

National Technical Assistance Center on Kinship and Grandfamilies

HHS-2021-ACL-AOA-TAKG-0103

Informational Conference Call Transcript

Moderator: Greg Link

June 8, 2021 - 2:00 pm ET

Operator: All participants will be in a listen-only mode until the question-and-answer session. During that time, if you'd like to ask a question, please press Star 1 and clearly record your first and last name for your question to be introduced. I'd like to inform all parties that today's call will be recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect at this time. I'd like to turn the call over to your host, Mr. Greg Link.

Greg Link: Great. Thank you so much, Becca, and welcome, everyone, to this informational call for the Administration for Community Living's Notice of Funding Opportunity for the National Technical Assistance Center on Kinship and Grandfamilies. This call is scheduled to go for approximately one hour. And during that time, my goal is to provide all of you with a bit of an overview of the funding opportunity itself. I want to walk through some key points throughout that funding opportunity that we would very much like for potential applicants to be aware of, as they're preparing their applications.

As I've mentioned, my name is Greg Link, and I'm the Director of the Office of Supportive and Caregiver Services at the Administration for Community Living. My office resides within the U.S. Administration on Aging. And we have - my office has specific oversight responsibility for pretty much all things family caregiving and kinship caregiving related that happen in - at the Administration for Community Living.

My office also oversees a number of other programs like the Life Span Respite Care Program, our Alzheimer's Disease Program Initiative, the Elder Care Locator, our diversity portfolio of Technical Assistance Resource Centers, Person-Centered Trauma-Informed Care for Holocaust Survivors, and a number of other smaller discretionary grant programs.

I really want to thank everyone for taking the time out today to be part of this call. I believe I may be joined on the call by Jan-Sheri Morris, who is with our Office of Grants Management at ACL, and she would be on hand later on to respond to any grant-specific questions that any of you may have.

Like I said, this call is scheduled to go for about an hour, and we will be covering the contents and the - of the Notice of Funding Opportunity entitled, National Technical Assistance Center on Kinship and Grandfamilies. ACL is particularly excited to have this funding made available to us by Congress this year for this five-year cooperative agreement.

It dovetails very, very nicely with a number of major initiatives that ACL has currently going, specifically our ongoing implementation of the requirements of the National Family Caregivers Support Program, under the Older Americans Act, which does contain authorization to the State units on aging and area agencies on aging, to support kinship and grandparent caregivers.

And we also are implementing the Recognize, Assist, Include, Support, and Engage, or RAISE Family Caregivers Act, as well as the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act. So, we have quite a lot of activity going on at the national level in support of family caregivers across the age and disability spectrum. And we look forward to establishing this National Technical Assistance Center on Kinship and Grandfamilies, to focus specifically on that population.

Hopefully, you have the Notice of Funding Opportunity open in front of you. Either you printed it out or you have it open on your computer screen. It's a 42-Page document, and every - within this document, is everything that you all need to know to prepare your applications for this funding opportunity. And I want to run through some key parts of it and then open the floor for questions.

So, if you're looking at the PDF, I am on Page 2 of 41. And we have a number of key dates on that Page that you all really need to be aware of. Number one, of course, is today's date, June 8th, for the informational conference call, and that's what's happening now.

There will be a printed transcript available of this call and the Q&A session. We will post that within a few days on the grants.gov Web site, in association with this particular funding opportunity. So, if you wanted to go back and review this call from earlier, you'd be welcome to do that, and the document will be there.

The next critical date that I want you all to be aware of is the due date for letters of intent, which is June the 24th of 2021. And I'll go into the letter of intent request here in just a little bit. But those are optional, but they are a planning tool for us.

Perhaps the most critical date, though, is the due date for applications. The due date for applications submitted to this funding opportunity is July the 26th, 2021, and applications are due by 11:59 p.m. on July the 26th, 2021. Applications that are received at any point after that period, will not be accepted, and they will not be given any consideration.

So, we strongly encourage applicants to, you know, of course, get to work early on your applications, and plan to submit them a minimum of three to five days prior to the application closing date, just to make sure that you are able to successfully upload all of the required elements of your application to grants.gov. And I'm going to talk a little bit more about the grants.gov system and things that you need to be aware of as you begin preparing your applications.

