CALL FOR SSI YOUTH SOLUTIONS APPLICATIONS: INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIREMENTS FOR AUTHORS

I. Project purpose

Mathematica, on behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability and Employment (ODEP), is seeking applications that propose innovative and testable policy solutions to improve the employment outcomes of youth and young adults ages 14 to 24 who apply for or receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Authors of accepted applications will receive a stipend to develop their ideas into full papers, which they will present to diverse stakeholders. The papers will be published and widely shared with federal, state, and local policymakers.

The project involves two stages:

- In the first stage, Mathematica will collect applications from experts that briefly describe their policy solutions for youth SSI recipients. **Applications are due by February 27, 2020.** ODEP will select applications for further development by **mid-April 2020.**
- In the second stage, experts whose applications were selected will develop their ideas into full papers that describe the policy solution in more detail. These experts will receive a stipend, along with technical and editorial assistance in preparing their papers. Full drafts of the papers must be completed by **January 25, 2021.**

Identifying policy, program, and service initiatives that can help youth with disabilities—particularly those who receive SSI—make successful transitions to adulthood is of interest to a variety of policymakers and stakeholders. New policy solutions, including those that build on existing evidence or involve innovative approaches, can help solve the challenges that youth SSI recipients face.

ODEP recently reviewed evidence about interventions that could improve employment outcomes for youth SSI recipients through its [SSI Youth Recipient Formative Research Project](https://www.odep.dol.gov/ssiyouth). This project also produced a framework that policymakers can use to help develop interventions and assess their readiness for implementation. ODEP seeks to extend the findings from that project by encouraging a diverse set of experts to develop policy solutions or interventions for this population. The main goal of the policy solution should be to improve the long-term employment outcomes of youth SSI recipients, though additional goals are also welcome. These solutions could be policies, programs, or services that represent either (1) novel, untested ideas that warrant further scrutiny or (2) interventions with credible evidence of their effectiveness worth considering for broader implementation. Examples of focus areas for potential policy solutions include the following:
• SSI work incentives and program eligibility
• Interaction between SSI and other programs, such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, state foster care, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
• Systemic coordination of youth disability-related programs and services at the state and local level
• Benefits counseling and financial literacy
• Employment and career services, such as vocational rehabilitation, job training, pre-employment transition services, and workforce programs
• Health care coverage and coordination and transition from child to adult services
• Broader implementation of the Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE) demonstration models
• Access to inclusive career pathways for youth with disabilities
• Professional development for staff who serve youth with disabilities

II. Applicant eligibility

Individuals or teams of individuals with the following qualifications are eligible to apply:

1. Knowledge of SSI policy, including eligibility requirements and work incentives

2. A minimum of five years of experience in at least one of the following areas:
   • Direct service to youth SSI recipients and their families
   • Administration or development of programs that involve youth SSI recipients
   • Policy expertise in one or more areas relevant to youth SSI recipients and their families. Examples of relevant areas include:
     - SSI policy and work incentives
     - Disability
     - Public programs
     - Poverty
     - Juvenile justice
     - Foster care
     - Opportunity youth
     - Special education
     - Postsecondary education
- Vocational rehabilitation
- Youth employment

3. Authorship of at least one paper or publication that demonstrates technical expertise in at least one of the above areas

4. Ability to complete a final paper by **January 2021** (with multiple drafts developed before that date) and availability to attend two in-person meetings in Washington, DC, to be held in **December 2020** and **February 2021** (with travel expenses reimbursed by the project)

For applications with a single author, that author must meet all qualifications. For applications with multiple authors, at least one author must meet each qualification. All authors need not meet all qualifications, nor must one of the authors meet all qualifications.

**III. Application process**

**A. Overview and key dates**

Eligible individuals interested in applying must visit the [http://ssiyouthsolutions.org/](http://ssiyouthsolutions.org/) website and follow the instructions for submitting an application via the website. This process includes the following steps:

1. Review the application requirements and scoring factors (Sections III.B and III.C)
2. Review the requirements for the selected applications (Section IV)
3. Create an account on the ssiyouthsolutions.org website
4. Complete and submit the application form on the website

Prospective applicants are encouraged to submit a notice of intent to apply via the ssiyouthsolutions.org website.

Prospective applicants are also encouraged to attend an informational webinar for prospective applicants scheduled for **Tuesday, January 28, 2020**. Attendees must register for the webinar via the ssiyouthsolutions.org website. The webinar platform will be accessible to people with disabilities, and a recording will be available on this site for persons who cannot attend the session.

The deadline for applications is **Thursday, February 27, 2020**. Persons who need accommodations or assistance with their applications should contact ssiyouthsolutions@mathematica-mpr.com to request assistance.

We will notify applicants via email of the outcome of the selection process by **mid-April 2020**.
B. Application requirements

The application form on the website will request applicants to submit the information listed below. Limits on the number of words permitted apply to some sections of the application.

