

Sole Source CONTRACT Filing Justification Template

Use the following justification template for preparing to file sole source contracts in the [Sole Source Contracts Database](#) (SSCD). Once completed, copy and paste the answers into the corresponding SSCD question and answer fields. You will also need to include a copy of this completed form in the documents you post to your agency website and in [WEBS](#).

What is a sole source contract?

"Sole source" means a contractor providing goods or services of such a unique nature or sole availability at the location required that the contractor is clearly and justifiably the only practicable source to provide the goods or services. (RCW 39.26.010)

Unique qualifications or services are those which are highly specialized or one-of-a-kind.

Other factors which may be considered include past performance, cost-effectiveness (learning curve), and/or follow-up nature of the required goods and/or services. Past performance alone does not provide adequate justification for a sole source contract. Time constraints may be considered as a contributing factor in a sole source justification however will not be on its own a sufficient justification.

Why is a sole source justification required?

The State of Washington, by policy and law, believes competition is the best strategy to obtain the best value for the goods and services it purchases, and to ensure that all interested vendors have a fair and transparent opportunity to sell goods and services to the state.

A sole source contract does not benefit from competition. Thus the state, through RCW 39.26.010, has determined it is important to evaluate whether the conditions, costs and risks related to the proposal of a sole source contract truly outweigh forgoing the benefits of a competitive contract.

Providing compelling answers to the following questions will facilitate the evaluation.

Specific Problem or Need

- What is the business need or problem that requires this contract?

WSAC needs a highly specialized and experienced vendor to conduct an in-depth, mixed methods review of the Passport to Careers program within a short timeline to comply with a legislative directive included in Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5187, passed in the 2023 legislative session. The Passport to Careers program helps former foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth prepare for and succeed in college, apprenticeships, or pre-apprenticeship programs. The review will focus on 1) an exploration and evaluation of the program's implementation, 2) a rigorous analysis of student outcomes, and 3) the development

of a detailed set of short- and long-term recommendations to improve the reach and effectiveness of the Passport to Careers program. This project requires a research firm that has the requisite content knowledge base in the education challenges that youth in the foster care system face and specific experience in evaluating financial aid promise programs geared towards them. The firm will need to hit the ground running, since the due date for the completion and submission of the program evaluation is June 30, 2024.

The mixed methods approach that will be used in this project is a time-consuming process, involving the development of an effective research design and the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative part alone involves identifying individuals and organizations that will be invited to participate, planning and scheduling meetings, conducting interviews and surveys, and engaging with focus groups. All of these steps take time to process before the data analysis can even begin.

In broad overview, the vendor's work will include (but will not be limited to):

- Reviewing program documentation and relevant secondary data.
- Establishing a logic model to guide the evaluation.
- Developing the overall program evaluation design.
- Designing and fielding data collection instruments.
- Consulting with organizations serving foster youth, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, public four-year institutions, and other organizations involved in the Passport to Careers program.
- Planning and conducting the qualitative research components of the project, including planning, recruiting participants, conducting interviews engaging with focus groups, and transcribing and coding responses.
- Analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data in consultation with WSAC.
- Reporting findings and developing detailed recommendations for program improvement.

Many of these phases of the project will take considerable time to coordinate and carry out. In-depth knowledge of the support needs of current and former foster youth in pursuing their postsecondary education goals and experience in evaluating financial aid promise programs like Passport to Careers, with no need for navigating steep learning curves, is essential to conducting the evaluation efficiently and completing the project within the established time frame.

Sole Source Criteria

- Describe the unique features, qualifications, abilities, or expertise of the contractor proposed for this sole source contract.

Westat Insight (Insight) is a recognized leader in conducting research and evaluations in the education policy arena and is uniquely positioned to conduct the needed program evaluation in the tight timeframe for this project. They have extensive knowledge of the supports needed by foster youth in achieving their postsecondary education goals and broad experience in program evaluation with specific experience in evaluating financial aid promise programs. This includes experience in qualitative and quantitative data analyses and evaluations and working with states across a broad spectrum of topics, including financial aid promise programs. They have

also worked on projects with the U.S. Department of Education, other federal agencies, states, school districts, and foundations. Their education staff include economists, sociologists, statisticians, anthropologists, and former teachers, all with advanced degrees and recognized as leaders in their field.

Westat Insight also has specific experience in evaluating education promise programs in Washington State. They are currently conducting a program evaluation with WSAC on the Seattle Promise program, a scholarship and student support program launched by Seattle Colleges, Seattle Public Schools, and the City of Seattle. All graduating seniors attending Seattle public high schools are eligible for the program, regardless of grade point average, income, ability, or country of birth. Seattle Promise provides free tuition at any of the Seattle Colleges for up to two years, equity scholarships to help cover additional costs, and student support and advising beginning in the junior year of high school. Through this project, Westat Insight has acquired contextual knowledge of the state and collaborative experience working with WSAC that will be invaluable in moving quickly through the steps that will be necessary to complete this complex project on time to meet the deadline established by the legislature.