So, turning to the Notice of Funding Opportunity itself, if we look at Page 2 of 41 at the very bottom, we have an executive summary, which just kind of gives a very, very high-level overview of this funding opportunity. These funds were made available, are being - are made available through the American Recovery Plan Act of 2021.

And in that Recovery Act, Congress authorized ACL to use \$10 million to establish this National Technical Assistance Center. Those funds are available to us for a full five years. And so, we intend to award that funding over that course, the course of that five-year period to a single grantee, with a federal funding level of up to 1.990 million per year for five years, for a total of about \$9,950,000 over the course of the five-year project. And I'll get into a little bit more of the specifics of what the application calls for and how the funding will work in just a minute.

If you scroll through Page 3 of 41, we provide some general background information on who are kinship families. We have spent the past couple of years working very closely with the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren.

We at ACL have learned a great deal about the importance of kinship and grandfamilies, in the lives of younger people. And we understand and have come to really appreciate the challenges that they face, the struggles that they endure, but also the tremendous need for assistance and support that they have. And we really view this opportunity to establish this resource center as a way to, on a national scale, really strengthen and grow how we as a country support kinship and grandfamilies.

And so, the grantee and their partners who are successful in this application to this Notice of Funding Opportunity, will be working very closely with ACL to establish the center and to become a real focal point for technical assistance to a variety of audiences, and we'll get into that in just a second.

If we go to Page 4 of 41, we have - we lay out the purpose, goals, and suggested outcomes for this Notice of Funding Opportunity. We begin with, again, a restatement of the American Rescue Plan, which was signed into law on March 11th.

In Section 2922 of the ARPA, it specifically authorizes ACL to establish this National Technical Assistance Center, for the purpose of expanding and enhancing capacity of States, territories, Indian tribes, tribal organizations, urban Indian organizations, and non-profit and other community-based organizations, to better serve and support the health and well-being of kinship and grandfamilies.

So, it is not a single audience that is the target for the activities of this resource center, but rather a very broad cross-section of the aging services network, really looking at States, tribes, territories, as well as - so at the very - at the State and territorial government level, the tribal level, but also at the community-based level. So, we expect the National Technical Assistance Center, to have considerable reach and scope in their efforts.

The primary goal of the - what we call it the NTAC, is to measurably increase the capacity and effectiveness of the target entities to better serve and support kinship and grandfamilies. And as such, the applicants will be expected to propose specific and measurable outcomes against which to measure their progress toward stated goals.

And over the course of the five-year project, you know, ACL is looking for outcomes that might look something like measurable increases in the number of identified existing and new evidence informed for exemplary programs or practices in use nationwide, measurable and sustained increases in the competency and capacity of the target audiences for this work, to better serve and support kinship and grandfamilies, and or, you know, measurable improvements in the ability of kinship and grandfamilies themselves to access the services and supports they need.

So, a little ways down on Page 4, we begin to see the activities and objectives of the NTAC as ACL has envisioned them. And I can tell you that we drew these almost verbatim from the language in the American Rescue Plan Act. Congress was very specific in what they

envisioned the NTAC would do.

And so, we have translated those - the wishes of Congress into this Notice of Funding Opportunity. And so, we expect them - we expect there will be broad engagement with a number of individuals with expertise in health promotion, education, nutrition, financial needs, legal, trauma, all of these incredibly important areas that are so vital to better supporting kinship and grandfamilies.

So, collaboration will be key. The identification of existing or fostering the development of new evidence-based or evidence-informed approaches, providing - directly providing training and technical assistance, facilitating and fostering learning across States, tribes, territories, and States and communities.

Also, as applicable, working with the Advisory Council to Support Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, and within the forthcoming National Family Caregiving Strategy that will be out on the streets sometime in 2022. We envision that the national strategy will include some possible actions to improve services and supports in how kinship and grandfamilies are able to navigate the support system.

And so, there would be some real opportunities for the NTAC to, you know, identify areas of the national caregiving strategy where they can make a true impact. We also expect the promotion and work towards equity and the implementation of culturally and linguistically appropriate approaches across all of the activities and with all the target audiences that we expect the grantee to work with.