1. Title (maximum word count=25)
   Provide a descriptive title for the proposed policy or program.

2. Description of the intervention(s) (maximum word count=400)
   Provide an overview of the proposed intervention(s), including its core components and activities. The description should include an assessment of the feasibility of the intervention(s).

3. Goals and outcomes (maximum word count=300)
   State the goals of the intervention(s) and the specific outcomes that would indicate success in meeting those goals. To be consistent with ODEP’s priorities for the SSI Youth Solutions project, the main goal of the intervention(s) should be to improve the long-term employment outcomes of youth SSI recipients. Additional goals might include the following:
   - Increase employment among youth SSI recipients and their families
   - Increase the self-sufficiency of youth with disabilities
   - Promote employment as an alternative to reliance on SSI and public assistance
   - Reduce household poverty
   - Increase engagement in post-secondary education
   - Reduce interactions with the juvenile justice system

   List the specific outcomes that the intervention(s) is intended to affect. The outcomes should be consistent with the goals of the intervention(s) and appropriate for the target population.

4. Target population (maximum word count=200)
   Describe the population to which the intervention(s) would be directed. This population should be from one or more of three main groups: (1) youth SSI applicants, awardees, and recipients; (2) youth with disabilities who take part in programs not associated with the Social Security Administration; or (3) other youth with disabilities (such as youth who receive special education services, disconnected youth, or youth who are otherwise at risk of receiving SSI). The target population could include a subset of people in these groups who have a certain characteristic (for example, a certain age, household income, or health condition). Include a rationale for your selection of the target population.
5. Relationship between the intervention(s) and outcomes (maximum word count=600)

Describe how and why the intervention(s) is likely to achieve the expected outcomes. Briefly discuss the theory of change underlying the intervention(s), indicating how the core components and activities will lead to changes in outcomes for the target population. Cite existing research that provides evidence of the likely effectiveness of the intervention(s) and note the strength of that evidence. As needed, explain how applicable the evidence is to the proposed target population. The intervention(s) need not have causal evidence, but it should have some evidence or theoretical basis to support its connection to outcomes for the population.

Note that ODEP is seeking applications that present either (1) new, innovative ideas that presently may lack an established literature on their effectiveness or (2) interventions with credible evidence of their effectiveness worth considering for broader implementation.

6. Fit within the existing landscape of transition services (maximum word count=200)

Explain how the intervention(s) fits into the landscape of public programs intended to promote youth transition. A critical part of an intervention’s fit in this landscape is its potential to promote current policy objectives without further fragmenting or complicating a complex system of youth transition services. Interventions might achieve this by changing existing programs or regulations, developing new services, expanding the types of entities that deliver services, and creating new funding sources. In describing an intervention’s fit within the existing landscape, state the strategic partnerships that it might require.

7. Applicant qualifications

a. Biography

Include a brief biography that describes applicants’ knowledge of SSI policy, experience with service delivery to youth SSI recipients or knowledge in relevant policy areas, and publication history. If two or more people are submitting an application, provide a biography for each person.

b. Resume or curriculum vitae

Upload the resumes or curriculum vitae of all applicants. Each should be no longer than three pages and should be in a PDF or Microsoft Word format.

8. References

Provide complete references for all citations in the submission.
C. Application scoring

1. Points available and ratings

Table 1 shows the total points available for each section of the application.

Table 1. Points available for each application section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Points available</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Title</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Description of the intervention</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Goals and outcomes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Target population</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Relationship between the interventions and outcomes</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Fit within the existing landscape of transition services</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Applicant qualifications</td>
<td>N/A b</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. References</td>
<td>N/A c</td>
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a This section will have two scores: one for the theory that describes the relationship between the intervention(s) and outcomes and one for the evidence supporting the relationship.

b Applications from individuals or teams that do not meet the minimum eligibility qualifications will not be reviewed.

c The references will support the scoring of Sections 2 through 6 of the proposal.

N/A = not applicable.

Table 2 shows the ratings that ODEP will use, along with the points assigned to each section, to score and rank the applications. The ratings and their weights are as follows: excellent (weight = 1), very good (weight = .75), good (weight = .5), marginal (weight = .25), and unacceptable (weight = 0).
Table 2. Ratings and definitions

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<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>An application that satisfies all of ODEP’s requirements and provides extensive detail to indicate feasibility of the intervention(s) and a thorough understanding of the problems. The application takes an innovative approach to address the underlying problem that significantly enhances the contribution made to the SSI youth policy discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>An application that satisfies all of ODEP’s requirements and provides ample detail to indicate feasibility of the intervention(s) and a very strong understanding of the problems. The application takes an innovative approach to address the underlying problem that enhances the contribution made to the SSI youth policy discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>An application that satisfies all of ODEP’s requirements and provides adequate detail to indicate feasibility of the intervention(s) and a strong understanding of the problems. The application takes a reasonable approach to address the underlying problem that enhances the contribution made to the SSI youth policy discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>An application that satisfies all of ODEP’s requirements and provides minimal but adequate detail to indicate feasibility of the intervention(s) and a minimal but adequate understanding of the problems. The application takes a reasonable approach to address the underlying problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>An application that contains a major error(s), omission(s) or deficiency(ies), indicates a lack of understanding of the problems, or contains an intervention that cannot be expected to be feasible. The application does not take a reasonable approach to address the underlying problem and cannot be corrected without a major rewrite.</td>
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2. Considerations for evaluating applications