Westat Insight's extensive experience in conducting program evaluations include the following recent studies:

- **Promise Neighborhood Training and Technical Assistance and Data and Annual Performance Report, for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement.**
- **Evaluation of Campus-Based Childcare: An Understudied Innovation in Postsecondary Success, for Arnold Ventures.**
- **Networks for School Improvement Summative Evaluation, for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.**
- **Evaluation of the Story Mentors Pilot Marketing Campaign in Mississippi, for the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.**
- **Evaluation of the New York Charter School Resources, Information, Support, and Engagement (NY-RISE) Program, for the New York State Education Department.**
- **Evaluation of the Comprehensive Center Technical Assistance Program, for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Program and Grantee Support Services.**
- **Evaluation of XPRIZE-Communities Competition, for the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.**
- **Evaluation of the Student Success Innovation Lab (SSIL) Completion Grant Pilot, for the University of North Carolina (UNC) SSIL.**

Westat Insight also has deep knowledge of the support needs of foster youth as they navigate the education system to pursue their postsecondary goals and the data exchanges that are needed to assist them. They have conducted evaluation studies for the U.S. Department of Education on foster youth data exchange policies between state education agencies and child welfare agencies. In their work for the Department of Education, Westat Insight conducted a comprehensive environmental scan of over 7,800 documents for a detailed report on data exchanges pertaining to foster youth. As part of this project, they held a webinar for state education agency staff on the findings from the environmental scan and conducted semi-structured interviews with state education agency and child welfare agency staff in nine states

to obtain information about data exchange processes, implementation challenges and facilitators, use and utility, and best practices.

Through the knowledge and proficiency gained in the many evaluation projects they have managed, Westat Insight has developed and demonstrated the essential skills needed to perform rigorous education-related program evaluations. With their expertise in evaluating financial aid promise programs and the unique support needs of foster youth, combined with their familiarity with Washington context and collaborating with WSAC on program evaluations, they are the only education evaluation firm that would be in a position to move swiftly through the various phases of the project and complete the project on time. Other firms identified through an RFP process would have a steep learning curve and would be faced with considerable delays in getting the project underway, which would jeopardize its timely completion.

- What kind of market research did the agency conduct to conclude that alternative sources were inappropriate or unavailable? Provide a narrative description of the agency's due diligence in determining the basis for the sole source contract, including methods used by the agency to conduct a review of available sources such as researching trade publications, industry newsletters and the internet; contacting similar service providers; and reviewing statewide pricing trends and/or agreements. Include a list of businesses contacted (if you state that no other businesses were contacted, explain why not), date of contact, method of contact (telephone, mail, e-mail, other), and documentation demonstrating an explanation of why those businesses could not or would not, under any circumstances, perform the contract; or an explanation of why the agency has determined that no businesses other than the prospective contractor can perform the contract.

We conducted a thorough scan of education research and evaluation firms and determined that no alternative organizations had the requisite experience specifically in both evaluating financial aid promise programs and the supports needed by foster youth pursuing postsecondary education. Additionally, no other firms have the Washington-specific context and experience working collaboratively with WSAC on program evaluation projects. Without this experience, the necessary content knowledge to perform a rigorous program evaluation in the timeframe required for this project would be a substantial challenge. There are distinctive considerations involved in evaluations on these topics that need to be understood to avoid learning curve delays and potentially weak research designs.

- What considerations were given to providing opportunities in this contract for small business, including but not limited to unbundling the goods and/or services acquired.

In our scan of potential firms, none were excluded on the basis of small size. We looked exclusively at their stated experience in evaluating education programs and, specifically, in the areas of foster youth and financial aid promise programs.

- Provide a detailed and compelling description that includes quantification of the costs and risks mitigated by contracting with this contractor (i.e. learning curve, follow-up nature).

The amount of time allotted by the legislature for completion of this project (by June 30, 2024) is very short for this type of project. To complete a rigorous and reliable evaluation in this timeframe, the organization conducting it will need to have the essential experience and expertise to move swiftly through the various phases of the project, including planning, design, participant interviews, focus group engagement, quantitative data collection, analysis, and recommendation development. By delaying the start of the project through the RFP process, we would lose valuable time that will be needed to be thoughtful and thorough in completing each segment of the evaluation. Taking shortcuts due to insufficient time during any step in the process would tend to weaken the reliability of the results, final conclusions, and recommendations.

