



# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

☎ 212-979-2369    ✉ susan.notkin@cssp.org    🌐 www.cssp.org

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP)—a national organization recognized for its leadership in shaping policy, reforming public systems and building the capacity of communities—solicits proposals from communications firms with extensive experience in nonprofit, social justice, educational and/or public good marketing to develop key messages and plan for a national public awareness campaign. This campaign aims to change the way the public thinks about youth and adolescence. Our goals are to (1) increase the knowledge and understanding of what is happening during this period of life and (2) infuse a new understanding of how youth can be supported in ways that help them navigate the period of adolescence and grow into responsible adults. We envision a broad, culturally responsive, communications campaign that targets adolescents of every demographic, as well as the adults, institutions and organizations that touch the lives of youth. Ultimately, to reach our objective of improving the lives of young people, we envision a scalable, multi-wave campaign that addresses general awareness, behavior change and systems change.

### ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

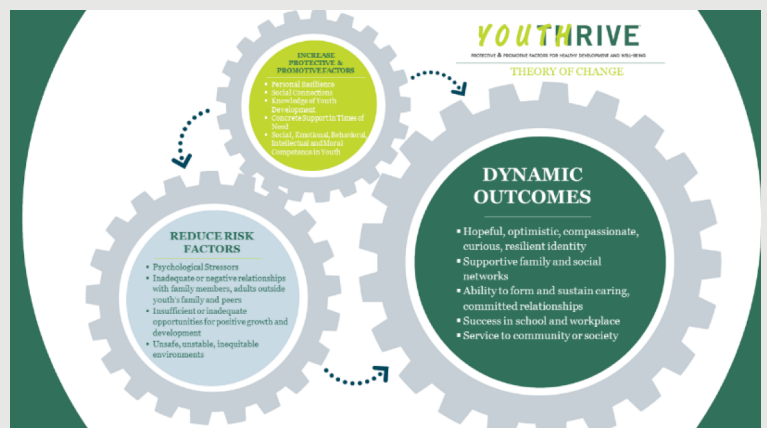
The Center for the Study of Social Policy, headquartered in Washington, D.C., works with state and federal policymakers, public administrators, philanthropic, private sector, judicial, research and community partners across the country. Our mission is to create new ideas and promote strategies that produce equal opportunities and better futures for all children and families, **especially those most often left behind.** Using data, extensive community experience and a focus on results, CSSP's work covers several broad areas, including:

- promoting public policies that strengthen vulnerable families
- mobilizing a national network to prevent child abuse and promote optimal development for young children
- assisting economically distressed neighborhoods with the tools needed to help parents and their children succeed
- reforming child welfare systems
- changing the way public systems serve and support adolescents in the country's child welfare and juvenile justice systems
- promoting the achievement of equitable outcomes for children of all races, ethnicities and income levels

Over the past 30 years, CSSP has played key roles in shifting the public's and the provider community's understanding of child abuse prevention; the value of public, private and community partnerships to address child abuse and neglect; and the value of family preservation as a vital strategy for protecting children.

### CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY'S Youth Thrive™ Initiative

In 2011, CSSP turned its attention to improving the dismal outcomes faced by youth in the foster care system. We set out to understand what youth need to thrive and what stood in the way of their health and development. To answer these strategic questions, we examined research on adolescent brain development, the impact of trauma on development, resiliency and positive youth outcomes. We then spent more than a year vetting this knowledge base with prominent researchers, child welfare administrators, youth practitioners and youth themselves. Based on these conversations and a synthesis of the research, we introduced the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors Framework, which identified the risks that impede healthy development; the protective and promotive factors that enhance well-being and mitigate risk; and the indicators of healthy adolescent development.



The guiding premise of Youth Thrive™ is that all youth, including those at heightened risk for negative outcomes, have a better chance of achieving healthy outcomes if they have experiences that support the building of the Youth Thrive™ protective and promotive factors and the reduction of risk factors.

