

# **Request for Proposals for Formative and Summative Research to Inform on the Development of Sesame Street Resources for Educators in Head Start Programs and Informal Childcare Providers that Focus on Young Children’s Emotional Wellbeing and Distress**

## **Background**

The mental health crisis is a public health emergency and, therefore, top of mind for many. However, there is minimal attention to the impact this crisis has on young children. Simultaneously, early childhood programs have stated the need for new and more relevant approaches to support well-being holistically while identifying the gravity and frequency of early signs of young children's distress. In particular, for those young children most disenfranchised, there is a demand for early childhood programs, traditional and nontraditional, to revise their focus and priorities to adequately prepare our next generation to succeed in school and in life. A key recommendation is for these early childhood programs to prioritize high quality, culturally responsive mental health support for young children, their families, and staff<sup>1</sup>.

To respond to this need, Sesame Workshop will be developing a multi-prong evidence-based model and newly created targeted Sesame resources to support the emotional well-being of children and families, with a special emphasis on those most marginalized, while equally building capacity and emotional support for traditional and nontraditional early childhood providers/staff. The target audience and delivery of these resources will be two early childhood systems that are especially vulnerable: publicly funded programs, including Head Start, and the unrecognized, under resourced informal network of childcare providers, such as Family Childcare (FCC) and Family, Friend and Neighbor childcare (FFN).

## **The Proposed Needs Assessment and Formative Research**

Research is at the core of Sesame Workshop’s model for creating engaging and effective content for young children and families. To that end, we are seeking a research team to conduct formative research to inform on the development of the proposed Sesame Street emotional wellbeing resources. This formative research will include two phases: a needs assessment phase and a formative research phase.

### **1. Needs Assessment**

The needs assessment phase will consist of interviews or roundtable meeting with leaders who have expertise in the development, distribution, implementation, promotion, and execution of training and professional development of Head Start staff serving preschool age children (3- to

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<sup>1</sup> Kerker BD, Rojas NM, Dawson-McClure S, Gonzalez C. Re-imagining Early Childhood Education and School Readiness for Children and Families of Color in the Time of COVID-19 and Beyond. *American Journal of Health Promotion*. 2023;37(2):270-273. doi:10.1177/08901171221140641c

5-year-olds) and childcare providers such as FCCs and FFNs caring for children birth to 5 years-old, with a particular focus on topics related emotional wellbeing of young children,

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caregivers/parents and staff. The goals of these interviews will be to gather information from these leaders on:

- identifying appropriate Head Start staff (educators, directors, family services staff, or others) who work with children and families on the promotion of emotional wellbeing and identifying and coping with distress
- identifying other providers working with young children and families who may be a target audience for Sesame Street resources promoting emotional wellbeing and identifying and coping with distress (e.g., home visitors, mental health consultants, etc.)
- current needs of Head Start staff and informal childcare providers, and/or other types of providers regarding children's, primary caregivers,' and providers' emotional wellbeing
- existing trainings and professionals' development, resources, and/or curricula for Head Start staff and/or informal childcare providers related to the emotional wellbeing and distress of preschool children, their families, and/or staff who support these children and families
- best practices regarding promotion, distribution and implementation of professional development and trainings for Head Start and/or informal childcare providers focusing on emotional wellbeing and distress of young children and adults who care for them
- evaluations, including desired outcomes, measures and findings regarding trainings, resources, and/or curricula related to emotional wellbeing and distress of young children, caregivers and/or staff.

## **2. Formative Research Phase**

The Formative Research phase will consist of interviews and/or surveys of Head Start staff and informal childcare providers (such as FCCs and FFNs) supporting low income and/or marginalized young children who are not yet in kindergarten and their families. Participants will be presented with prototypes of the Sesame Street emotional wellbeing and distress resources and asked for their feedback and recommendations. Primary caregivers may also be interviewed to obtain their feedback as well if budget and time allow. These prototypes will be developed based on the findings from the needs assessment phase described above. The goals of this phase will be to explore:

- providers' knowledge and attitudes about children's, caregivers,' and providers' emotional wellbeing and distress;
- providers' perception about whether and how much emotional wellbeing impacts children and the adults who care for them;
- familiarity and comfort with supports and/or resources that promote emotional wellbeing for children and their caregivers and providers;
- feedback and recommendations on prototypes proposed by Sesame Workshop designed to support emotional wellbeing (i.e., appeal, clarity, usefulness, relevance, implementation, promotion, distribution)

The research team will be responsible for identifying and selecting qualified Head Start staff and informal child care providers (those serving low income and minority families), as well as assisting with identifying and contacting leaders with expertise in providing professional development (preferably with a focus on emotional wellbeing and distress) for Head Start staff and informal child care providers.

