



## Welcome to ICF *Education Connections*

The December 2016 issue of *Education Connections* reports on ICF's nine-year collaboration with the Texas Education Agency, including recent work on the Texas Public Prekindergarten Study and the Texas GEAR UP. We also report on a series of products prepared by ICF staff derived from the Social Innovation Fund evaluation. ICF author Tony Marchese's new book speaks to ICF's capability in leadership development.

ICF's expertise extends from early education to K-12 schooling, to postsecondary education and workforce development. The solutions we devise with our clients enhance their capacity to achieve the outcomes they seek. Visit our [website](#) for more information about ICF in education.

### The Texas Education Agency and ICF: Nine Years Working Together

What is unique about ICF's work with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the abundance



of our collaborative projects over the past nine years—and the consistency and quality of our relationship. TEA has contracted with ICF on more than a dozen projects, including program evaluation, applied research, best practice identification, and policy analysis.

How do we explain the success of this ongoing collaboration? One key is ICF's expertise in real world research: ICF proposes actionable solutions that address primary research goals but retain the flexibility to cope with challenges like working with state data and with schools.

Another key is knowledge and understanding of the state, its policy and legislative mandates, as well as engaging with organizations located in Texas. Most ICF contracts with

TEA have featured local partners, of whom about 75% were minority- or woman-owned businesses.

Two recent contracts illustrate these principles.

Released in September, the Texas Public Prekindergarten Study report recommended a maximum of 22 students and a student-to-teacher ratio not to exceed 11 students per teacher to create conditions for early education success in pre-K classes. ICF's findings made news across the state, as the [Texas Tribune](#) and the advocacy group, [Texans Care for Children](#) headlined the study and its ramifications for future state policy. See the full report at [this link](#).

ICF is mid-way through its seven-year comprehensive evaluation of the Texas GEAR UP, which supports middle and high schools with high populations of low-income youth by instituting strategies to increase academic rigor and postsecondary success. ICF's evaluation is designed to illuminate the extent to which Texas GEAR UP strategies meet program goals, its impact on students, parents, and school personnel and its cost and sustainability over time. See [this link](#).

## ICF Produces Innovative Reports Based on National Evaluation

For the past three years, ICF has conducted for the Corporation of National and Community Service (CNCS) a national evaluation of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) program, one of the six tiered-evidence federal initiatives that combine public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, evidence-based solutions in health, youth development, and economic opportunities to improve the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The ICF



team has produced a series of products that include: a quasi-experimental design study of SIF grantee organizational capacity, a meta-analysis of grantee evaluation reports, seven issue briefs highlighting the best practices and lessons learned on key programmatic areas, and three Return on Investment (ROI) pilot studies on employment and training programs. These reports will continue to be posted on the CNCS website at [this link](#). The client has credited these products as “innovative and ground-breaking.” ICF was recently awarded a contract to continue the national assessment for another year.

## New Book on Leadership Development by ICF Author



In his forthcoming book, *Design: Discovering Your Personal Owner’s Manual*, ICF’s Dr. Tony Marchese presents a compelling case for reassessing how we facilitate personal leadership development. Several of the book’s key concepts and activities have met with great success in leadership retreats for community and business leaders, governmental employees, and technical assistance consultants.

Conventional, deficit-based approaches encourage remedying a mindset or behavior, but Marchese argues that these can impede authentic growth. Interdisciplinary in scope and appeal, *Design* encourages readers to be particularly attentive to their “birthright gifts,” often long ago forgotten or set aside, residing within us in a state of dormancy and neglect. Tapping into our *Design* (or what is right about us) and constructing an accompanying *Personal Owner’s Manual* (plan of action) positions us, regardless of our age or acumen, to make personal choices that are deeply informed and intentional rather than arbitrary or based upon trial and error. *Design* is scheduled to be released in Spring 2017. Watch for additional details in an upcoming edition of *Education Connections*.



## AEA Papers & Presentations Posted on ICF Website

At the [American Evaluation Association](#) meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, October 24-29, 2016, ICF staff members showcased our collaborations with clients as well as our expertise on a variety of topics, including complexity theory, evaluation frameworks, and financial education evaluation.