We've - on the bottom of Page 5, we have laid out some priority focus areas that we expect the grantee to work on, and it's fairly broad. It's everything from health promotion to nutrition to housing needs, financial needs, trauma and trauma-informed care, criminal justice, intergenerational programming, as well as supporting, you know, the development of, you know, multifaceted community-based supports, with an eye towards equity and diversity, and targeting towards limited English proficiency populations.

But we also don't view this as an exhaustive list. We understand that we live in a very dynamic environment these days, both policy-wise and program-wise. And so, we at ACL, Lori Stalbaum, who will be the Program Officer, and myself as the Director of the cognizant office that will oversee this work, expect to have a close working relationship with the grantee and their partners, to constantly fine-tune and define new areas of focus over the

course of the five-year project. We would expect that, you know, the applicants would describe - really consider and describe how the strategies and approaches that I talked about before, will be carried out, and the means by which you're going to do that.

At the top of Page 6, we highlight some of ACL's expectations for organizational capacity to do this work. I have to emphasize again, this is a grant that will be working on a national scope. So, it is not meant to develop - to run local programs, or a resource center that has a limited focus in a single State or community. This is a national project.

And so, we will be looking for applications that propose to work on a national scope. And so, we are - you know, applicants should describe their ability to, you know, begin work rapidly, start up expeditiously, work effectively with all of the target audiences that I mentioned before, so States and tribes and territories and local communities.

How - you know, being able to employ efficient and effective strategies to maximize the available resources. And probably most important, at least from the federal perspective, is ensuring sustainability of these activities after the five-year period of funding. We have no guarantee beyond the five years of funding that's available, that Congress will choose to fund this any further.

And so, we will be looking for the grantee and their partners at every step of the way, from the very beginning, to give sustainability of their activities and efforts. Real strong consideration and attention in your applications will be scored on the extent to which you demonstrate the organizational capacity.

We also believe that no one - while there will be a single grantee, we don't believe that any one single organization necessarily can do all of this work. And so, we look very much to what applicants will propose in terms of collaboration and partnerships.

Applicants should describe the partner organization, the organizations that they will bring along with them, the roles that each will play. Letters of support from - definitely from the partnering organizations, would be a great idea, and not just boilerplate, you know, letters of support, but letters of support that articulate what each partner will bring to the effort, will be critically important.

For a project of this scope, we also encourage and, you know, hope that applicants and ultimately the grantee, would have an advisory or steering committee, and use subject matter

experts. As I mentioned before, we don't necessarily expect any one entity to be able to do all of this. There's - this is a fairly broad topic and one that requires considerable expertise.

As this is a cooperative agreement, ACL expects to be on - involved in a substantial way, in an ongoing basis, on the identification of subject matter experts to advise the work. And we are also permitting the grantee to use grant funds to provide stipends to steering committee members and other subject matter experts that are brought on board as necessary, when they work directly in connection with this project. We recognize that expertise doesn't necessarily come for free, and that to bring real expertise to the table may require some incentives. And so, stipends are permitted.

We also will permit the use of sub-grants or contracts, again, recognizing that no one single entity can probably do this. The prime grantee, the grantee of ACL, will have the ability to issue sub-grants or subcontracts. Of course, the ACL program officer will work with applicants on that.

You know, this new technical assistance center fits very squarely into ACL, and particularly the Administration on Aging long history of providing training and technical assistance through resource centers. And so, we expect that the resource center will, you know, propose technical assistance approaches that are multifaceted and multimodal. It's not going to be all webinars, and it's not going to be all printed materials, but it will be a wide range of ways that you design and deliver technical assistance.

You know, we do expect that, you know, when products and materials are developed, that of course, they're developed for public consumption, and that there would be a strong focus on effective dissemination strategies, disseminating information in fully accessible 508 compliant formats, which is a standard within the federal government and with federally funded projects.

And then finally, at the bottom of Page 7, we do speak to sustainability, and the importance of it. Each application is going to be scored in part on the extent to which a plan for the project's sustainability beyond the period of federal funding, is articulated and appears feasible and likely. So, as you're planning your applications, please give some real thought to how you're going to sustain this work beyond the period of funding.