We encourage a mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) approach. We expect the primary method to be qualitative and consist of adult responses collected via interviews (individual or group). This may be complemented with a quantitative approach during the testing phase, such as online surveys of a larger sample of providers, to help further inform on responses gathered via interviews. Addition of a quantitative approach is preferred, but not required, and may be employed if budget and timeline allow.

## **Sample**

The target sample for the needs assessment phase will include English-speaking and bilingual (Spanish/English) leaders with expertise in promoting emotional wellbeing and wellbeing in formal, specifically Head Start, and informal childcare settings through professional development of providers working in these settings. Leaders should include those working in regional and/or national Head Start offices, as well as state and local organizations serving Head Start and informal childcare providers on how to support the emotional wellbeing and wellbeing of families and children.

The target sample for the test phase of the formative research will include English-speaking and Spanish-speaking informal childcare providers and Head Start staff, as well as other providers supporting young children and families as recommended in the needs assessment phase. Head Start staff may include educators, family services staff, directors, or other Head Start staff working at local centers who support the emotional wellbeing of young children ages 3- to 5years-old, the children's primary caregivers, and/or of the Head Start staff. Informal child care providers may include FFNs, such as family and/or close friends (for example, a relative such as a grandparent or other relative, or a neighbor or friend) who care for the preschool age child of another person for at least 8 hours a week in their own or the child's home, for little or no pay. Informal childcare providers may also include, but not limited to, FCCs who may or may not be licensed and are paid to care for a small group of children other than their own in the provider's home.

Research team will assist with identifying and recruiting, in conjunction with Sesame Workshop, participants for the needs assessment phase of the formative research. Research team will also lead recruitment of qualified participants for the testing phase, including identifying appropriate informal childcare providers and Head Start staff, as well as other providers recommended in the needs assessment phase. Head Start staff may include educators, directors, family services staff or others, as determined by the needs assessment phase and Sesame Workshop recommendations.

Recruitment should consider demographic variables such as providers' role, level of education, years of experience, specific experience with supporting children's and families' emotional wellbeing and wellbeing, race, geographic region, ages of children they support, native language(s) spoken (English, Spanish), as well as demographic variables of children and families they support, such as race, geographic region, income, native languages. The analyses will examine the research participants' responses by providers' role, level of education, years of experience, age of children being served, native language (English/Spanish), geographic region.

## **Objectives and Measures**

The main objectives of the formative research are to answer the following research questions:

- What factors contribute to positive shifts in awareness about the importance of emotional well-being for young children and their parents and providers?
- What strategies and activities do stakeholders perceive are needed to increase awareness of, and supports for, emotional wellbeing and distress and their effects on children and families and the providers who support them?
- What practices, resources and supports are being utilized by providers to promote emotional wellbeing and identify distress in children, parents, and providers? Do they perceive these practices, resources, and supports as effective or not?
- To what extent do Sesame Workshop's proposed resources provide tools and guidance that are perceived as relevant and actionable?
- To what extent, and in what ways, would stakeholders participate in and use the Sesame Workshop resources?
- What are the barriers and facilitators to implementing the Sesame Workshop resources?
- To what extent, and in what ways, do stakeholders perceive Sesame Workshop's proposed resources as valuable and effective or not?

The measures used in the formative research will include discussion guides for the participant interviews and may also include online surveys if a quantitative component is included.

## **Timing**

The formative research will take place over 8–9-month, beginning in July 2024. Proposals should plan for completion of the needs assessment phase by September 30, 2024, and the testing phase by February 21, 2025. A report of the findings of the needs assessment phase will be due on September 30, 2024. A summary report of preliminary findings for the testing phase will be due on January 31, 2025. A final report of the testing phase will be due on February 21, 2025.

