



Request for Proposals

Building a 21st Century Children Services Workforce

1. Background and Introduction

Established in 1980, the Public Children Services Association of Ohio is a membership-driven association of Ohio's county Public Children Services Agencies that advocates for sound public policy, promotes program excellence, and builds public value for safe children, stable families, and supportive communities. PCSAO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization governed by a [Board of Trustees](#) composed of member agency directors and guided by a [Strategic Modernization Plan](#). The [executive director and professional staff](#) oversee day-to-day operations, and the association is [audited](#) annually and publishes an [annual report](#).

PCSAO has a long [history](#) of advocacy on behalf of its members, including conducting and publishing research related to children services. The biennial [PCSAO Factbook](#) is transitioning to its 15th edition, and the [Children's Continuum of Care Reform Plan](#) evolved out of PCSAO's data-driven approach to public policy. Other [recent research publications](#) include a wide range of policy, community education, and workforce-related efforts.

The children services workforce has been in crisis for a decade, with public children services agencies struggling to recruit qualified caseworkers and retain them beyond one or two years. Recent [state investments](#) have begun to stabilize the workforce, but significant challenges remain, including an ongoing [addiction epidemic](#) and [global pandemic](#) that stretch caseloads and deepen the trauma that caseworkers experience. It is clear that agencies cannot achieve better outcomes for children and families, implement much-needed reforms, or address inequity in the system until they have a stable and thriving workforce in place.

Ohio's is a state-supervised, county-administered children services system. The county-administered nature means that there is no statewide repository of human resources data and no consistency across counties on a variety of workforce issues. Resources vary significantly from county to county, and large urban agencies have different workforce challenges than small rural agencies. As such, statewide solutions have been elusive. More data and analysis are needed to identify a wholistic approach to this challenge. The project should be conducted with awareness of other workforce efforts, including the [Quality Improvement Center – Workforce Development](#) project, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Rapid Response Team, and the Governor's Top Jobs List (in-demand and critical jobs), to name a few.

2. Project Goals and Scope of Services

The purpose of this project is to produce concrete and comprehensive recommendations for recruitment and retention solutions to Ohio's children services workforce crisis in order to stabilize and ultimately build a thriving workforce for Ohio's county public children services agencies.

The project will collect information about the critical nature of the children services workforce and its connection to child and family outcomes from existing national/state research; and examine state-county workforce reform efforts, in Ohio and other states, in child protection and comparable fields to identify possible solutions for Ohio's workforce crisis. Solutions may include recruitment and retention efforts derived from safety science/safety culture development, public education campaigns that increase public value for the work of child protection, and actions that lead to greater racial diversity in the workforce, particularly in leadership. Methods may include but are not limited to literature reviews, original research, and focus groups.

The project is intended to answer the following questions and produce concrete, comprehensive solutions that can be implemented at both the county and state level:

- 1) *What can we learn from research and from data collection about the current state of the children services workforce?***
- 2) *What research, data, and concrete solutions are relevant to addressing Ohio's workforce crisis? What children services workforce solutions have been successful in other states, particularly state-supervised, county-administered systems like Ohio's, and what solutions have been successful in Ohio or other states in comparable sectors (government human services)?***

The vendor should look to the most current research and solutions available (last 10 years), particularly given generational shifts and variations in the workforce.

3. Anticipated Selection Schedule

PCSAO is releasing this Request for Proposals on January 15, 2021. Questions about the project and application process may be submitted to pcsao@pcsao.org through 5 p.m. (EST) February 5, 2021. PCSAO will ensure that responses do not provide an unfair advantage to any applicant. A complete list of questions and answers may be requested by any applicant and will be made available on February 8. **Proposals will be due by 5 p.m. (EST) February 12, 2021.** Proposals will be reviewed, and a vendor selected by February 26. Applicants not selected will be notified no later than March 8.

4. Time and Place of Submission of Proposals

Proposals must be submitted electronically to pcsao@pcsao.org by 5 p.m. (EST) February 12, 2021. Proposals submitted after that date will not be considered. Hard copy proposals are not necessary and will not be reviewed.

5. Timeline

More specific deadlines will be determined in consultation with the selected vendor prior to contracting, but generally PCSAO is striving to adhere to the following timeline:

- March – June 2021: Research, surveys, and focus groups, with biweekly check-ins with PCSAO
- July 2021: Develop recommendations based on research in consultation with PCSAO
- August 2021: Finalize research brief and collateral materials
- September 2021: PCSAO to publish research brief and collateral materials

6. Deliverables

PCSAO is open to different and innovative approaches to answering these questions, and anticipates that there will be overlap between the two parts. The contract will be deliverable based, and applicants will be expected to assign a “weight” or cost to each part of the scope of work as part of the budget.