So, moving on to the statutory authority on Page 8 of 41, this is - while the program - while the prime statutory authority - while the NTAC was authorized under Section 2922 of the

American Rescue Plan Act, we are also using the authority of Title IV of the Older Americans Act, as administered, to administer the grant. So, there are two statutory authorities that we reference here.

Moving on to Section 2, the award information. As I've mentioned, this is a cooperative agreement. And so, in a cooperative agreement, there is substantial involvement by the funder. And in this case, it's ACL, the program officer. We have an estimated total funding for the total of five years at \$9,950,000.

We will only make one award off of this Notice of Funding Opportunity. And they will - the single award will be for a five-year project, with five 12-month budget periods. And so, each award year will be - will have an award ceiling of approximately \$1,990,000 each year of five years.

We lay out beginning at the bottom of Page 8, going on to Page 9, the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement. We lay out what ACL will do. ACL will provide, you know, day-to-day federal responsibilities of grants management. We will assist the grantee with project - we'll assist the grantee in understanding the key policy concerns and some of the priority areas of ACL.

We'll work with the grantee at every step of the way throughout the course of the project, and we'll provide consultation. And we will attend and participate in major events that the grantee may put on as appropriate. We also lay out responsibilities for this - the grantee, and that is to keep us informed, participate in monthly check-In calls with the ACL program officer, Lori Stalbaum, provide drafts of all press releases and social media announcements prior to their issuance.

And probably most key right now is providing preliminary and other working drafts of all products and deliverables to the ACL project officer for review prior to dissemination. And then we indicate that we expect that final drafts of all the products and deliverables would be 508 compliant. The list of terms and conditions for both ACL and the grantee, are laid out on Pages 8 and 9. And so, please be aware of them. They will be - those terms and conditions will be incorporated by reference in the notice of award that is issued.

Moving on to Page 10, where we have eligibility information, this is a full and open competition. And so, it's open to all domestic public and private nonprofit entities, including State and local governments, Indian tribal organizations, governments, faith-

based organizations, community-based organizations, hospitals and institutions of higher education.

So, given the fact that it's full and open competition, which is the standard for most federal grant opportunities, we expect that this will be a highly competitive opportunity. And so, we encourage everyone to bring their total A-game to the application process, as well as to the collaborations that they bring to the table.

There is a matching or cost-share requirement. We have imposed a 5% match on this project, which means that ACL will fund no more than 95% of the project's total cost. And the match that the grantee brings to the table, can be either - it must be non-federal, other non-federal funds, and it can be either cash or in kind.

And we explain on Pages 10 and 11 of 41, the difference between non-federal cash and non-federal in kind. And we also provide some guidance on how to compute the match amount that you bring to the table. We also discourage you from - applicants from exceeding the minimum match requirement.

Number one, it doesn't give you an advantage in the competition. That's not something that's scored. And number two, if you propose more than the minimum match, you're held to that match requirement as part of your grant. So you need to be aware of that.

Section - item number three on Page 11, responsiveness criteria. This is something critical for you guys to be aware of as you're crafting your applications. Applications that fail to meet each one of the responsiveness criteria, and the application screening criteria, will be screened out and they won't be - they will receive no consideration.

And so, first is the application responsiveness criteria. Number one, the project that you propose, has to focus primarily on serving grandfamilies and kinship families, in which the primary caregiver is an adult aged 55 and older, or the child has one or more disabilities.

And number two, that the project activities are national in scope. And I had spoken to that a couple of minutes earlier. You know, please don't propose something that's limited to a community or to a State or to a single territory. This is a national technical assistance center, with a national scope and national effort. If either one of these responsiveness criteria are not met, your application will be screened out and will not be reviewed.

In addition, there are some important application screening criteria, and these are very technical in nature. Number one is, you know, was the application received on time? The narrative length. We're giving applicants 50 pages of narrative, which is pretty unusual, but we recognize that with a project of this size and length, that 20-page narratives probably wouldn't cut it.

And so, we're giving applicants, you know, a 50-page limit to tell their story, lay out their project, and what have you. So, please take a look at the application screening criteria. Make sure that you're doing double spaced in fonts not less than 11, and that the narrative doesn't exceed 50 pages.