## **Deliverables**

Researchers will deliver the following for the formative research:

1. **Needs assessment report:** After completing the interviews or roundtable meeting with leading experts, researchers will submit a report of findings.

2. **Data analysis plan for testing phase:** Before data collection begins for testing phase, researchers will submit an analysis plan that describes how data will be analyzed to answer the project's research questions.
3. **Endline test phase report:** The researcher will submit a draft version of the report of the findings to Sesame Workshop for review prior to the completion of a final report (in English). The report must include an Executive Summary.
4. **PowerPoint summary:** The researcher will submit a summary of findings with appropriate graphics in PowerPoint created for a non-research audience.
5. **Data, original instruments, videos, IRB approval document, consent forms, data and other material:** Researchers will be required to submit an electronic version of data (in mutually agreed upon format), as well as original instruments (screeners, discussion guides, etc.), and provide access to videos made during the research sessions. Instruments will be in the local language (if applicable) and English. Quantitative data will be submitted in English and qualitative data should be submitted in the original language and an English translation. These items will become the property of Sesame Workshop. Note: The researchers selected will have access to instruments used in previous Sesame Workshop assessments, which can be used as a base for creating questionnaires and other data collection devices for the proposed study.

### **The Proposed Summative Research**

Following the Needs Assessment and Formative research rounds and content creation, we are seeking a research team to conduct summative research to assess the impact of bilingual emotional wellbeing & distress resources with Head Start staff and informal childcare providers supporting low income and/or marginalized young children who are not yet in kindergarten and their families. The research will be organized in three phases: piloting, data collection & analysis, and reporting.

#### **Phase 1: Piloting (Tentative timeline: July to September 2026)**

This phase will employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This phase will be used to pilot instrument to assess the impact and implementation of emotional wellbeing & distress materials with qualified Head Start staff and informal childcare providers (those serving low income and minority families).

#### **Phase 2: Data Collection & Analysis (Tentative timeline: December 2026 – December 2027)**

Phase 2 will assess the impact of emotional wellbeing & distress materials with qualified Head Start staff and informal childcare providers (those serving low income and minority families). The methods and design of data collection will be informed by the methods used during the formative research, which may include, but not be limited to, a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g., a pretest/post-test design, individual interviews, focus groups, etc.). Pre-implementation surveys will include questions to assess:

- Providers' knowledge and attitudes about children's, caregivers,' and providers' emotional wellbeing and distress;

- Providers' perception about whether and how much emotional wellbeing impacts children and the adults who care for them;
- Familiarity and comfort with supports and/or resources that promote emotional wellbeing for children and their caregivers and providers;
- Use of strategies for promoting positive emotional well-being and coping with distress, and comfort and familiarity with existing supports and resources.

Post-implementation surveys will follow up after resource exposure to gauge shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and reported behaviors. We anticipate the use of web-based distribution platforms for an online survey, using partner organizations' contact lists as the primary mode of survey administration. Qualitative data collection may include focus groups, individual interviews, ethnography, and/or case studies, and supplement quantitative findings by providing additional information and context and may also be an important tool for collecting data from members of the target audiences who may lack literacy or digital access and skills. All data collection efforts will adhere to the principles in the ethical standards of research guidelines set forth by the Society for Research in Child Development's Governing Council (2021).

### **Phase 3: Reporting (Tentative timeline: January-April 2028)**

During this phase, a comprehensive report will be compiled, refined, and presented to communicate the impact of Sesame Workshop's emotional wellbeing & distress materials. The reporting process includes:

- **Drafting the Report:** Compiling and analyzing data collected during Phases 1 and 2 to draft a detailed report showcasing the findings and lessons learned from the research project.
- **Refinement:** Iterative refinement of the report based on feedback from internal and external stakeholders to ensure accuracy and relevance.
- **Presentations:** Final reports will be presented to Sesame Workshop, project partners, funders, and government agencies through presentations and workshops.

The reporting phase aims to provide transparent and actionable insights to optimize emotional wellbeing & distress materials for the benefit of children, caregivers, Head Start & informal childcare providers, and other stakeholders.

