



**Request for Proposal
Project Coordinator and Researcher
Right to Read Project**

Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta

RFP Release Date: July 5, 2010

Teleconference Information Session for Interested Proponents: 10:00 am, Wednesday, July 28, 2010

Deadline for Questions received Via Email: 4:00 pm, Friday, August 6, 2010

Deadline for Receipt of Completed Proposals: 4:00 pm, Monday, August 23, 2010

Decision: Monday, August 30, 2010

Consultant to Commence Work: On or around 6 September, 2010

Request for Proposal Project Coordinator and Researcher Right to Read Project

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of Request for Proposal

The purpose of this Request for Proposal (RFP) is to identify a qualified consultant to provide coordination and research support for the Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta (LDAA) Right to Read Project.

1.2. Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta

The LDAA is a registered charity that provides information and support for people with learning disabilities. A voluntary, not-for-profit organization of parents, professionals and other concerned people, the LDAA works locally through its chapters and provincially to promote understanding and improved services for children and adults with learning disabilities.

The LDAA works with Alberta Education and other government and non-government agencies to improve the services for Albertans with learning disabilities. It hosts an annual provincial conference and sponsors other learning opportunities. It provides help and support to local chapters as well as individuals. It serves as a channel for up-to-date information about learning disabilities.

2. Project Background

2.1. Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities refer to a number of disorders which can affect how a person acquires, organizes, retains, understands or uses verbal or nonverbal information. People with learning disabilities typically have average to above average intellect and reasoning and are fully able to learn given the right intervention. Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- oral language including listening, speaking and understanding
- reading including word recognition and comprehension
- written language
- mathematics

Individuals with learning disabilities may also have difficulties with organizational and social skills. The impact of learning disabilities changes over the course of a person's life. These changes are affected by a person's strengths and needs and the manner in which they interact with their environment. Learning disabilities are suspected when a person unexpectedly under-achieves at school or can only achieve with unusually high levels of effort and support.

The causes of learning disabilities are unknown, although current research indicates it is a neurological condition which is also hereditary in nature. Learning disabilities are not caused by lack of motivation or poor teaching, although these factors may further complicate the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities. Learning disabilities often co-exist with other neurological or health conditions, lending complexity to the issue.

The National Institute of Health cites the incidence level of learning disabilities as 8 to 10%. Based on this incidence level, using Canadian census information at July 1, 2009, there are 369,000 Albertans with learning disabilities, 67,000 of whom are 14 years of age and under. About 6000 children aged 5 to 9 years, the cohort in Kindergarten and the early elementary grades, have learning disabilities and are at risk for difficulties with reading and writing.

The most common learning disability is a reading disability or dyslexia. Estimates place the incidence of dyslexia at approximately 80% of all learning disabilities. The focus of the LDAA's Right to Read project is on early identification of risk for reading disabilities.

2.2. The Right to Read Project

The LDAA believes that all children in Kindergarten and Grade 1 should be screened for risk for reading problems. The LDAA strongly asserts that early intervention is critical to ensuring that all children maximize their potential. While effective interventions may be employed to support people at all ages, early intervention is vital to prevent the secondary disabilities and low esteem issues that accompany failure to succeed at school. The Right to Read Project emerged from these beliefs.

In the fall 2008, the LDAA sponsored an information session led by dyslexia expert, Dr. Linda Siegel of the University of British Columbia. While the session was designed for decision makers in school districts in Edmonton and area, it was attended by a broad array of individuals. The sessions were followed by a more intensive workshop held with various school district representatives. One of the findings from the smaller workshop was that there were significant barriers to universal screening.

In early 2009, the LDAA struck a working committee comprised of experts in the field of reading assessment, special education, dyslexia, psycho-educational assessments and project management. Over the course of the winter and summer, the committee created a tool entitled the Reading Readiness Screening Tool (RRST).

The RRST is designed to be *administered by teachers*, on a one on one basis, to children in Kindergarten or Grade 1. However, the RRST Committee believes the tool can be used effectively for older children, particularly English Language Learners entering the elementary school.

