

## **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)**

### **Business Planning Services for the TEAR Handle With Care (HWC) Program**

**Issued by:** Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU)

**Issue Date:** June 1, 2025

**Response Deadline:** August 29, 2025

**Contact Person:** Wendy Smith, Director, Early Childhood, Family & Community Services

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## **I. Purpose**

The Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) is seeking responses from qualified individuals or firms with expertise in business planning, nonprofit sustainability, and cross-sector partnership development to support the creation of a comprehensive business plan for its Trauma Education, and Response Handle With Care (TEAR HWC) Program.

This business planning process is intended to position the TEAR HWC program for long-term sustainability, statewide expansion, and the potential replication of its data system, training model, and cross-sector coordination practices.

This RFI is for information-gathering only and may lead to a formal solicitation or direct procurement.

## **II. Program Background**

The Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) respectfully requests funding to sustain and expand the Trauma Education and Response Handle With Care (TEAR HWC) program—an innovative, cross-sector initiative designed to support children exposed to violence and trauma. Children who experience trauma often struggle in school due to impaired concentration, emotional dysregulation, absenteeism, and declining academic performance. Simultaneously, law enforcement officers frequently encounter children at traumatic scenes but lack a coordinated system to ensure those children receive the support they need.

Established in 2021, the TEAR HWC program addresses this gap by fostering trauma-informed collaboration among law enforcement, schools, and community organizations. Based on the national Handle With Care model,<sup>1</sup> TEAR HWC takes this proven strategy a step further. When law enforcement interacts with a school-age child during a response, they send a notification to the child's school. School staff then “handle with care,”

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<sup>1</sup> [West Virginia Center for Children's Justice - Handle With Care](#)

checking in with the student and alerting appropriate personnel to offer additional support as needed.

TEAR enhances this model through three innovative additions:

1. Law enforcement officers are trained to ask families if they need assistance with basic needs and, with consent, refer them to community-based providers.
2. The program ensures consistent follow-up and feedback loops between law enforcement and schools, reinforcing sustained engagement and accountability.
3. In 2024, the TEAR program launched a standardized [HWC data collection system](#),<sup>2</sup> streamlining how police officers and first responders submit notices to school districts. Unlike most HWC programs nationwide, which lack formal data tracking, TEAR HWC's system provides a distinct advantage—enabling comprehensive program evaluation, continuous quality improvement, and data-informed decision-making.

Since its inception, the TEAR HWC program has supported nearly 800 students across 17 school districts in Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties. To date, TEAR HWC staff have trained more than 2,700 police officers, first responders, and education professionals in the Handle With Care process and trauma-informed care practices. The program has also established strong partnerships with 19 police departments and over 220 community organizations. With additional funding, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit will expand the program's reach, strengthen its impact, and enhance its data infrastructure to support continuous learning and improvement.

## **Program Goals**

The TEAR HWC program seeks to:

1. Strengthen cross-sector communication and coordination to support trauma-exposed youth.
2. Equip law enforcement and school personnel with trauma-informed strategies that foster safety and healing.
3. Expand access to behavioral health services and essential resources for children and families in crisis by strengthening and streamlining referral pathways.
4. Use data and feedback to measure impact and inform ongoing improvements.

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<sup>2</sup> The TEAR data system was made possible by a grant through the R.K. Mellon Foundation and was built by the [Data Warehouse Consultants](#).

## Core Activities:

1. **Training:** Provide comprehensive training for law enforcement and school staff on child trauma, the HWC model, and protocols for notification and response.
2. **Data Collection & Feedback:** Maintain a streamlined, automated system for documenting notices and follow-ups, providing monthly outcome summaries to law enforcement and stakeholders.
3. **Resource Access:** Facilitate warm hand-offs from law enforcement to community providers to ensure families receive timely support for basic needs.
4. **Community Collaboration:** Convene Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to share best practices, improve services, and build lasting partnerships between schools, first responders, and community organizations.

