

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

OVERVIEW

Federal Agency:

Social Security Administration (SSA), Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support

Title:

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (WIPA)

Announcement Type:

New Announcement

Funding Opportunity Number: WIPA-WIP-15-001

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number:

CFDA 96.008, SSA Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program

We intend this Funding Opportunity to reflect the following goals outlined in the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan:

- Strategic goal: Deliver innovative, quality services
- Strategic goal: Strengthen the integrity of our programs
- Strategic goal: Serve the public through a stronger, more responsive disability program
- Strategic goal: Build a model workforce to deliver quality service
- Strategic goal: Ensure reliable, secure, and efficient Information Technology services

Source: United States, Social Security Administration, Agency Strategic Plan 2014-2018.

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/agency/asp/>

Background:

Congress intended WIPA services to offer community-based support to beneficiaries to begin, maintain, or increase work activity. As funding has remained static, we have altered the service model to focus on in-depth services to beneficiaries who are working or about to work. We have increased Information and Referral (I&R) services via a national call center. This permits WIPA projects to focus intensive services on beneficiaries requiring expertise that WIPA organizations

can provide. We are using innovative technology to serve large geographic territories via distance-services. We strengthen the integrity of our programs by assisting beneficiaries to make accurate and timely wage reports. These reports reduce the likelihood and amounts of overpayments. We provide expert technical support and active monitoring to ensure quality services, and we provide secure access to our data system to ensure beneficiary privacy and to improve future iterations of the program.

Dates:

The opening date of this announcement is the date of publication. The closing date for receipt of award applications under this announcement is 5:00PM Eastern Standard Time on **March 30, 2015**.

Letter of Intent:

We ask prospective applicants to submit on or before **February 9, 2015**, a letter of intent that includes:

1. This program announcement title, and Funding Opportunity number;
2. A brief description of the intent to apply for a WIPA award and the exact name of the organization that will apply;
3. The name, postal and e-mail addresses, and the telephone and fax numbers of the entity's director; and
4. Names of the key personnel, if known, as well as partner institutions and agencies.

The letter of intent is not required, is not binding, and does not enter into the review process of a subsequent application. The sole purpose of the letter of intent is to allow Social Security staff to estimate the potential review workload and avoid conflicts of interest in the review. Send the email letter of intent to SSA-TA@grantreview.org.

Pre-application Teleconferences, Webinars and Competition Website

As applicants submit questions regarding the application submission process and programmatic content of this Request for Applications (RFA), we will post a list of questions and answers on the Internet at (http://www.ssa.gov/oag/grants/ssagrant_current.htm#sb=1). Submit questions to SSA-TA@grantreview.org no later than March 23, 2015. Potential applicants should monitor the website frequently to ensure that they have the latest information, updates and answers.

Additionally, we will post, on the same website, announcements regarding two webinars or teleconferences we will host regarding this opportunity. If you plan to apply, you will need to register for one of these two events. Periodically, we may post important materials to the same website.

Full Text Announcement

I. Funding Opportunity Description

Introduction:

Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) projects are community-based organizations that provide counseling and support to disabled beneficiaries of the Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. On or before August 1, 2015, we will award cooperative agreements for a network of WIPA projects as authorized under Section 1149 of the Social Security Act. This Funding Opportunity represents the first re-compete of the WIPA program since 2006. With this Funding Opportunity, we seek WIPA cooperative agreement awardees that will provide services across the country through July 31, 2020, pending availability of funds over a five-year period of performance.

The purpose of the program is to support beneficiaries who want to return to work to make a successful and profitable transition to the workforce. Beneficiaries that continue to work improve their economic independence and financial security. WIPA projects help beneficiaries take advantage of our work incentives programs, which may delay or reduce the effect of work on monetary benefits and health insurance. Additionally, WIPA projects act as repositories for information about other work incentives, benefits counseling services, and other resources that may help beneficiaries succeed in their work attempts, or may assist beneficiaries to improve financial stability as they return to work.

