ESSENTRIFY

PROGRESS REPORT

UPDATED THROUGH 13 OCTOBER 2026

The $57 Billion Accountability Gap: So What?

PAPER 4 IN A CONTINUING SERIES

Do opioid settlement RFPs set the money up to learn what works, and to last?

A running analysis from request for proposals (RFPs) to results, updated as the corpus grows

39 RFPs reviewed

29 issuing bodies

17 states

8 design dimensions

BACKGROUND

Settlement dollars are flowing to state and local governments with expectations for evidence-based use, accountability, and lasting benefits. Earlier work examined who is responsible for setting standards to assess whether funded interventions work and produce lasting results. Does the RFP establish the expectations needed to demonstrate success and sustainability?

THE PROJECT

We are developing tools to help jurisdictions strengthen the funding process while studying the full continuum: RFP, application, work plan, and results. Each stage can keep or lose the thread of evidence, sustainability, and accountability. This report examines the RFP stage and develops a framework for all four. Our corpus grows through published RFPs and those jurisdictions evaluate or draft with our Engine.

METHODS

We reviewed 39 RFPs from 29 issuers in 17 states across eight dimensions. Each coded entry includes a supporting quote and confidence rating. Two team members check AI coding against preset agreement thresholds. We also check whether multiple RFPs from the same issuer disproportionately influence the findings.

RESULTS SO FAR

69%

Measures may miss the mark

18 of 26 assessable RFPs required measures that did not match what funded work could reasonably influence. That makes success harder to demonstrate. (61% excluding the state cluster.)

<1 in 10

No common yardstick

Fewer than one in ten named an established outcome framework, making it harder to combine findings across communities and build evidence of what works.

54%

Sustainability asked for, but not defined

54% made sustainability plans mandatory or scored. Of 28 that asked, half gave no guidance on an adequate answer; only one set concrete criteria. How can lasting results be planned consistently?

46%

Applicants choose the measures

46% let applicants propose their own measures (57% including issuer-suggested menus). Without common expectations, comparing results can be harder.

19

19 different designs - and counting

19 profiles across 29 entries: varied designs complicate consistent expectations and shared learning.

SO WHAT?

The agreements intend funds to follow and contribute to evidence-based practice, yet many RFPs leave key measurement and sustainability choices to applicants. These findings do not show misuse. Even when programs perform well, relying on the RFP for guidance may not be enough to demonstrate success, compare results across programs, or learn from them. These are findings from 39 RFPs, not national prevalence.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR ISSUERS

- Specify how evidence-based practice applies to the funded work
- Explain adequate sustainability plans
- Require measures within reasonable influence
- Use common structures for comparable results

NEXT: Expand the RFP corpus, complete reliability checks, then examine applications, work plans, and results.

Essentrify, Inc. | Dormer, Cheruiyot, G. Adepoju, D. Adepoju