For background info on Youth Thrive™ go to [www.cssp.org](http://www.cssp.org).



## WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT YOUTH

The research behind Youth Thrive™ addresses what all youth need to thrive. All youth need supports, experiences and opportunities that intentionally build the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors. Only recently has science established that adolescence is a period of profound brain development and that the brain, as well as a young person's potential, is not determined by age three as was once thought. In fact, positive experiences and supports can help young people make good decisions and survive the often turbulent years of adolescence. Research suggests that the unevenness in the development of the rational prefrontal cortex and the emotional limbic system may explain why some youth engage in sensation-seeking, risky or reckless behaviors and make decisions based on feelings rather than logic.

Both the promising and troubling news is that the adolescent brain is adaptable and shaped by multiple experiences. While positive experiences lead to optimal brain growth and development, adverse childhood experiences, such as exposure to abuse, neglect and violence can disrupt brain development. This means that the adolescent period presents a new chance for helping adults support teens as they become healthy, productive adults and good decision-makers.

Over the past five years, CSSP has:

- Partnered with seven jurisdictions to use the Youth Thrive™ Protective and Promotive Factors Framework as a lens through which to re-think their policies, programming, staff training and contracting of services impacting youth in the foster care system, juvenile justice and runaway and homeless youth systems
- Identified 15 exemplary programs across the country that are on-the-ground examples of practice aimed at building the five protective and promotive factors
- Developed training for staff who work with youth on building the protective and promotive factors
- Begun developing an assessment tool for youth to indicate their needs and strengths.

## The Campaign

Although the research helps us to understand why many adolescents act the way they do and the role that adults (and peers) play in guiding youth, the prevailing narrative about youth too often continues to portray adolescents as problematic. They are supposedly uninterested in parental guidance and viewed as out of control, as people to be feared, subdued or discounted. This narrative affects the way parents parent, teachers teach, police interact and how a host of other institutions engage with young people. Because of misconceptions or ignorance about why youth act the way they do, young people face unnecessary traumas (foster care experience, juvenile justice, and homelessness) that they take with them into adulthood. Parents, caregivers, teachers, social workers and others who interact with youth want to know more and do more. Just as there is ample opportunity to learn about infant and child development, helping adults should have the information needed to help them to support the development of adolescents in their lives. This campaign is to fill this void of information. We want adults who interact with youth in all spheres to understand:

- why youth act as they do (knowledge of youth development)
- what they could do to support youth in managing emotions (resilience)
- why it is important to involve peers and parents and other adults for guidance and support (social connections)
- how to model the value of asking for help in finding resources for success (concrete supports)
- how to help youth build skills to navigate the adult world (social emotional and cognitive competencies)

Respondent will support the development of impactful, thoughtful and carefully targeted campaign messaging that would reposition the following misconceptions about youth and adolescence:

- **Youth are predators—wild, irresponsible, immoral, violent.** The negative media portrayal of youth perpetuates a deficit-based and inaccurate view of all youth, but sometimes intensely so with youth of color or other identities
- **Youth are “crazy.”** They lack an ability to control themselves and think about the future and the consequences of their behavior. There are several significant gaps in the public's understanding of adolescence, which is in fact a period of significant brain growth and change and experiences, when opportunities and supports make a life-long difference in a young person's ability to thrive.

### What We Know and What We Want Others to Know

- We know more than ever before about why adolescents act the way they do based on new scientific discoveries. Adolescence is period of major changes. Those changes are normal, not pathological.
- All of our encounters with youth matter. These encounters write on the tablets of their hearts and minds and shape who they become. Opportunity and support will influence their trajectory. There are negative consequences of – and missed opportunities from – not investing in youth or helping youth fulfill their maximum potential.
- **All** youth are assets to American society. How adults act and what happens to youth can either be good or bad for us all. We want more of the good.
- What is good for your teen is good for all teens. The maladaptive behaviors that are seen as harmless by certain teens should not be viewed as warranting harsh penalty for others. The behavior arises from the same set of internal processes. So, just as one teen is fortunate to be born into a financially stable, educated family, other teens need access to the same opportunities and care to be successful adults.