WIPA projects serve beneficiaries who are age 14 and older, and receive any of the following benefits based on their own disabilities:

- Social Security Disability Insurance Benefits;
- Childhood Disability Benefits;
- Disabled Widow(er)s Benefits;
- SSI based on blindness or disability;
- Medicare under the Extended Period of Medicare Coverage (for former disability beneficiaries performing substantial work);
- Medicaid under Section 1619(b) of the Social Security Act (for SSI beneficiaries ineligible for payment due to work income);
- A State supplementary SSI payment (even if the beneficiary is not due a Federal SSI payment); or
- Medicare coverage based on disability and Medicare qualified government employment.

WIPAs provide long term planning for transition-aged youth and may begin providing services to beneficiaries as young as 14. Often, younger individuals with disabilities are not encouraged by school or family supports to consider summer and part-time jobs, build employment resumes, plan for an economically secure future or develop self-concepts as employable individuals. WIPAs provide support earlier to educate and encourage a smoother transition from the protected school environment to the adult service system, and to a more successful working future.

WIPA projects employ Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs). CWICs counsel beneficiaries about work incentives and the effect of work on other Federal, State, and local benefit programs and employment supports. CWICs are charged with providing beneficiaries with accurate, timely, and understandable information. This includes helping beneficiaries to understand and use programs that support entry into the workforce, such as the Social Security Ticket to Work program and the Plan to Achieve Self-Support (PASS). CWICs also assist beneficiaries to identify and connect with vocational services and supports, as well as other services, such as Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS), an award program also funded by our agency to assist beneficiaries to remove barriers they may experience that preclude, delay, or deter work goals.

CWICs not only provide guidance to beneficiaries about available work incentives, but also facilitate their use. For example, a CWIC may assist a beneficiary to develop a PASS or may provide guidance to beneficiaries on saving documentation and when and how to submit wage reports to Social Security and other benefit providers.

Because of the complexity of work incentives, disability support, and poverty reduction programs, we require WIPA staff to participate in an intensive training and pass a rigorous certification process prior to working with beneficiaries. We provide extensive technical support via a Social Security contractor, to ensure the technical information disseminated by CWICs is correct and applicable to each participating beneficiary's situation.

During the training and certification process, prospective CWICs will learn about all of the following topics:

1. Work incentives applicable under Titles II, XVI, XVIII, and XIX of the Social Security Act, including extended Medicare and continued Medicaid for working individuals;
2. Benefits and work incentives offered under other Federal benefit programs, including, but not limited to, subsidies under Housing and Urban Development (HUD), HUD's Family Self Sufficiency program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Aid to Needy Families, Medicaid programs, including Medicaid waiver services and Medicaid buy-in programs, Veteran's benefits, and other Federal benefits;
3. Work incentive programs of particular interest to transition-aged youth between the ages of 14 and 25;
4. Poverty reduction programs, including Individual Development Accounts, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and similar programs;
5. Rehabilitation programs such as those provided by State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, Employment Networks (EN), and the Veteran's Administration;
6. Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended;
7. Best practices for marketing to State VR agencies to provide services under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA);
8. Counseling beneficiaries regarding the health insurance programs, regulations, and protections available throughout the United States or territories such as those authorized under the Health Care Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA), Federally mandated Medicaid coverage, Medicare coverage as it relates to disability benefits, and the Affordable Care Act;

9. Conducting outreach with beneficiaries and community partners, including working with the Program Manager for Recruitment and Outreach authorized under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act;
10. Prioritizing workloads;
11. Conducting effective benefits counseling and analyses for diverse populations and for differing levels of understanding;
12. Methods and procedures for verification of benefits, developing past work, conducting research on benefits using the Social Security Program Operations Manual Systems, and other resources;
13. Preparing written Benefits Summary and Analyses (BS&A) to document the counseling process;
14. Maintaining and protecting beneficiary records;
15. Conducting long-term, intensive beneficiary follow-up to support successful job acquisition and retention;
16. Best practices for providing WIPA services, including outreach to diverse and underserved populations; and
17. Methods of data collection, performance measurement, quality assurance, and best practices for WIPA management, staffing, and supervision.

We expect CWICs to understand how benefits, services, and work incentives interact with the lives and expectations of disability beneficiaries attempting to work. To do this, CWICs must be willing and able to research programs and policies affecting the beneficiaries with whom they work. CWICs verify and analyze benefits, synthesize this information in the context of the person's work goals, and ensure the services beneficiaries receive are accurate, timely, and useful.