The anticipated timeline for releasing an RFP and arriving at a selection of a successful vendor would push the start of the project forward to the middle of October. The anticipated milestone dates for each phase of the RFP process are:

- **RFP release date: August 1, 2023**
- **Proposal submission deadline: August 31, 2023**
- **Notification of successful vendor: September 15, 2023**
- **Project start date: October 15, 2023**

Thus, the RFP process would lead to a start date in the latter half of October in the fall of 2023. This would leave only 8 months to complete all the phases of the program evaluation by June 30, 2024. The qualitative segments of the evaluation alone will require several months to be conducted in a thorough and rigorous manner. They will involve identifying contacts, recruiting participants, and coordinating meetings for interviews and focus group sessions. With the November and December holidays, scheduling of meetings would likely be challenging. Interviews and focus group sessions may have to be set up in January or February. Following those sessions, the researchers will need to transcribe and code all responses before the analysis can begin. This is in addition to all the separate phases of the quantitative data analysis. Thus, handling the vendor selection through the RFP process would jeopardize the timely completion of this evaluation project.

On the other hand, Westat Insight is in a position to hit the ground running and move swiftly to set the various pieces of this evaluation project in motion. They are highly specialized in the evaluation techniques required and are experienced in collaborating with WSAC on program evaluation. For these reasons, Westat Insight is the only education research and evaluation firm with experience in evaluating promise programs and foster youth supports that is in a position to start quickly, proceed smoothly through the various phases based on relevant experience, and complete the project on schedule in a careful, thorough, and rigorous manner.

- Is the agency proposing this sole source contract because of special circumstances such as confidential investigations, copyright restrictions, etc.? If so, please describe.

The special circumstance that this sole source contract is intended to address is the brevity of the timeframe established by the legislature for completion of the project and the need for a

firm that has specific experience in evaluating promise programs and the supports needed by foster youth in pursuing postsecondary education.

- Is the agency proposing this sole source contract because of unavoidable, critical time delays or issues that prevented the agency from completing this acquisition using a competitive process? If so, please describe. For example, if time constraints are applicable, identify when the agency was on notice of the need for the goods and/or service, the entity that imposed the constraints, explain the authority of that entity to impose them, and provide the timelines within which work must be accomplished.

Yes. There are critical time constraints involved in this project. The timeframe for the project was established in Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5187, passed in the 2023 legislative session, with funding beginning on July 1, 2023. The relevant passage is printed below:

“\$150,000 of the workforce education investment account—state appropriation is provided solely for an implementation review of the passport to careers program. The review must include short and long-term recommendations to improve the reach and effectiveness of the passport program. The review must include consultation with organizations serving foster youth, the state board of community and technical colleges, public four-year institutions, and other organizations involved in the passport to college and passport to apprenticeship programs. Amounts provided in this subsection may be used to provide stipends for youth participating in the review who are receiving funds from passport programs or are eligible to receive funds from passport programs. The review must be submitted to the appropriate committees of the legislature by June 30, 2024.”

- Is the agency proposing this sole source contract because of a geographic limitation? If the proposed contractor is the only source available in the geographical area, state the basis for this conclusion and the rationale for limiting the size of the geographical area selected.

Not Applicable.

- What are the consequences of not having this sole source filing approved? Describe in detail the impact to the agency and to services it provides if this sole source filing is not approved.

The consequence of not having this sole source filing approved is the potential risk of having insufficient time to complete the program evaluation and submit the final report and recommendations to the legislature by the established deadline. Moreover, given the time it would take for a firm lacking the specific experience in both evaluating financial aid promise programs and foster youth in postsecondary education issues to get up to speed on the topics, it would pose a challenge to conducting the evaluation with the rigor and thoroughness it requires.

Sole Source Posting



Washington State Department of
Enterprise Services
Contracts & Procurement

- Provide the date in which the sole source posting, the draft contract, and a copy of the Sole Source Contract Justification Template were published in WEBS.
 - If exempt from posting in WEBS, please provide which exemption.
 - If failed to post, please explain why.
- Were responses received to the sole source posting in WEBS?
 - If one or more responses are received, list name of entities responding and explain how the agency concluded the contract is appropriate for sole source award.

Reasonableness of Cost

Since competition was not used as the means for procurement, how did the agency conclude that the costs, fees, or rates negotiated are fair and reasonable? Please make a comparison with comparable contracts, use the results of a market survey, or employ some other appropriate means calculated to make such a determination.

The \$150,000 figure was the amount budgeted for the project in the legislation directing that WSAC produce the evaluation (Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5187). The agency has decided to contract this project out.