

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
7431-08-0002**

**POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION PARTICIPATION RATES
OF STUDENTS FROM MIDDLE INCOME FAMILIES**

1. Issuer:

The Learning Branch, Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC).

2. Synopsis

Recent analysis suggests that students from middle income families are experiencing increasing pressures in terms of financing post-secondary education (PSE), and that this pressure may be reflected in decreasing or stagnant PSE participation rates. The Learning Branch seeks to engage a researcher to examine the issue of PSE participation by students from middle income families in order to obtain the most up-to-date information possible to inform the debate on this important and timely policy issue.

3. Context

As part of its responsibility for the Canada Student Loan Program, the Learning Branch conducts ongoing analysis to ensure that supports continue to respond fairly to the needs of all students, while targeting those who are in greatest need. Recent analysis by external organizations has suggested that students from middle-income families (MIFS) may be experiencing a “squeeze”, in that they may be ineligible for some forms of financial assistance, and do not have the financial resources to independently fund their post-secondary education. It has been suggested that this financial “squeeze” is leading to decreased PSE participation by these students.

An initial diagnostic by the Learning Branch in conjunction with provinces and territories (via the FPT Policy Working Group), which will be made available to the successful bidder, indicates that many MIFS have difficulty accessing student financial assistance, and are more likely to seek alternate funding sources such as private loans or employment during study. However, there is insufficient data to claim a decrease in PSE participation rates.

This lack of data is due to a variety of factors. Most studies of participation rates by income highlight differences between the lowest and highest income categories, but do not provide detailed information on the middle income groups. Furthermore, most studies currently available on this topic are based on data dating from 2001 or earlier. Finally, there are key differences in methodologies and data sources that make comparison and synthesis difficult. The definition of middle-income itself differs widely in the literature.

The purpose of this research project is therefore to obtain as clear a picture as possible of the PSE participation rates of MIFS over approximately the last 10 years, using a

methodology specifically designed for this purpose rather than inferring the information from related studies.

4. Terms and conditions:

All submitted proposals will become the property of the Learning Branch, HRSDC, and will not be returned to their originators. The lowest priced bid will not necessarily be selected.

The Minister has determined that any intellectual property arising from the performance of the Work under the Contract will vest in Canada, on the following grounds: the main purpose of the Contract, or of the deliverables contracted for, is to generate knowledge and information for public dissemination.

For additional information, please visit www.sdc.gc.ca/en/cs/fas/as/contracting/toc.shtml

Copyright and Intellectual Property: HRSDC reserves the right to publish the document (in paper format and/or on the internet) as part of a series of papers commissioned.

5. Submission of proposal

Responses are to be sent by email to:

Contracting Authority: Mimi Rabouin
E-mail: mimi.rabouin@servicecanada.gc.ca

Proposals will be accepted until August 29th, 2008 at 2:00 PM EDT

Supplementary information will not be accepted after the deadline, unless requested by the contracting authority to clarify a statement made in the proposal.

6. Communications:

Prospective bidders may direct questions about this RFP to the Contracting Authority. Questions must be posed in writing and all questions and answers will be shared with all known prospective bidders. Questions may be directed to:

NAME: Mimi Rabouin
Contracting Authority
Service Canada
Phone: (819) 934-5587
Fax: (819) 997-0442
Email: mimi.rabouin@servicecanada.gc.ca

7. Objectives of this RFP:

The objective of this research project is to estimate, as accurately as possible, the PSE participation rate (primarily for university, but also for college if possible) among students from middle-income families over approximately the last 10 years, and to compare it with the participation rates of students from other income groups, subject to a variety of control variables.

8. Scope of Work:

Throughout this description, “PSE participation rate” refers primarily to university participation – the contractor must conduct the analysis on university participation. The same analysis for college students would be highly desirable, but not required. It is not desirable for contractors to provide a combined rate that describes participation in “any PSE”, as research has shown that this masks important differences between university and college participation rates.

HRSDC officials will provide the contractor with the diagnostic on students from middle income families prepared by the Learning Branch, and the studies on participation rates by income that have been reviewed to date. The contractor will be responsible for exploring and utilizing additional sources and materials to complete the project.

Regular status updates will be required during the project. A schedule for these updates will be agreed upon between the Learning Branch and the successful bidder.

The contractor will provide estimations of PSE participation rates by income group, with particular emphasis on the “middle-income” category (see note on choice of definition below). In calculating these estimations, the contractor will make use of appropriate control variables that are relevant to the provision of student financial assistance. These could include, but are not limited to: family size, presence of or amount of savings for PSE, whether student is dependent or independent, whether student is studying at home or away. The choice of control variables will depend on the data source; contractors who can provide more sophisticated estimations using multiple control variables will be regarded more favourably. Ideally, the data will cover a period of 10 years, ending with the most recent year possible. The contractor must provide estimations for university participation rates; a similar analysis of college participation would be highly desirable but not required. Likewise, data disaggregation by province would also be highly desirable.