ODEP will consider the following factors in scoring the relevant sections of the applications.

a. Description of the intervention(s)

The extent to which the application addresses each of the following:

- The intervention(s) is clearly described and easy to understand.
- The core components and activities are clear conceptually.
- The intervention(s) is feasible to implement in the existing youth-transition context, based on programs and supports already available to youth with disabilities.
- The narrative demonstrates that the author will be able to produce a full paper about the proposed intervention(s).

b. Goals and outcome

The extent to which the application addresses each of the following:

- The goals and outcomes of the intervention(s) are consistent with ODEP’s priorities.
- The goals and outcomes are consistent with the described intervention(s).
- The target outcomes are the best measures of the success of the intervention(s).

c. Target population
The extent to which the application addresses each of the following:

- The proposed target population comes from one of the three main groups of interest.
- The target population is appropriate for the intervention(s) and is the group most likely to be affected by the intervention(s).

**d. Relationship between the intervention(s) and outcomes**

1. **Theory**
   
   The extent to which the application addresses each of the following:
   
   - The intervention(s) has a strong theoretical foundation connecting the components and activities to outcomes.
   - This theoretical foundation directly relates to the goals, outcomes, and target population.

2. **Evidence**
   
   The extent to which the application addresses each of the following:
   
   - The existing evidence supports the likely effectiveness of the intervention(s).
   - The evidence is causal, rather than correlational or observational.
   - If the discussion includes evidence from studies focused on a different target population, the discussion includes whether and how such evidence could be generalized to the proposed target population, and the generalization makes sense.

**e. Fit within the existing youth-transition landscape**

The extent to which the application addresses each of the following:

- The intervention(s) is consistent with the policy objectives of federal agencies and existing programs.
- The description of the fit of the intervention(s) in the youth-transition landscape considers key aspects of this landscape.
- The intervention(s) complements or leverages existing public programs.
- The description identifies all necessary strategic partnerships.
- The description discusses all needed changes to existing program mechanisms or contexts.
IV. Project requirements

Selected applicants will work with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), and its contractor, Mathematica, to:

- Prepare a full draft (about 20 single-spaced pages) of the policy proposal, along with a paper abstract and summary
- Revise the draft paper based on several rounds of feedback from Mathematica, ODEP, and an expert peer review panel
- Participate in an in-person briefing of federal staff on the draft paper, to be held in Washington, DC
- Present the paper at a conference to be convened in Washington, DC

Preliminary guidelines and a schedule for interim and final products are presented below.

Authors will receive a stipend of $20,000 for participation in the project and a completed paper (regardless of the number of authors contributing to the paper). This stipend is intended to offset the time spent writing and revising the paper, along with attendance for one author at all online and in-person meetings. Authors will also receive reimbursement for travel expenses associated with the two trips to Washington, DC. Mathematica will provide authors with individualized technical and editorial support throughout the paper development process.

**Preliminary guidelines for papers**

The paper should:

- Be about 20 single-spaced pages in Times New Roman 12-point font
- Have a title that briefly describes the heart of the policy proposal
- Include an introduction that clearly presents the policy proposal and its motivation, a background section describing the specific issue that the policy proposal will address and related evidence, a detailed description of the policy proposal, and a conclusion that summarizes the paper and discusses areas for further research or policy development (authors will receive more detailed guidance after award)
- Include an abstract of 300 or fewer words, along with a one-page summary
- Be written in plain language (Mathematica will edit drafts for grammar and style)
Authors will also provide:

- Names, titles, and affiliations of all authors in the authors’ preferred format and order for appearance on the SSI Youth Solutions website and other publications
- Biographies (about 200 words) for each author
- Professional headshots of all authors
- Excel versions of any tables that appear in the paper and Excel or .eps files for any graphs or figures that appear in the paper

**Schedule**

Selected applicants are expected to complete all project milestones according to the following schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project milestones</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend project kickoff meeting (online)</td>
<td>April 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide author biographies and headshots</td>
<td>April 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit paper outline</td>
<td>May 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit first draft of paper</td>
<td>July 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submit second draft of paper</td>
<td>August 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer review of second draft of paper</td>
<td>September 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revised paper responding to peer review; draft abstract and short summary</td>
<td>November 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present paper to federal staff in Washington, DC</td>
<td>December 2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit final paper, abstract, and summary</td>
<td>January 2021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present paper at conference in Washington, DC</td>
<td>February 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Subject to change; specific dates to be provided during the project kickoff meeting.