods, analysis methods, research questions, target populations, or another dimension

  o Relevance to the field: meaning the findings fill an evidence gap or can be used by other programs or the field to improve practice

  o Informing how to increase the reach of sector programs through objectives such as building evidence on how sector programs can effectively serve more or different types of learners, understanding barriers and facilitators of sector program expansion, improving the strength of the sector program for key populations, etc.

Please limit your response to 1,500 words. You will be asked to further expand on these and other factors during the Proposal stage.