There are four components to the RRST. They include:

- **Reading Readiness Screening Tool Recording Booklet.** This document contains the test, places to record results, and prescribed scripts for teachers to use when administering the RRST. This document must be photocopied every time the test is employed.
- **Reading Readiness Screening Tool Teacher Instructions.** This document provides practical advice to teachers on the administration of the RRST and is designed to complement the content of the Recording Booklet. This document is designed to be printed only once.
- **Reading Readiness Screening Tool Student Stimulus Booklet.** This document is used during the administration of the RRST and contains pictures and other tools. It is designed to be printed once, on cardstock, and bound. It complements the Recording Booklet and Teacher Instructions.
- **Reading Readiness Screening Tool Student Teacher Instructional DVD.** This 30 minute DVD was produced to provide instruction to teachers on the use of the RRST.

The RRST has been piloted by a network of individuals associated with the LDAA. For a person fully versed in the RRST protocol, testing takes approximately 20 minutes per student. Initial feedback has been very positive. Teachers who have used the tool describe it as having good discriminatory value.

The RRST is designed as a universal screening tool, meaning its intent is to identify students at risk for literacy learning. However, because of its design, it is clear that it can provide diagnostic information about areas of particular concern that may be the focus of more intense instruction.

2.3. Next Steps

In creating the RRST, the LDAA had hoped to make the tool broadly available for use in classrooms as a universal screening tool for potential reading problems. In order to meet this objective, there are several next steps that require attention.

Objective 1: The RRST tool must be validated. There are several components associated with this objective:

- Normative values need to be established for *each* sub-test for a normal population of children, including those who have no risk for reading problems through to those who are at definite risk.

- The discriminatory value of an overall aggregate test score, using all the sub-tests contained in the RRST, requires exploration and validation.
- Potential risk, as determined by performance results for different combinations of sub-test components, requires exploration and validation.

Objective 2: The results of the RRST need to be compared to other standardized tests. Tests exist to ascertain risk for reading difficulties. This component of the review would include comparing outcomes of the RRST with well known standardized tests like the Test of Phonological Awareness (TOPA) and potentially other instruments.

Objective 3: The ease of administration of the RRST needs to be determined and, where appropriate, supports provided to optimize administration. This step entails gaining insight from teachers on the ease of administration of the RRST and how the administration process could be improved.

3. Interest in Reading Readiness Screening Tool

The LDAA has had widespread interest in the RRST. Several schools and school districts have expressed an interest in using the RRST. Initial dialogue has begun with Alberta Education regarding the inclusion of the RRST in resource packages associated with the implementation of Setting the Directions Framework for Special Education Reform. Requests are also being received from various jurisdictions outside of Alberta on the use of the tool. Through the involvement of Dr. Linda Siegel, expressions of interest have also been received internationally. In its draft format, the RRST has been translated into Spanish.

4. Requested Support

The LDAA requires the services of an individual to provide expertise, energy and coordination to meet the stated objectives noted above and to engage in a wide variety of activities to support the aims of the Right to Read Project.

Responsibilities of the successful applicant would include but not be limited to the following:

- 4.1. Work with the Right to Read Committee and its content and academic advisors, to create a research protocol to meet the goals noted above.
- 4.2. Ensure adherence to mandated processes and regulations. These may include but are not limited to ethics review(s), protection of privacy of information and like activities. The consultant will, on behalf of the Right to Read Committee, be expected to create initial drafts of any mandated reports, ethics applications and supporting documentation.
- 4.3. Prepare, on behalf of the Right to Read Committee, initial drafts of grant applications for potential funding sources to support continued research on the Right to Read project and interventions coupled with the RRST.

