

Request for Proposals

Support Partner for Service Design & Delivery Initiative

The Postsecondary Success (PS) team is issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to engage a partner that will facilitate, support, and provide servant leadership for a network of organizations that are working together to support institutions in pursuing equitable value and success for Black, Latino/a/x, and Indigenous students and students from low-income backgrounds in higher education. This scope of work will be for a 26-month period, beginning in May 2022 and ending in July 2024 to support the Service Design & Delivery (SD&D) initiative.

Overview

The Postsecondary Success strategy at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is committed to increasing student success in education after high school and eliminating race and income as predictors of student success. For over a decade, we and our partners have been working closely with a diverse set of colleges and universities seeking to transform themselves to dramatically improve outcomes for today's students – especially Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous students, and students from low-income backgrounds.

Initiatives such as [Completion by Design](#) and the [Frontier Set](#) have taught us a lot about what transformation means, that it can happen, and how it happens. One of the most important lessons we've learned is the importance of partners that can bring campuses together and connect them with experts and resources, who can help guide them to adopt, adapt implement, evaluate, and sustain changes in policy and practice.

A growing number of institutions are embracing the need to transform and are seeking reliable guidance and support for their efforts. Our **Service Design & Delivery initiative (SD&D)** was launched in late 2018 to bring together our key partners – institutional **intermediaries**, solution network intermediaries and providers, capacity providers, and pathways providers – to work together in an aligned ecosystem focused on scaling **institutional transformation**. Through on-the-ground practice, we are deepening relationships, increasing our understanding of institutional transformation, and meeting strategy goal of supporting ~300 institutions in closing racial and socioeconomic equity gaps.

From July 2022 through July 2024, our SD&D partners will support institutions across the country to ensure more Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous students, and students from low-income backgrounds obtain high value degrees or credentials.

Our Process and Timeline:

- Overview Webinar: Wednesday, October 20, 2021
- Request for Proposal (RFP) Circulated: Monday, November 1, 2021
- Office Hours: November 18, 2021; December 8, 2021; January 6, 2022
- Deadline for RFP Submissions: Friday, January 14, 2022
- Finalists Notified: Thursday, February 4, 2022
- Finalists Conversations: February 7-25, 2022
- Finalist Notified: March 31, 2022
- Work Commences: Monday, May 16, 2022

Scope of Work for Community of Practice Backbone

BMGF's PS team is looking for an **entity** to provide leadership, guidance, coordination, and support to a diverse set of programmatic partners: **Solution Network Intermediaries (SNIs)**, **Intermediaries for Scale (IFS)**, **Pathways**, and **Capacities Providers**. SD&D members spent the past three years engaging in testing and learning processes during which trusted relationships were developed, a set of **learning tracks** were developed and staffed, and initial shared perspectives were articulated (including a set of quality dimensions and indicators for service asks and delivery, racial equity principles, perspectives on integrated frameworks, and needs assessments).

The selected entity would serve as the Community of Practice **backbone** organization to guide and support our SD&D initiative moving forward. In this role, the entity will be responsible for creating a seamless approach to accomplishing the SD&D goals. This includes providing the functions listed below, in addition to being comfortable and flexible with ambiguity as we continue to refine our approach to institutional transformation at scale. The backbone may subcontract with others to provide one or more of the functions or may provide these functions through dedicated staffing.

The backbone leader will prioritize racial and socioeconomic equity in all efforts to guide the vision and strategy, and ensure that the Steering Committee, Learning Track members and all ecosystem members (Intermediaries for Scale, Solution Network Intermediaries, Pathways Providers, and Capacities Providers) keep racial equity at the center of their strategies and actions. The backbone leader will also act as a **servant leader** to guide strategy execution, adoption, and adaptation. This includes working with the **Steering Committee** and BMGF's representatives (as appropriate) to evaluate data, prioritize opportunities for action, and adapt to changing context and systems.

1. Support implementation of the initiative's strategy and vision:

- a. Ensure all members are aligned with the goals and vision of the ecosystem
- b. Understand what each community group (IFS, SNIs, Pathways, and Capacities Providers) and individual partner brings to the table in terms of vision alignment, roles, perspectives, assets, and constraints
- c. Facilitate the active engagement of ecosystem members to achieve the initiative's goals and vision

2. Work with the different communities to articulate a shared learning agenda:

- a. Facilitate conversations across each **community group** (i.e., Solution Network Intermediaries, Intermediaries for Scale, Pathways and Capacities providers) and **the full ecosystem** (which is comprised of all the community groups) to articulate critical learning questions
- b. Coordinate and prioritize **learning agenda** topics with Steering Committee and Learning Track Leaders for the broader ecosystem's learning
- c. Coordinate and prioritize learning agenda topics for each community group with connections (when appropriate) to the full ecosystem's learning agenda
- d. Produce a learning agenda that supports each community group's coordination, learning, and cohesion as well as the broader ecosystem's continuous learning agenda

3. Facilitate shared capability building opportunities:

- a. Work with each community group in the ecosystem to identify individual community and broader ecosystem **capability building** opportunities; these opportunities should complement the shared learning agenda

