



Rural Trust Global Teacher Fellowship: Request for Proposal for Program Evaluation

Background Information

The Rural School and Community Trust (Rural Trust) is a national non-profit organization, created to help rural schools and communities grow better together by involving young people in place-based learning linked to community and economic development; conducting research and advocating for appropriate educational policies and equitable funding for rural schools; improving rural access to highly effective educators; and increasing rural capacity to design, implement, and support appropriate innovations.

For nearly two decades, the Rural Trust and its predecessor (the Annenberg Rural Challenge) have sought to bring rural America in all of its diversity into the mainstream of American consciousness. We have sought to elevate the rural voice, to secure adequate and equitable resources for rural schools, to counter the prevailing narrative of rural decline. We have framed our work within the context of social and economic justice, understanding the direct correlations between and among education, family and community well-being, and the strength and survivability of a democratic and just society.

The importance of effective teachers to student success is perhaps the single most widespread point of consensus in the national school reform discourse. Recruiting and retaining effective school leaders gets less attention, but our experience has proven this to be an important and urgent issue as well. Teachers consistently rank effective and supportive leadership among the reasons they choose to remain in or leave the profession or a particular school.

While there is consensus about the need for effective teachers and leaders, there is far less consensus on what constitutes universal effectiveness and how to achieve it. We believe that the most effective instructional leaders (teachers) are those who, among other things: 1) have a command of their teaching discipline - including the deep content knowledge that enables intellectual flexibility around subject matter, a deep knowledge of how the discipline relates to other disciplines, and a command of an assortment of teaching strategies that engage students with diverse learning backgrounds, styles, and capacities in deep conceptual and applied learning; 2) have an expanded world view based on practical knowledge and experience; 3) are able to establish caring and developmentally supportive relationships with their students and families; 4) understand, connect with, and respect the history, culture, and place in which their students live and from which they come; and 5) can leverage local assets and needs in support of the learning process and community growth. Effective building and district leaders understand and support teachers in these roles.

By any definition of quality, highly effective educators are difficult to recruit and retain in many rural schools and communities. This challenge is particularly debilitating in remote rural communities and in places with high concentrations of children of color and poverty. As a result, these communities often settle for less qualified school leaders and in turn school leaders settle for less effective teachers, including long-term substitutes; higher qualified teachers who stay only as long as necessary to obtain a “better” position; or temporary “missionary” types who have strong content knowledge but little understanding of the community or its history and little commitment to remaining in it.

Our goal is to develop and support highly effective teachers and leaders who are particularly disposed to and skilled at teaching, learning, and living in rural places. This puts us in the service of the national interest in seeing that every child is taught by a highly effective teacher in every classroom every year, that our schools are led by highly effective administrators who enable the accomplishment of that goal, and that our communities have effective leaders who support that goal. To that end, and with the generous support of a committed donor, we have provided a Global Teacher Fellowship to approximately 30 rural teachers for each of the past three years. The Global Teacher Fellowship fits into a larger rural teacher and school leadership effort and is intended to give teachers an opportunity to expand their personal and professional development through high quality, self-designed international travel and study, training in place-based learning, and access to a network of similarly engaged rural educators.

Purpose of Contract

The purpose of the Rural Trust Global Teacher Fellowship evaluation is to examine the successes and challenges of program implementation and to answer key questions aimed at program improvement and sustainability. Specifically, we are seeking to know the following.

1. What is the impact of the fellowship on the following?
 - a) Teacher retention
 - b) Leadership advancement for teachers
 - c) Curriculum development
 - d) Global awareness and connections in classrooms
 - e) Other teachers in the schools from which fellows are selected
 - f) Student engagement in the classroom
 - g) Student world view and global connections
2. What is the value of the fall fellows' institute and how can that be improved?
3. Who else is doing fellowships/professional development for rural teachers? Do any have a specifically international experiential focus?
4. What opportunities are there for potential partnerships to advance or improve the fellowship?
5. What are fellows saying and what data are available for use in future marketing efforts for program participation and potential additional funding sources?

Services and Deliverables

- In collaboration with the Rural Trust, develop a study plan, including scope, approach, and timeline
- Obtain written participant* permission to engage in surveys, interviews, and focus groups
- Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups according to the study plan

- Conduct additional research required to address the specific interests and questions raised by program administrators
- Analyze the data
- Submit a report of findings to the Rural Trust by March 1, 2015

*Note that by participant, we mean fellows as well as other stakeholders, including Selection Committee members and school leaders.

Assistance

The Rural Trust and the contractor will engage in regular meetings (via conference calls) to discuss progress, challenges, and resolutions in the work. Rural Trust staff will provide program documentation as requested by the evaluator and assist as needed in connecting evaluators with staff, fellows, and others.

Desired Qualifications

- Expertise in and capacity to conduct qualitative evaluation, including individuals with strong facilitation and communication skills
- Documented experience working successfully with rural populations
- Ability to analyze and report on qualitative data

To respond to this RFP, please submit a narrative not to exceed 5 pages, that provides:

1. An overall purpose statement
2. A statement of qualifications, including:
 - Previous relevant experience
 - Knowledge, expertise, and capacity
 - Project management plan
3. A description of the proposed approach to be undertaken to meet the proposed deliverables
4. A proposed timeline with deliverables noted

Budget

Include detailed one-page budget for the total cost of the project (including indirect costs not to exceed 8%), and a budget narrative (line-item justification and basis for calculations) not to exceed one page.

Proposal Submission

Please email responses to this RFP no later than **5:00pm EST September 5, 2014** to Doris Terry Williams at doris.williams@ruraledu.org. You may direct all questions and inquiries to the same.

Notice of Award

The selection of the external evaluator will be finalized by September 8, 2014. Applicants will be notified on or by that date.