## Program Impact

- **Police Department Engagement:** There are currently 19 active TEAR HWC police department partners, with 9 in Allegheny County and 10 in Westmoreland County.
- **School District Participation:** TEAR HWC is currently implemented in 13 school districts, with 5 located in Allegheny County and 8 in Westmoreland County.
- **Training & Reach:** Since 2021, TEAR HWC staff—certified as Trauma-Informed Care Practitioners—have trained 2,744 individuals, including 521 police officers and first responders, and 2,223 educators, administrators, and school personnel.
- **Resource Connection:** Of the 813 TEAR notices submitted to date, 47% identified tangible family needs such as food, diapers, and clothing. Through partnerships with AIU family centers, 100% of these needs were successfully met.
- **Notifications & Responses:** From October 1, 2021, to April 21, 2025, a total of 813 TEAR HWC notices were sent—49% from Allegheny County and 51% from Westmoreland County—resulting in 794 children receiving care and support through school-based trauma-informed responses.
- **Age Breakdown:** The majority of HWC notices involved elementary-aged students (38%), followed by middle school (30%), high school (28%), and pre-kindergarten (4%). (N=188)
- **Comparative Context:**

- In 2023, Maryland reported 851 HWC notices across 336 schools (averaging 2.5 notices per school)<sup>3</sup>, while TEAR HWC generated 331 notices to just 5 school districts (averaging 66 notices per district), demonstrating a significantly higher engagement rate per district.
- In 2024, Maryland issued 493 HWC notices across 282 schools, averaging 1.7 per school. By contrast, TEAR HWC issued 198 notices across 8 school districts (averaging 24.8 notices per district), again highlighting the program’s deeper integration and usage within each district served.
- **Ongoing Professional Development:** TEAR HWC hosts Quarterly Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in participating districts, bringing together school staff, first responders, and community partners for continued trauma education, collaboration, and networking. These efforts align with the 50+ professional development trainings delivered by program staff to date.

As the TEAR HWC program continues to grow and evolve, AIU seeks to formalize a long-term strategy to sustain its infrastructure, scale its services, and deepen its community impact.

### III. Project Goals and Scope

AIU seeks a strategic partner to develop a detailed, forward-looking business plan for TEAR HWC. The selected partner will:

- **Conduct a Current-State Assessment**, including program strengths, challenges, and resource needs. This should also include a review of AIU’s legislative and policy environment, and potential cost-sharing frameworks with partners.
- **Complete a Market and Needs Analysis**, identifying regional and national demand for trauma-response programs, and assessing opportunities for replication and earned income.
- **Develop a Revenue and Funding Strategy**, including identification of state, federal, and philanthropic sources; feasibility of state budget line-item funding; and earned revenue from licensing, consulting, or access to TEAR’s data system.
- **Build Cost Models and Financial Projections** for 1-, 3-, and 5-year horizons, along with adaptable budgeting tools.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://handlewithcaremd.org/hwc-data.php>

- **Outline an Operational Roadmap**, including staffing models, technology needs, and strategic partnerships to support growth and sustainability.
- **Design a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy**, focusing on community partner buy-in, legislative support, and compelling impact communication.
- **Deliverables include:**
  - Comprehensive written business plan
  - Executive summary slide deck
  - Budget and financial modeling tools

#### **IV. Qualifications and Desired Expertise**

AIU welcomes submissions from consultants, firms, or collaborative teams with relevant experience in:

- Strategic or business planning for nonprofit or public-sector initiatives
- Financial modeling and sustainability strategy
- Understanding of trauma-informed systems and experience working with cross-sector programs that service children and families (e.g., education, law enforcement, behavioral health, or youth-serving systems)
- Navigating state and federal funding streams
- Community stakeholder engagement and consensus-building

#### **V. Submission Instructions**

Submissions should demonstrate familiarity with public-sector sustainability planning, and clearly describe how your team would tailor its approach to the goals and context of the TEAR HWC program.

Please send a brief response (maximum 10 pages) including:

1. **Overview of your organization or team**, including relevant experience
2. **Approach** you would take to develop the business plan
3. **Sample of relevant past projects**, especially those in public education, trauma services, or sustainability planning
4. **Team bios or qualifications**
5. **Estimated cost range** for services (non-binding)

**6. Proposed timeline** for the work

Send all responses to **Wendy.Smith@aiu3.net** by **August 29, 2025**.

AIU may request follow-up conversations with select respondents prior to issuing a formal RFP or making a final selection.

**VI. Disclaimers**

This RFI is issued for information-gathering purposes only. It does not constitute a solicitation or offer to contract. AIU may issue a formal RFP or select a qualified respondent based on RFI responses. All information submitted will be treated as confidential and used solely to inform planning.