- 4.4. Serve as primary point of contact with representatives of school districts either piloting the RRST or considering its use. Responsibilities will include but not be limited to:
 - 4.4.1. Ongoing liaison with designated representatives from school districts using the RRST in order to provide direct support on all aspects associated with data collection (research projects);
 - 4.4.2. Respond to requests for information from school districts who may be interested in using the RRST;
 - 4.4.3. Respond to questions about the RRST, or, when necessary, redirect to a member of the Right to Read Committee.
 - 4.4.4. Distribute information packages on the RRST and disseminate information on research protocol, as appropriate.
 - 4.4.5. Coordinate Professional Development sessions on the RRST, as necessary.
 - 4.4.6. Some travel within Alberta may occur to complete the responsibilities under this section.
- 4.5. Creation of content and support with updates to the LDAA's project website at www.RightToRead.ca.
- 4.6. Other duties as may be assigned.

5. Contract Terms and Conditions

- 5.1. The LDAA will enter into a contractual relationship, for a one year period, with a successful proponent.
- 5.2. The contract may be extended beyond the one year period, contingent upon:
 - Available funding
 - Performance
- 5.3. The LDAA will entertain proposals from a wide variety of individuals, consulting firms, and interested sole proprietors.
- 5.4. The LDAA believes this proposal may be of particular interest to individuals working at Universities or Research Institutes, or with graduate students. The LDAA would be willing to work with a student who may wish to utilize this project to complete work associated with either the acquisition of a Master's Degree or a PhD. In this circumstance, the student's thesis or dissertation advisor will be required to approve the proposal, and agree to serve in a review role as the project progresses.
- 5.5. The total budget for the work on an annual basis is fixed at \$30,000. This amount is not subject to negotiation. This fee does not include travel expenses which will be reimbursed separately according to the LDAA's policy on reimbursement.
- 5.6. A responsibility of the successful proponent includes application for research grants to support the project. Funding received in this manner may be utilized to purchase additional services from the successful proponent beyond the annual fixed amount. Funds received in this manner may also be used to extend the contractual relationship with the LDAA beyond the one year period.
- 5.7. The successful proponent will report and be accountable to the Executive Director of the LDAA.

5.8. A contract will be established with the successful candidate as quickly as possible. Ideally, the consultant will begin providing support on or around September 6, 2010.

5.9. The successful candidate will work from their own home or office / university environment as the LDAA works through a virtual office environment.

6. Proposal

Proposals should include the following:

6.1. Understanding of Project and Proposed Approach

Prospective candidates should indicate their overall understanding of the proposed project. The proposal should also include a suggested approach and timeline to meet the key project objectives.

6.2. Project Suitability

Prospective candidates should:

- Describe their academic and experiential background that reflects their suitability and content expertise in this area of research.
- Describe previous experience with project management, databases, research, and working with advisory committees/task forces.

Proposals from Masters or PhD students must include a letter from their academic advisor that speaks to their expertise and project suitability, and their perceived ability.

6.3. Time Commitment

Proponents should clearly indicate the hours per month that they are able to work on the project, given their other commitments and the budget as noted above. This will serve as the initial discussion point for development of a service contract.

6.4. References

All proponents should include a minimum of three references. For Masters and PhD students, one reference must be their academic advisor.

6.5. Presentations and Publications

It is strongly suggested that proponents append Curriculum Vitae that documents their academic preparation, publications and presentations.

7. RRST Documentation

Electronic copies of the RRST Documentation will be made available to individuals wishing to complete a proposal after they have signed an agreement that the documents will not be circulated or disclosed to others except for the purposes of completing the proposal.

8. Information Sessions and Questions

A teleconference will be held for Interested Proponents beginning at 10:00 am, Wednesday, July 28, 2010. The Teleconference may be accessed by dialing: 1-800-808-0861. The participant code is 990163.

Email inquiries should be directed to Kathryn Burke, Executive Director at execdir@LDAA.ca.

All email inquiries must be received by no later than 4:00 pm, Friday, August 6, 2010. Responses to email questions will be circulated to all individuals having received the RRST documentation.

9. Selection Process

Criteria for selection of the successful candidate will include but not be limited to the Selection Committee's perception regarding the following:

- 1) The skill and knowledge base of the candidate
- 2) Experience with work of a similar nature
- 3) Suggested approach to project
- 4) Input from references

10. Proposal Deadline

Proposals must be received via email in Adobe Format, by no later 4:00 pm on Monday, August 30, 2010.