The contractor shall produce a written report which provides the following:

1. A discussion of the selection of data source(s) for the project. The contractor will investigate available data sources and will provide an evaluation and discussion of all those that could be considered for the project. The contractor is encouraged to be resourceful and seek out data sources that may not have been used in the literature to date. The contractor will use the results of this investigation to justify

the data source(s) used in the final estimations. More than one data source may be used for the final estimations, if appropriate.

2. A discussion of the definition of middle income. The contractor will provide a discussion of various possible definitions of middle income and how they relate to the selected data source(s). The final estimations may be performed using more than one definition, if the contractor deems it appropriate. While there are no clear-cut income thresholds to qualify for student financial assistance, a chart detailing some of the income cut-offs used in the calculation of eligibility for the Canada Student Loans Program (e.g. income levels at which parental contributions are not expected) will be provided to the successful contractor to assist in choosing program-relevant definition(s) of middle-income.
3. Selection of the empirical methodology. The report will provide details of the specific estimation techniques or other methodologies used to obtain the participation rates. This will include a discussion of the control variables.
4. Results of the estimations. The report will provide a thorough discussion of the results of the estimations, including a comparison between the rates for middle-income students and those for students from other income groups. A discussion of the trends over time will also be included. The report will also include a discussion of how the results relate to the findings of other studies on PSE participation by income.

9. Deliverables and payments:

All reports produced for this contract must be written in English or French and provided electronically in Microsoft Word. If the report includes graphs or charts, the contractor must also provide accompanying spreadsheets in Microsoft Excel that provide all underlying data represented in the graphs.

The successful bidder will provide a preliminary and a final report. The reports are to be written clearly and concisely, addressing the study objectives. The preliminary report shall be as complete as possible in all analysis, literature review and documentation. The final reports should incorporate the feedback from the preliminary reports and, therefore, should involve only minor changes.

Deadlines for Deliverables:

Preliminary Report: February 13, 2009

Final Report: March 23, 2009

Payment Schedule:

Completion of Preliminary Report: 2/3 of total costs

Completion of Final Report: 1/3 of total costs

Payment will be made 30 days after receipt of an invoice, upon acceptance of each deliverable by the Project Authority and following a review and edit of submitted documents.

10. Budget:

The cost of the project shall not exceed the available budget of \$35,000 (including applicable GST or HST).

11. Suitability of Service

Availability of Personnel: The Bidder certifies that, should it be authorized to provide services under any Contract resulting from this solicitation, the persons proposed in its bid will be available to commence performance of the work immediately upon contract award and will remain available to perform the work in relation to the fulfillment of this requirement.

12. Selection Criteria:

Mandatory Requirements

The Mandatory requirements listed below will be evaluated on a simple pass/fail (i.e. compliant/non-compliant) basis. Proposals which fail to meet the following mandatory requirements will not be assessed further and the bidder's proposal will be considered non-responsive.

- A detailed statement of the work planned for carrying out this project **MUST** be submitted, including the identification of specific outputs and a schedule for their completion.

Rated Requirements

Proposals will be evaluated in accordance with the evaluation criteria contained in "Evaluation Criteria". Only those proposals which are compliant with all of the Mandatory Requirements and then achieve a score of **seventy percent (70%)** or better in each of the technical and contractor characteristics sections of the point rated evaluation criteria will be considered for contract award.

The compliant bidder with the highest combined rating of technical merit (**70%**) and price (**30%**) shall be selected as the preferred supplier to implement the Project provided that the estimate total price does not exceed the maximum budget for this requirement as stated above in article 10.

A further breakdown of how points will be awarded is presented in Appendix A.

Selection Criteria	Total Points	Min Pts Required
Technical		
<p>a) Understanding of the Policy & Research Issues Related to the Objectives and Scope of Work The bidder should demonstrate their understanding of the project requirements and objectives by situating the proposal within existing research and literature on the topic while also demonstrating awareness of HRSDC policy research interests. Bidders who submit a proposal which only copies directly from the context section of the RFP will not be awarded points under the demonstrated understanding section.</p>	30	
<p>b) Proposed Theoretical Approach Proposals will be evaluated on the theoretical approach outlined in the proposal. Where insufficient theoretical literature is available, or is inappropriate for the issues to be pursued, the proposal should provide a sound conceptual framework from which to address the issues. The bidder should ensure to thoroughly describe the relevant theoretical approach(es) (or conceptual framework) to be used in the research and provide an understanding of how such approaches will meet the scope of work.</p>	20	
Total Technical	50	35
Characteristics of the Contractor		
<p>c) Relevant research experience Bidders should provide evidence of experiences in conducting research on similar or related topics, as well as expertise in the analysis & synthesis of information as it pertains to the subject area.</p>	30	
<p>d) Relevant policy-oriented writing experience Bidders should provide details of relevant experience and competencies that clearly demonstrate the bidder's experience in writing policy-oriented documents for various audiences.</p>	20	
Total Contractor Characteristics	50	35
Total	100	70