### Target Audiences

- Adults who are engaged with and make decisions in the lives of youth (e.g., parents, teachers, coaches). We envision youth as effective messengers.
- Existing Youth Thrive™ jurisdictions could pilot and test the first phase of the campaign, so human services professionals - social workers, mental health providers, law enforcement and probation officers, etc. - would be targeted.

## Objectives and Measures of Success

CSSP is seeking a creative partner to develop key messages, an overall communications strategy and materials and, ultimately, plan for a broader messaging campaign that utilizes the full-range of communications channels and strategic partnerships.

We want to improve the lives of young people and recognize that doing so will require broader understanding of adolescent development and helpful approaches for how to support them. To drive behavior change and systems change, we believe it is necessary to engage a broader audience. One example of this theory of change is found in the growing understanding among both lay people and policy makers of the benefits of early learning and the adoption of early learning programs and policy changes in jurisdictions across the country. We believe this didn't happen simply because people saw it as beneficial to "at risk" children, but rather was a core need for all pre-school children (including their own).

We seek assistance in making the information we know improves the lives of young adults – the protective and promotive factors distilled in the Youth Thrive™ framework – accessible, digestible, useful and well-known to a broad audience of parents, caregivers, service providers and policy makers. How will we know we've been successful?

- Members of the targeted audiences (youth, their families, and the institutions that support them) can articulate what youth need, why they act the way they do, and what they as adults can do to support youth by building the promotive and protective factors that enhance young adult well-being;
- Youth-serving agencies take meaningful action to incorporate aspects of the Youth Thrive™ framework in their policy making and practices;
- Positive images of youth and the Youth Thrive™ framework are present in multimedia nationally.

## Budget

The budget for the message development and campaign planning phase is \$50,000. A flat-fee contract paid monthly is contemplated as actual number of hours required will vary monthly. Please clearly indicated your total proposed fee for this first phase of the campaign.

## Proposal Submission and Evaluation

Applications for this project are due to Susan Notkin ([susan.notkin@cssp.org](mailto:susan.notkin@cssp.org)) by 11:59 EST on September 23, 2016. CSSP will host a phone conference for respondents on September 9, 2016 at 2:00 ET. Please confirm your participation on the call by September 2<sup>nd</sup>. Follow-up interviews with finalists will take place in late September, and final decisions and execution of the contract will be in effect as of October 30, 2016.

Proposals should be no longer than seven pages and include:

- A narrative description of the approach you would take to this work, including:
  - Approaches to developing key messages of the campaign, communications strategy, and creative materials to be developed;
  - Descriptions of how research on public views on adolescence, polling and other data may be used to frame the messages;
  - Timelines for developing messages and proposing implementation plan, including timing of deliverables and approval protocols for deliverables;
  - Adopting relevant analytics and metrics for the implementation phase of the campaign.
- A proposed scope of services and budget for this project, including a description of how you would allocate resources to manage the objectives of this work, organizational capacity, and staff bios.
- Examples of working with non-traditional outlets and out-of-the-box partnerships to drive messaging and awareness.
- An explanation of experience or proposed approaches to developing campaign materials and collateral that reach underserved communities, including use of video, social media, and traditional media.
- Detailed capabilities list and current client roster, including case studies of relevant experience developing and implementing this type of campaign.
- Code of ethics statement and three professional references.

It is our intention to award the contract to the respondent with the best combination of attributes to perform the required services. We will evaluate programs based on compliance with the requirements of the RFP, applicants' experience and qualifications and our evaluation of the applicants' ability to meet our service needs with all due speed and attention. Other factors include the creativity in applicants' approach and methodology, quality of project work plan, description of proposed deliverables and project management and internal control to ensure a successful campaign.