If you submit more than a 50-page narrative, anything over 50 pages will just be eliminated from the application, and the grant reviewers won't be able to read it. The project work plan, letters of commitment, curriculum vitae for personnel, are not counted as part of the project narrative for the purposes of the 50-page limit. So, those are separate and apart from just the narrative.

At the bottom of Page 11, we begin to lay out the application submission information. All the applications have to be - must be submitted through grants.gov. ACL will not accept an application that is emailed to us, or submitted in any other way, other than grants.gov.

So, I would say that if you intend to submit an application, as soon as this call is over, make sure that you are registered on grants.gov and are able to submit an application. Getting a grants.gov account and being able to do that, you can take several days to a couple of weeks. So, start now. Don't wait until you're ready to submit the application and say, oh, I better get a grants.gov account. Do it now.

And so, we lay out a whole bunch of information about grants.gov. The most important thing is that if you have technical issues with grants.gov, do not call Lori Stalbaum. Do not call me. Grants.gov is not an ACL computer system. And so, we cannot help you with it. There is a toll-free number and an email address where you can write or call for technical support with grants.gov. So, please don't waste time trying to reach Lori or myself or our grants office. Contact grants.gov directly.

You also have to have a DUNS number and a SAMS number in order to submit your application. And we lay out the instructions for you to do those. Just as you are - should be checking your status on grants.gov, also make sure that your DUNS and SAMS numbers are

up to date, current, and ready to be used, because they can take up to two days sometimes to be, you know, active and all of that. So, start on those now. Work on those.

You know, Pages 12, 13, again, goes into some considerable detail about the DUNS and number and the SAMS number processes. Please pay attention to those. At the bottom of Page 13, we talk about letters of intent. We would like to have letters of intent no later than June the 24th of 2021. They are not required, but we use letters of intent as a tool to help us plan the grant review.

Number one, we need to know about how many applications we're going to be expecting, so that we can select the appropriate number of grant reviewers. We also need to make sure that there isn't a potential conflict of interest between the grant reviewers and the applicants.

And so, letters of intent help us to begin to sort through that, so that when all the applications are in, and we start the grant review, we don't run into surprises with, oh, somebody - we have so many more applications than we do reviewers, or we have grant reviewers that have conflicts of interest. So, please consider a letter of intent. It doesn't have to be anything fancy. It can be just a very simple email to Lori, saying, hey, I'm going to apply. That's all we need to know. We just need to have, you know, the information that you're going to apply.

Moving over to Page 14, and going on for a couple of pages, we lay out the requirements for the project narrative. We give you some ideas for the sample components of the project narrative. So, include a summary abstract, a problem statement, goals and objectives, you know, how you're going to manage the project and all of that. We provide that as guidance, and then we go into some considerable detail about what each of those subjects, or each of those sections of the narrative should contain. And that goes on for a few pages.

Then if we go down to Page 17 of 41, there are two sections. One is the budget narrative justification, and the other one is the work plan. I want you to really pay attention to these two sections. In addition to the regular budget document that just shows the numbers that you're going to be proposing to spend each year, you have to submit a detailed written budget narrative, and we provide a template for that.

Likewise, a work plan. We provide a template for the work plan. The budget narrative has to include a single budget for each of the project years, and then one comprehensive budget narrative that covers all five years. So, in a sense, it's six separate documents, one budget narrative for each project year, and then one comprehensive budget

narrative covering all five years.

The work plan, we require a work plan that covers all five years. So, you should clearly show the breakout of each of the years in the work plan. And work plans should be detailed enough, so that the grant reviewer, the application reviewers, can understand what the major tasks are, who's doing them, what the timeframes are.

So, please follow the guidance that's in the templates for how to establish the budget narratives and the work plans. The templates are provided as examples. You don't have to use those. You're welcome to, but you can come up with your own format. As long as you give us a complete picture, then, you know, you're welcome to use your own format.

Just keep in mind, the grant reviewers are not going to come to you with questions. Neither will ACL. So, if what you submit is not clear, it's not well organized, it will be scored accordingly, because it has - it should be very clear and organized, well organized and well-articulated.