### **Sample**

Similar to the Formative round, the sampling procedure must consider demographic variables such as: providers' role, level of education, years of experience, specific experience with supporting children's and families' emotional wellbeing and wellbeing, race, geographic region, ages of children they support, native language(s) spoken (English, Spanish), as well as demographic variables of children and families they support, such as race, geographic region, income, native languages. The analyses will examine the research participants' responses by providers' role, level of education, years of experience, age of children being served, native language (English/Spanish), geographic region. A power analysis should accompany the description of sampling methodology. A comparable control group that is unexposed should also be sampled to allow a basis for comparison.

## Objectives and Measures

The aims of the summative research will be informed by the findings put forth by the Formative round and shall include, but are not limited to exploring:

- The effectiveness of Sesame Workshop's emotional wellbeing & distress resources and activities (i.e., implementation strategies, events, professional development, communication strategies, as well as resource formats – both physical, as well as video, and digital, etc.)
- Changes in Head Start and informal childcare providers' knowledge, attitudes, and reported behaviors surrounding supporting emotional wellbeing for young children and their caregivers

The researcher will be responsible for identifying internationally validated measures and adapting them for this evaluation if necessary. New measures must be pilot tested and validated prior to fieldwork. Please note that the objectives and measures for the summative evaluation will be informed by the lessons learned from the formative results and other implementation-related activities, and thus are subject to change.

## Timing

The summative research is expected to begin in July 2026, pending finalization of content. Proposals should plan for submission of final deliverables by April 2028.

## Deliverables

Researchers will deliver the following for the summative research:

1. **Data analysis plan:** Before data collection begins, researchers will submit an analysis plan that describes how data will be analyzed to answer the project's research questions.
2. **Endline test phase report:** The researcher will submit a draft version of the report of the findings to Sesame Workshop for review prior to the completion of a final report (in English). The report must include an Executive Summary.
3. **Final Report:** The researcher will submit a final report of the findings I (in English) to Sesame Workshop. The report must include an Executive Summary
4. **PowerPoint summary:** The researcher will submit a summary of findings with appropriate graphics in PowerPoint created for a non-research audience.
5. **Data, original instruments, videos, IRB approval (if needed), consent forms, data and other material:** Researchers will be required to submit an electronic version of data (in mutually agreed upon format), as well as original instruments (screeners, discussion guides, etc.), and provide access to videos made during the research sessions. Instruments will be in the local language (if applicable) and English. Quantitative data will be submitted in English and qualitative data should be submitted in the original language and an English translation. These items will become the property of Sesame Workshop. Note: The researchers selected will have access to instruments used in previous Sesame Workshop assessments, which can be used as a base for creating questionnaires and other data collection devices for the proposed study.

## Proposal Components

Proposals shall include a provision for delivery of the following elements:

1. **Research Design:** Proposals shall outline the design of a potential study or set of studies including:
  - Description of qualitative methods (individual interviews, focus groups, in-person, virtual, synchronous/asynchronous), and, if proposed, quantitative methods (online survey or other method).
  - Data collection plan, including a description of monitoring and quality control measures for data collection; a description of how researchers are trained and ways in which researchers will ensure that they adhere to the ethical standards of research set forth by the Society for Research on Child Development (<http://www.srcd.org/about-us/ethical-standards-research>). We expect the evaluation team to obtain IRB approval for this work.
  - Data analysis plan that outlines how data will be analyzed to answer project's research questions
  - Timeline
2. **Budget:** A detailed budget for the project shall be submitted with the research proposal. The budget shall include separate sections for both Formative and Summative, outlining costs associated with each data collection wave.
3. **Key personnel:** CVs or biographic summaries of key personnel.
4. **Past evaluations and references:**
  - A 1-2-page description of similar or comparable studies -- preferably examples of both formative and summative research studies -- in which the agency has engaged in the past, or similar work sample.
  - Contact information for at least two previous clients for references

### **Deadline**

Proposal should be submitted by **June 21, 2024**. A decision will be made by **June 28, 2024**.