A. *What can we learn from research and from data collection about the current state of the children services workforce?*

- a. Importance of the role of the children services caseworker in determining outcome of cases
- b. Fiscal cost of turnover in Ohio and [nationally](#)
- c. Risks associated with turnover (especially with respect to child safety)
- d. Turnover and caseload data from other state-supervised, county-administered children services systems, where available
- e. Ideally will include solution-oriented focus groups or surveys with current Ohio children services caseworkers, supervisors, and management (as well as other stakeholders such as county commissioners, courts and prosecutors), focusing on:
 - i. Positive factors of work
 - ii. Reasons for staying
 - iii. Reasons others leave
 - iv. Impact of specialized programs such as Ohio START and 30 Days to Family, and of stakeholders such as the courts, clients, substitute caregivers, and regulatory agencies
 - v. What is needed to be more effective/efficient

B. *What research, data, and concrete solutions are relevant to addressing Ohio’s workforce crisis? What children services workforce solutions have been successful in other states, particularly state-supervised, county-administered systems like Ohio’s, and what solutions have been successful in Ohio or other states in comparable sectors (government human services)?* Solutions and approaches may include but are not limited to:

- a. Addressing/reducing the role/amount of regulations and rules in Ohio vs. other states and their connection to retention as well as family outcomes
- b. Efforts to incorporate principles of learning organizations, safety science and culture of safety
- c. Reforms throughout the employee process, including but not limited to:
 - i. Job posting/position description
 - ii. Compensation and benefits
 - iii. Incentives such as loan repayment and housing opportunities
 - iv. Candidate screening
 - v. Interview and Realistic Job Preview
 - vi. Training, orientation, onboarding, and supervisor supports (experiential)
 - vii. Progression to full caseload, including mentoring, training unit, etc.
 - viii. Shared caseloads, team approach (cross-system)
 - ix. Recognition, retention incentives, benefits at each new level

- x. Critical incident response and worker safety (including during the pandemic), including rotation off the front line if needed
 - xi. Exit interviews, “stay interviews”
 - xii. Career ladder starting in secondary schools and credentialing (not transferrable)
 - xiii. Coaching for supervisors
 - xiv. Influence (pro and con) of civil service and union environments
- d. Issue-specific solutions related to:
- i. Implementation of safety science/culture of safety/learning organization research
 - ii. Cost and approach of public education campaigns for purposes of recruiting caseworkers
 - iii. Methods for increasing racial diversity, particularly in leadership

C. Specific work products include these three items:

- 1) A concise and easy-to-read research report encapsulating the items described under “Project Scope and Goals” above, including successful efforts in other states and in comparable fields in Ohio, and concrete recommendations for both the state and county agencies to address workforce recruitment and retention;
- 2) Results of data collected, including focus groups (which may or may not be incorporated into the report), and contact information for any interviewees; and
- 3) Collateral materials (overviews, infographics, etc.) that help explain and promote the identified solutions.

Note: While not a hard deliverable, the work may include consultation on a workforce survey that PCSAO will use to collect data from member agencies.

D. Elements of the Proposal

PCSAO recommends a brief but thorough proposal of between 5 and 15 pages, 12-point type, with page numbers, that includes the following information:

- Applicant name, organization, and complete contact information
- Applicant history and qualifications, including any partners or subcontractors
- History and examples of similar work (references may be requested)
- Approach, methodology and brief work plan for each element of this project
- Proposed budget (see below)
- Written assurances that the applicant has adequate commercial general, professional liability (if applicable), and property insurance
- Appendices do not count toward maximum number of pages

E. Budget

As a nonprofit, PCSAO has a limited budget to support this project. At this time, the total contract is expected to be at or below \$30,000, with the option to negotiate certain deliverables contained within the scope of work.

This will be a fixed-cost contract in that the selected vendor will be responsible for all incidental services and supports that typically incur during course of business. Such incidental services and supports include but are not limited to cellphone calls, copying, office supplies, travel, automation support and technology. PCSAO will not reimburse for these incidental supports.

The budget should assign costs based on the two research components described under Scope of Services along with a projected timeframe for completing each element of the project.

F. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by PCSAO staff, and the final selection will be approved by PCSAO's executive director. Successful proposals will:

- Be complete, professional and error free
- Instill confidence in the applicant's ability to get the job done, including all aspects of research, data collection and analysis, focus group facilitation, collaboration with PCSAO, and production of easy-to-understand collateral materials (overviews, infographics, etc.)
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of human resources and workforce solutions related to recruitment and retention, ideally in the public children services or other human services sector
- Express a strong commitment to and competence in issues related to race, equity and inclusion in the workforce
- Meet the budget conditions described above