

**Request for Proposals  
Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab  
November 13, 2017**

**1. Background**

In partnership with the Governor's office and the Department of Corrections, the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab at the University of Denver is seeking a research partner (individual or team) to lay the data and policy groundwork for understanding what combination of pre- and post-release programs is the best to offer to adult offenders to reduce recidivism.

The Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (hereafter "the Colorado Lab") is housed within the Barton Institute for Philanthropy and Social Enterprise at the University of Denver (DU). The Colorado Lab was established in summer 2017 with philanthropic support. Its purpose is to support state agencies in learning about the efficacy and efficiency of programs they administer and translating that research into action. Agency partnerships are voluntary and the Colorado Lab does *not* perform an auditing function. Rather, the Colorado Lab serves as a strategic partner to support good government.

**2. Summary**

The Colorado Lab issues this RFP with the intent of identifying an ongoing research partner (individual or team) with criminal justice expertise to support its the Lab's first partnership project with a state agency. Although the scope of this first project is fairly narrow, the Colorado Lab seeks to establish an ongoing relationship with researchers familiar with the existing literature on corrections and recidivism in general and, ideally, with Colorado corrections-related data for this and future corrections-related work.

The Colorado Lab will oversee the obtaining of all necessary data needed to complete the work described below, including: CWISE (Colorado Web Integrated Support Environment); DCIS (Department of Corrections Information System); Pre-release Access Database; and data provided by the Latino Coalition community provider for the Work and Gain Education & Employment Skills (WAGEES) program. The Colorado Lab will obtain all readily-available data dictionaries, but the research partner should expect data documentation to be incomplete.

The work for this project includes the following deliverables:

- A. *Merged source data plus complete documentation.* Preparation of this deliverable will include completing the following tasks:
  1. Consolidating existing data documentation and generating additional documentation as necessary for all data elements in the relevant source data.
  2. Merging records from available data sources at the offender level using best practices (numeric identifiers where available; name and date of birth when numeric identifiers are not available).
  
- B. *Detailed descriptions of the types of contacts offenders experience pre- and post-release, and counts of contacts at the offender level calculated according to the business rules defined in 2. below, along with a description of those business rules.* Preparation of this deliverable will include completing the following tasks:

1. Documenting the types of contacts offenders experience pre- and post-release to support their transition to the community as documented in the CWISE data. Pre-release contacts occur in the context of transition-related programming, interactions with a facility parole officer and pre-release specialist, and, in some cases, coordinated support through multidisciplinary team staffings. Post-release contacts occur in the context of interactions with community re-entry specialists (at 18 parole field offices), employment training navigators (4 statewide by region), continuity of care case managers (2 statewide), and behavioral health specialists (4 statewide). In general, contacts are intended to support the offender's transition to the community by connecting them with housing, food, clothes, employment, and/or support services as needed (e.g., in relation to a disability). Assessment, education, and treatment under the auspices of 1<sup>st</sup> Alliance will not be included in this project but may be considered for future work.
2. Recommending business rules to standardize contact counts at the offender level separately for pre- and post-release. As part of this recommendation, identify contacts that perhaps should *not* be counted (e.g., transport upon release when no other contacts, collateral contacts with someone other than the offender related to the case).

C. *Summary of policy landscape coupled with a description of how those policies are implemented at the institution level. Particular attention should be paid to variation in practices across sites that might provide an opportunity for a quasi-experimental study of program efficacy.* Preparation of this deliverable will include completing the following tasks:

1. Completing a summary describing the relevant state-level policies that inform which offenders should receive which pre- and post-release services.
2. Generating and piloting an interview protocol designed to build understanding of the local decision-making processes for determining what factors determine pre- and/or post-release contacts, including any communication between pre- and post-release personnel. Identify the appropriate personnel to interview under this protocol (e.g., pre-release specialists, facility parole officers, or others within prisons, community re-entry specialists or others for post-release), and how they will be interviewed (e.g., individually by phone, in a focus group, etc.).
3. Recommend a purposeful sample of sites at which to conduct interviews to understand the degree of variance in processes that determine which offenders receive which pre- and post-release services.
4. Completing interviews and summarizing the results using an accepted qualitative coding method.

D. *Analytic dataset, data dictionary, all code used to clean the data and to address descriptive questions, a concise report answering descriptive questions and making suggestions for further exploration.* Preparation of this deliverable will include completing the following tasks:

1. Creating an analytic dataset including multiple cohorts of offenders based on month of release (approx. 700 offenders/month) for the last two years (post- HB 14-1355). Outcomes for housing, employment, parole violations, and reoffending will be examined at three months after release and every three months thereafter as long as the offender is

on parole. Reoffending will be examined through the most recently available corrections data. Using this dataset, answer the following descriptive questions:

- a. How many offenders have at least one transition-related contact pre- and/or post-release and how many do not? What are the characteristics of offenders who have more or fewer contacts pre-release, post-release, and overall? Is there a difference in terms of housing, employment, parole violations (according to severity), and recidivism for offenders who have more or fewer documented contacts pre-release, post-release, and overall?
- b. Is there a difference in the type and frequency of contacts experienced by high-risk/high-need offenders as determined by LSI score relative to those who are not categorized as high-risk/high-need? Is there a pattern of contacts within each group that is correlated with better outcomes in terms of housing, employment, parole violations (according to severity), and recidivism?
- c. Are high-risk/high-need offenders receiving the greatest frequency of contacts pre-release? Post-release? Is there a relationship between the number and type of contacts pre-release and the number of contacts post-release?
- d. What other static and dynamic risk factors are correlated with the number of contacts? Are there predictors of risk/need besides LSI that appear to be considered when determining the number of contacts?
- e. What are the characteristics of offenders in each of the four categories created by the matrix of high versus low risk/needs and none versus some contacts? What are the characteristics of offenders who received no contacts at all, who received some contacts pre-release but none post-release, and who received none pre-release but some post-release? What predictors anticipate multiple post-release contacts when there were no pre-release contacts? What combination of contacts, by type and frequency, result in better outcomes?

**3. Proposal Narrative.** Please include a cover page with the name, organization, and contact information for all key personnel, indicating who is the lead investigator/contact person. The proposal narrative should be no longer than 10 double-spaced pages with one-inch margins and 12-point font, not including cover page, references, budget, budget justification, and curriculum vitae. Please provide the following information indicating why you/your team are a good fit for this partnership work.

- Describe why you are interested in partnering with the Colorado Lab on this work.
- Describe your prior quantitative and qualitative research experience, including a discussion of a specific project and methodology used, working with personally identifiable information generally, and corrections data specifically, in Colorado or elsewhere.
- Describe familiarity with Colorado policy around adult corrections, re-entry, recidivism, and risk assessment.
- Describe familiarity with academic literature around adult recidivism, re-entry, parole policies, and risk assessment.
- Describe how you would analyze the available data to address the research questions above.

- Propose at least one (and preferably more than one) technique for identifying potential causal links between specific programs and the outcomes of interest that may inform future evaluation studies. Big data/machine-learning techniques are encouraged in addition to traditional parametric or nonparametric approaches.
- Pose any additional descriptive questions that should be considered at this stage of the project.
- Vita or resume for all key personnel (these can be included as attachments and do not count against the 10-page limit).

#### **4. Budget**

Please provide an itemized budget and budget justification. Indirect costs are not allowed. A primary goal of this project is to build the research infrastructure necessary to reduce costs for future projects with the Department of Corrections (e.g., data dictionaries, cross references across data sets, documentation of potential pitfalls in accessing, manipulating, and/or interpreting data, etc.) We anticipate that this work can be completed for under \$75,000, but bids over \$75,000 will be considered with adequate justification for how the greater expense is likely to reduce costs for future research projects conducted in partnership with the Department of Corrections.

Other considerations:

- Regular communication (weekly at a minimum) with Director of Colorado Lab is required
- All code must be made available to Director of Colorado Lab upon request. Code should be well-notated throughout.
- Access to data is only allowable via VPN to a DU secure server per Colorado Lab confidentiality agreement. No personally-identifiable or sensitive data may be removed from the secure server.

#### **5. Timeline**

RFP distributed: 11/13/17

Proposal submission deadline: 12/31/17

Anticipated Awardee notification: 1/19/17

#### **6. Fine Print**

Eligibility: There are no eligibility restrictions.

Contingency: Award is contingent upon approval of the Colorado Lab's research request submitted to the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis.

Contract duration: The project start date will depend on data availability with the completion date six months after all source data has been received or August 31, 2018, whichever is later. This schedule is designed to allow a complete summer for potential academic partners and may be negotiated as work unfolds. The contract may be renewed.

Point of contact: All questions about the RFP process should be directed to the Director of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, Kristin Klopfenstein, at [Kristin.klopfenstein@du.edu](mailto:Kristin.klopfenstein@du.edu).

Submissions: All submissions should consist of a single pdf file attached to an email to the Director of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, Kristin Klopfenstein, and copied to program coordinator Tanya Salih at [Kristin.klopfenstein@du.edu](mailto:Kristin.klopfenstein@du.edu) and [tanya.salih@du.edu](mailto:tanya.salih@du.edu).

Indirects: Indirect costs are not allowed.

Review Process: Proposals will be reviewed by a committee consisting of the Director of the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab, a representative of the Colorado Lab's funder, a representative of the Colorado Governor's office, and a representative of a Colorado university other than the University of Denver. Finalists may be asked to submit additional information and/or complete interviews before the final award decision is made.

Acceptance of Proposals: The Colorado Lab reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals and to waive irregularities or technicalities. Cost-effectiveness will be a consideration but the Colorado Lab is under no obligation to award to the lowest bidder.

Contract: This RFP will become part of the awarded contract. The contents of the proposal and any clarification thereto submitted by the successful bidder shall become part of the contractual obligation incorporated by reference into the ensuing contract.

Discretion: Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, discretion is required. All outside communication about the project will go through the Director of the Colorado Lab unless otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Director of the Colorado Lab and the Department of Corrections.