- b. Engage community groups, Steering Committee, and other members (e.g., Learning Track leads) in scope development and refinement as well as capability building partner selection
 - c. Scope and oversee processes for contracting, reporting, and oversight of shared capability building opportunities
- 4. Act as an advocate for the needs and perspectives of each community and the broader ecosystem:**
- a. Understand and articulate growth milestones that each community group and the broader ecosystem experience and provide recommendations for how the foundation may support this growth
 - b. Support, when needed/appropriate, in raising partners' concerns to the foundation
 - c. Ensure effective communication flow between **foundation relationship managers** and community groups
 - d. Work with the foundation's evaluation partner(s) to support further learning and better support community groups and the broader ecosystem
- 5. Enable active engagement of all ecosystem members:**
- a. Serve as an ecosystem convener and facilitate effective dialogue and discussion to support aligned action among initiative members. Key elements include:
 - Work with community groups and Steering Committee to identify aligned activities to further network goals and refine/establish Learning Tracks to implement the activities.
 - Onboard new ecosystem members and offboard exiting members (if/when needed).
 - Build a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across participants and one that supports aligned action.
 - Ensure coordination of Learning Tracks by managing workflows, ensuring alignment with network goals, and supporting Learning Track members in reaching their agreed-upon deliverables.
 - Work with initiative members to establish shared measurement practices.
 - Facilitate and support (the development, launch, and evaluation) of the bi-annual ecosystem-wide convenings

Qualifications and RFP Responses

Please make sure that your proposal addresses the following qualifications and questions. The "Assessment Criteria" section provides additional context how applicants will be assessed. By **December 1, 2021**, details of the rubrics will be shared on the [Support Partner for SD&D RFP](#).

Required Qualifications

1. Deep understanding of the U.S. higher education landscape
2. Racial and socioeconomic equity expertise within the context of U.S. higher education landscape
3. Demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion as evidenced by representative leadership, project staffing, and other organizational leadership (i.e., board or an advisory group)
4. Comfort with ambiguity and ability to be agile as the strategy continues to evolve
5. Ability to build an inclusive network of diverse partners so that they can achieve equitable outcomes for Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous students, and students from low-income backgrounds

6. Knowledge of **network theory**, best practices, and network management
7. Ability to foster and maintain an action-oriented mindset among network members
8. The ability to create a culture of, and structures to support, continuous learning of network members and knowledge sharing
9. Convening design, logistics, and facilitation in support of productive and **learning-forward** member dialogue.
10. Experience developing a learning agenda
11. Experience scoping and overseeing technical assistance providers
12. Highly effective skills as a communicator, listener, negotiator, problem solver, advocator, and relationship and consensus builder

Questions to Address Within Proposals. Please:

1. Describe why you want to be the community of practice backbone for the Service Design & Delivery Initiative
2. Describe how you would approach this work, providing details that align with the outlined scope of work
3. Describe your prior experience working on racial and socioeconomic equity-related issues in higher education, with specific reference to supporting institutional transformation process
4. Identify the specific focus population(s) your work has addressed (e.g., Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous), the number of years served, and how your success and challenges in supporting those populations inform the activities in this proposal. Provide details on how you have supported racial outcomes (e.g., antiracist approaches to community building)
5. Describe your experience working as a servant leader, what you have learned functioning in that capacity, and how you would leverage those insights in your work with the SD&D Initiative
6. Describe your prior experience facilitating, scoping, and planning a learning agenda
7. Describe your prior experience being/finding a re-granting agency to support the skills training for the shared capability building opportunities
8. Describe how you would staff this effort, and how the perspectives of proposed staff and organizational leadership will support the goals of racial and socioeconomic equity and represent the perspectives of those you are serving
9. Describe your prior experience working with higher education institutions, associations, organizations, or initiatives at the state and national level
10. Describe your prior work experience, if any, with any of the Network members, and/or describe your prior work experience, if any, with, or grants from, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or other philanthropic organizations.
11. Share any known risks, issues, concerns, or conflicts your organization may have related to this work

Budget

- Provide a **26-month budget** for your services; the overall budget for the backbone's professional support should not exceed ~**\$1.0 million** (e.g., event and meeting facilitation, internal network operations and communication, evaluation). If your budget must exceed \$1.0 million to successfully execute this work, please provide a rationale.

- This does not include the funds that will be provided for shared capability building activities and opportunities that this partner will be facilitating as one of the five scoped functions listed above
- This scope of work will be for the beginning of May 2022 through the end of July 2024 to support the Service Design & Delivery (SD&D) initiative

Assessment Criteria

Rubrics Categories			
Racial & Socioeconomic Equity Expertise – Applicant demonstrates experience supporting equitable success and value outcomes for Black, Latino/a/x, Indigenous students, and students from low-income backgrounds in higher education	Shared Goals Understanding of and commitment to the initiatives’ overall vision and strategic goals	Facilitation Ability to facilitate active engagement of the SD&D community group members	Institutional Transformation Understanding of how to center racial and socioeconomic equity in the institutional transformation process
Learning Agenda Ability to identify shared learning goals and articulate a learning agenda	Onboarding Ability to onboard new network members and facilitate member transitions	Inclusive Culture Ability to build a culture that fosters relationships, trust, and respect across members and that supports aligned action	Project Management Ability to support Learning Track members in reaching agreed-upon deliverables
Shared Capability Building Ability to identify shared capability building needs and find, vet, and manage Technical Assistance (training) providers			

Selection Committee

The backbone will be selected by a committee of seven ecosystem partners (that are self-nominated and elected by the broader community). Network members who apply to this opportunity, if any, will recuse themselves from the selection process.

Learn More

The foundation hosted an informational webinar on Oct 20, 2021, and we will be hosting three office hours to provide information and answer questions about this opportunity and the selection process.

- Webinar information: [View the webinar presentation](#) and [Download the webinar slides](#)
- [Register Here](#) to participate in:
 - Office Hours 1: November 18, 2021
 - Office Hours 2: December 8, 2021
 - Office Hours 3: January 6, 2022

For more information, please consult the Support Partner for SD&D RFP.

- [Glossary of Terms](#)
- [FAQ](#)

Contact us at SDDRFP@gatesfoundation.org with any questions.