### **Budget**

The research proposal for both the Formative & Summative should not exceed a budget of US \$700,000.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Sesame Workshop is particularly interested in proposers who have experience conducting formative **and** evaluation research with offices of Head Start and/or U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and who have experience with their IRB approval processes. Proposals will also be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Experience in conducting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative research and knowledge of media research methodologies
- Experience conducting research with formal and informal childcare providers, including those working in Head Start settings on implementation and on impact of professional development
- Experience conducting research with Head Start staff and in Head Start settings, and with the IRB process of Office of Head Start and/or U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Experience conducting research with young children

- Experience conducting research with primary caregivers of young children birth to 5years-old
- Experience conducting research with informal child care providers, such as Family, Friend, and Neighbor care providers (FFNs) and Family Child Care providers (FCCs)
- Experience conducting research on family engagement among formal and informal early childhood providers is preferred.
- Experience conducting research on development of resources for young children and adult caregivers, preferably focused on promoting emotional wellbeing and/or identifying and coping with distress
- Experience conducting evaluations of impact of media-based resources for young children birth to 5-years-old, their adult caregivers and/or early childhood providers.
- Experience conducting research with English and Spanish primary caregivers and child care providers of children ages birth to 5-years-old.
- A demonstrated capacity to work in a range of settings and to deliver products in a timely fashion under tight and strict monitoring, management and deadlines
- The ability to produce high-quality reports
- Feasibility of study within budget and time parameters
- Appropriateness of research design
- Capacity to execute proposed study

### **How to Submit Proposals**

Submit proposal via email to: [david.cohen@sesame.org](mailto:david.cohen@sesame.org). Please note the following in the email subject heading: **Proposal for Formative & Summative Research to Inform Upon Sesame Street Emotional Wellbeing and Distress Resources for Early Childhood Providers**. Upon submission of a proposal, bidders will be asked to submit a Contractor Information Form.

Questions are welcomed! Please contact [david.cohen@sesame.org](mailto:david.cohen@sesame.org).

### **Disclaimers and Terms of this RFP**

1. Sesame Workshop will not compensate offerors for preparation of their response to this RFP. All expenses incurred in the preparation of the Proposal in response to this RFP is at your sole cost and responsibility.
2. This RFP does not guarantee a resulting contract and Sesame Workshop is under no obligation to offerors unless and until a written agreement is signed by Sesame Workshop and offeror.
3. Sesame Workshop may withdraw or amend this RFP at any time.
4. This RFP may result in one or more contracts for parts of activities.
5. Sesame Workshop may request additional rounds of responses based on more detailed instructions or requirements.
6. Information provided by Sesame Workshop in connection with the RFP process, including this document, is confidential to Sesame Workshop. Proposals produced under this RFP belong to Sesame Workshop. Any distribution of such Proposals must first have written authorization from Sesame Workshop.
7. Offerors are not entitled to any compensation or payment for any submission to Sesame Workshop or Sesame Workshop's use of such submission for any purpose. Offerors

acknowledge that Sesame Workshop in good faith will have the sole discretion to determine whether any compensation is due to offerors for use of any submitted materials. Offerors recognize that any creative materials, concepts, ideas, and techniques that are disclosed to Sesame Workshop may be similar or identical to, in whole or in part, to creative materials, concepts, ideas and techniques already developed, in development, or to be developed in the future by Sesame Workshop.

8. Offeror will retain a copy of its Proposal and hereby releases Sesame Workshop from any liability for loss of, or damage to the copy of the Proposal that is submitted to Sesame Workshop.
9. All intellectual property and related materials provided to offeror by Sesame Workshop shall remain the sole and exclusive property of Sesame Workshop and no license is granted to offeror other than as may be necessary for offeror to prepare and submit its Proposal hereunder. Offeror understands and agrees that Sesame Workshop is entitled to use any part of the Proposal which is not concrete or does not itself constitute protectable and/or copyrightable property without compensation to offeror.
10. No work may be sub-contracted out on this proposal, unless otherwise agreed to by Sesame Workshop.
11. Any contract to be entered into between Sesame Workshop and an offeror will be for work provided solely as work-made-for-hire, with ownership and all rights belonging to Sesame Workshop.
12. The cost estimate and proposed timeline and all other terms and conditions stated in your Proposal must remain valid for 180 days from the date of delivery of the Proposal to Sesame Workshop.