You know, letters of intent are important. And as we discussed on Page 17, again, the submission date is July the 26th, 2021 at 11:59 p.m. And we, you know, lay out some of the things around, you know, contacting grants.gov, again, for support, and that we will not consider your application if you've failed to register on grants.gov before the application deadline and so on.

On Page 18, at the very bottom, we lay out some very, very important funding restrictions. These are established in statute. This project will not fund construction or major rehab of buildings. It will not fund basic research, and it won't fund the continuation of existing projects without expansion or new and innovative approaches to them. So, please, you know, be aware of the funding restrictions as you're writing the applications.

There's also on Page 19, some guidance around the availability of meals with grants funds. So, please, I'm not going to dig into those. They're pretty straightforward. But please do make sure that you understand those. During the business review that the grant specialists does, they will be looking very, very carefully at your budgets and budget narratives, and will come back to you if there appear to be unallowable expenses in that budget narrative, and you will be required to change those. So, please pay attention to what's not allowed and don't include those upfront.

At the bottom of Page 19, going on for a few pages, and this is really critically important, and then stop and we'll go to questions, are the review criteria that your - each application will be scored against. Each application will - can receive a maximum of 100 points.

We score applications across five different broad domains, project relevance, approach, budget, project impact, and organizational capacity. Within each of those sections, we lay out the exact criteria that the grant reviewers, who will be third-party independent reviewers, will use to evaluate each application.

They are yes and no questions. So, what I would suggest is that you become very familiar with these grant review criteria, and make sure that you can - when your application is done, you can answer yes to every one of those questions.

If you can, then you have - then it's very likely that you have a completely developed application. There's no guarantee that it's going to get funded, but you - if you're able to answer yes or you believe you can answer yes, then, you know, you should feel fairly confident that you have adequately addressed what the Notice of Funding Opportunity is asking for.

Just note that if you fail to include a budget narrative or a work plan, that entire section will be scored as a zero. We do insist on having those two pieces of information. So, again, look through the scoring criteria. They go on for a number of pages.

Starting on Page 22 to the end, there is some general administrative, you know, information about how we will review and select the grantees. The funding decisions are made by the assistant secretary or the administrator of ACL. We anticipate a September 1st start date for this project.

And so, notices of award - the single notice of award to the single grantee, will be going out sometime, hopefully before September 1st. However, the project will not start any later than September 30th. So, we have set a target date of 9/1. We hope to meet that, but just know that if it's not 9/1, it will be no later than September 30th.

And then as you go through the application, there's the templates that I referred to talk to you about. Contact information for Lori, and for Jan-Sheri, and then an explanation and instructions for all of the forms that you need to fill out that would accompany your application. So, with that, I'm going to ask Becca to open the lines and see if we have any

questions.

Operator: If you'd like to ask a question please, press Star 1, clearly record your first and last name for your question to be introduced. Again, it is Star 1 if you have a question at this time. Thank you. Our first question comes from Donna Butts. Your line is now open. You may ask your question.

Donna Butts: Thank you, and thank you, Greg. This is very helpful. I had a question. When you were describing the broad audience, which I think is very important, you talked about aging services. And I wondered to what extent you'll be looking at the child welfare system, or other service delivery systems that impact the families, given that they're older caregivers, and children and youth.

Greg Link: I think to the extent that those other systems figure in and would be logical to incorporate, I think that would only strengthen the application.

Donna Butts: Right. Thank you.

Operator: There are no further questions at this time. As a reminder, if you would like to ask a question, please press Star 1. Thank you.

Greg Link: Okay. Well, if there are no other questions, then I just want to extend my gratitude to everyone who tuned in today to participate in this call. I, you know, wish everyone the best in their application writing endeavors. Keep in mind that there will be a transcript of this call posted on the grants.gov website, in association with this particular funding opportunity announcement, in case you wanted to review the contents of anything that I went over.

If you have specific questions about the NOFO following this call, please address those questions to Lori Stalbaum. Her email is in the Funding Opportunity announcement document. She's out of the office for a couple of days, but will be responding as quickly as she possibly can upon her return. Becca, if there are no other questions, we can go ahead and end the call.

END