Southern Regional Learning Lab
Request for Applications (RFA) – Evaluation Contractor

**Introduction**
School Food FOCUS, a program of Public Health Solutions, is a national collaborative that leverages the knowledge and procurement power of 43 large school districts across the country. The FOCUS mission is to make school meals nationwide more healthful, regionally sourced and sustainably produced, while transforming food systems to support students' academic achievement and lifelong health.

The FOCUS Southern Regional Learning Lab (SRLL) brings together seven school districts to leverage their combined buying power and redirect purchasing practices to access more wholesome food by connecting the districts with suppliers, government, and community advocates. Building on work accomplished and underway in the FOCUS Upper Midwest Regional Learning Lab (UMRLL) and National Procurement Initiative (NPI), SRLL participants will concentrate on two food categories and their supply chains: chicken and produce. (For more detail on the UMRLL and NPI, see Appendix A: Upper Midwest Regional Learning Lab and Appendix B: National Procurement Initiative.)

The SRLL has just entered Phase One (April 2015 – June 2016) of a three-year implementation. FOCUS seeks an evaluation contractor (individual or team) that will work closely with the program participants and staff to refine and implement an evaluation protocol—designed during the SRLL Assessment Phase (April 2014 – March 2015)—for this initial implementation year, and ideally to continue over the duration of the project.

**Process**
The SRLL evaluation contractor will use quantitative and qualitative methods to understand, analyze and interpret the activities and outcomes of the SRLL. The SRLL is a stakeholder-driven project with a participatory research lens. Project goals and activities are developed collectively among school districts and their community partners, and these participants are asked to contribute to all parts of the project, including evaluation. As such, FOCUS seeks applications from evaluation professionals that have the expertise, experience and a demonstrated commitment to work in a collaborative way with newly formed coalitions—in this case, participating school districts, partners and FOCUS staff. Successful

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1 Prince William County Public Schools (VA); Charleston County School District (SC); Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (TN); Gwinnett County Public Schools (GA); School District 5 of Lexington and Richland Counties (SC); Aldine Independent School District (TX); Orange County Public Schools (FL)
candidates will be flexible, open to changes and continuous development of project elements, and able to communicate about evaluation in a readily comprehensible way that translates meaning to professionals from other fields.

**Major Deliverables**

*Refinement of Evaluation Protocol*

The major areas of investigation of the evaluation are outlined in the current evaluation protocol:

- SRLL partnership and collaborative action
- Process of systems change
- Impact on school food procurement and supply chains
- Food quality and student/staff attitudes toward changes
- Replication and sustainability

Methods proposed are quantitative and qualitative: annual surveys, interviews, analysis of procurement data, and site visits. The contractor will refine the evaluation protocol to reflect current realities, including developing a detailed reporting timeline and scaling activities based on available resources.

*Implementation of Evaluation Plan*

The selected contractor will conduct evaluation activities as outlined in the refined protocol during Implementation Phase One.

*Other Responsibilities*

The contractor will be expected to communicate regularly via email and phone with FOCUS staff and SRLL participants, as well as communicate when requested with the FOCUS Leadership Council, key funders, and the broader FOCUS network. The contractor will also attend in-person meetings of the SRLL.

**Compensation:** $50,000 to $80,000 (including travel). Applicants are encouraged to submit bids below or above the stated range if detailed rationale for such can be supported.

**Project term:** May 2015 through May 2016. Given quality of work and relationship with the SRLL, the contractor may be asked to lead implementation of the next two Implementation Phases.

**To apply, please submit:**

1) A cover letter (no more than two pages) that includes specific past experience with:
a. Evaluation projects
b. School nutrition programs (or other food service experience)
c. Working with K-12 school districts
d. Multi-stakeholder collaboration and/or participatory research

2) Estimated hourly rate for services
3) Resume/bio of all potential participants

**Evaluation of Applications**

Proposals will be evaluated based on consultant qualifications, past experience, familiarity with relevant topics, and alignment with FOCUS goals and methods. Proposal principals may be asked to participate in a phone interview. Preference will be given to applicants based in the South.

Please submit completed applications and send any questions to arosenthal@schoolfoodfocus.org by midnight on Sunday, April 19.