APPENDIX A
Selection Criteria Points

TECHNICAL PROPOSAL

a) Understanding of the Policy & Research Issues Related to the Objectives and Scope of Work: (maximum 30 points)

Not addressed: 0 points
Fair: 1-10 points
Good: 11-18 points
Very Good: 19-25 points
Excellent: 26-30 points

Subjective Rating Criteria

- **Not addressed:** A demonstrated understanding of the departmental policy and research issues is not provided in the proposal or was copied directly from the proposal. There was no discussion of the specific research questions chosen to be addressed by the bidder.
- **Fair:** The bidder has little understanding of the policy and research issues and / or does not provide sufficient links to past research in the area. The bidder provided little elaboration from the proposal background. Little to no discussion of the narrowed research topic and questions to be addressed was provided.
- **Good:** The bidder has a satisfactory understanding of policy and research issues related to the objectives and scope of work. The proposal provided a good background description that built on the outlined background in the proposal. Some discussion of the research questions and narrowed topic was provided in the proposal.
- **Very good:** The bidder has a good understanding of how such research fits with policy and research issues related to the objectives and scope of work. The background was well written, clear and provided a good understanding of the state of past research. The proposal provided a good description of the narrowed research topic, its implications for the department, and the research questions to be addressed within this project.
- **Excellent:** The bidder has a sophisticated understanding of how such research fits with the policy and research issues related to the objectives and scope of work. The background provided an excellent link to previous research on the topic. An excellent understanding of the more narrow research focus was provided. A detailed understanding of the research questions and the impacts of this research for the department was outlined in the proposal.

b) Proposed Theoretical Approach: (maximum 20 points)

Not addressed: 0 points
Fair: 1-10 points
Good: 11-14 points
Very Good: 15-17 points

Excellent: 18-20 points

Subjective Rating Criteria

- **Not addressed:** No information on the theory is provided in the proposal.
- **Fair:** Proposal inadequately describes the proposed theory and / or the proposed theory is inappropriately linked to the research (i.e. inaccurate, outdated and / or irrelevant) and does not meet the project objectives.
- **Good:** The proposal provides a limited description of the theory proposed. The theory is appropriate for understanding key aspects of the problem / issue.
- **Very Good:** The proposal provides a good description of the theory, is well suited for the topic, and will meet the project objectives.
- **Excellent:** The proposed theory is discussed in depth and demonstrates a sophisticated knowledge of the topic. The selected theory demonstrates a clear understanding of key issues within the topic.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONTRACTOR

c) Relevant research experience: (maximum 30 points)

Not addressed: 0 points
Fair: 1-10 points
Good: 11-18 points
Very Good: 19-25 points
Excellent: 26-30 points

Subjective Rating Criteria

- **Not addressed:** No information on relevant research experiences provided in the proposal.
- **Fair:** Contractor has demonstrated less than two years relevant experience in the subject.
- **Good:** Contractor has demonstrated two to three years relevant experience in the subject, reflecting limited variety and depth.
- **Very Good:** Contractor has demonstrated more than three years of relevant experience in the subject, reflecting adequate variety and depth.
- **Excellent:** Contractor has demonstrated more than five years of relevant experience in the subject, reflecting significant variety and depth.

d) Relevant Policy Oriented Writing Experience: (maximum 20 points)

Not addressed: 0 points
Fair: 1-10 points
Good: 11-14 points
Very Good: 15-17 points
Excellent: 18-20 points

Subjective Rating Criteria

- **Not addressed:** No information on experience writing research papers and policy-oriented documents for various audiences provided in the proposal.
- **Fair:** Body of research demonstrates less than two years of relevant experience in writing research papers and policy-oriented papers for various audiences.
- **Good:** Body of research demonstrates two to three years of relevant experience in writing research paper and policy-oriented documents for various audiences.
- **Very Good:** Body of research demonstrates substantial experience (more than three years) in writing research papers and policy-oriented documents for various audiences relevant to the issues in this RFP.
- **Excellent:** Body of research demonstrates significant relevant experience (more than five years) writing research papers and policy-oriented documents for all audiences.