Program History:

Section 1149 of the Social Security Act, which was added by section 121 of Public Law (P.L.) 106-170, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, requires that the Commissioner of Social Security establish a community-based work incentives counseling program. WIPA is the current implementation of this requirement.

We entitled an earlier iteration of these services under the Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) program. BPAO started in 2000 and provided information, referral, benefits counseling, and short-term support to beneficiaries working or thinking about work. The program expired at the end of September 2006.

On October 1, 2006, we awarded cooperative agreements for a WIPA program. Although WIPA served a similar function to BPAO, WIPA services were more intensive, longer-term, and had an enhanced focus on beneficiaries who were working or actively seeking employment. Social Security issued 106 cooperative agreements at the beginning of the WIPA program. Four WIPA projects closed during subsequent years. On June 30, 2012, Social Security terminated the remaining 102 WIPA projects due to the absence of Congressional appropriation for the program that year.

Congress authorized Social Security to resume WIPA funding with the March 26, 2013 Continuing Resolution (P.L. 113-6). Social Security reopened the WIPA program on August 1, 2013. Not all of the prior awardee organizations were available to provide services. Social Security negotiated with prior WIPA awardees to provide full coverage of the country. Ninety-five WIPAs currently receive funding that will expire July 31, 2015.

Since the inception of benefits planning under P.L. 106-170, services have become more intensive and targeted to beneficiaries who are serious about working. Current WIPA cooperative agreements provide intensive, long-term support to beneficiaries to assist them not only to begin to work, but to navigate the complex and potentially frightening changes that occur as beneficiaries reduce or eliminate dependence on benefit programs. The current cadre of WIPAs focuses from 25 to 35 percent of its work effort on basic I&R.

Service Model:

This RFA includes a modified service model that differs from past iterations. Congress established the funding levels for these services in 1999, and the available funding remains unchanged. Because of the leveling of available resources, we require organizations under this iteration of the WIPA program to provide more targeted, comprehensive, and intensive services with a large percentage of those services offered to beneficiaries via distance-based delivery. We will implement a limitation on general I&R to fifteen percent of the overall work effort, and we encourage projects to use the Help Line (described in the next paragraph) as a general contact number for I&R services. Historically, projects have spent a significant portion of their time responding to inquiries characterized as I&R; that is, providing general information about work incentives, answering questions about the impact of work on benefits, and offering referrals to other employment related agencies. The results of such inquiries do not yield measureable employment outcomes.

Instead, the new service model requires WIPAs to prioritize those beneficiaries that are working or on the brink of work for immediate direct services. The results of WIPA intervention with groups of targeted beneficiaries is more likely to result in measureable and positive employment outcomes.

Our Beneficiary Access and Support Services (BASS) contract with Booz Allen Hamilton is currently responsible for the Help Line operations. The BASS contract expires on September 28, 2015, shortly after we announce the new WIPA awards. We anticipate continuing the Help Line under a new contract scheduled to begin on September 29, 2015. Under this iteration of the WIPA program, WIPAs will direct or “push” beneficiaries that appear to be earlier in the employment decision process to certified Help Line representatives for I&R services, so that WIPA staff can focus on intensive benefits planning for targeted beneficiaries. Help Line staff receives training and certification similar to the training CWICs receive, though with the emphasis more on determining appropriate referrals.

In order to target the services to the highest priority populations, WIPA services will focus on beneficiaries who are working, including self-employed, about to begin employment or self-employment (job offer pending or business about to start up), or who, based on informed

analysis, are very serious about working and ready to work. A recent Social Security evaluation of the WIPA program, completed by Mathematica Policy Research, found that the majority of beneficiaries seeking WIPA services fall into the following categories:

About four in five recent WIPA enrollees (81.9 percent) were actively engaged in finding a job or were already working when they first contacted a WIPA project About half of those (41.1 percent overall) were looking for a job and 8.7 percent overall had a job offer pending. Nearly one-third (32.1 percent) of all WIPA enrollees were already working (30.7 percent employed by someone else, 1.4 percent self-employed). The remainder (18.0 percent) were considering work but not actively pursuing employment.*

* Schimmel, Prenovitz, Livermore, Bryce. “Evaluation of the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program in 2011: Beneficiaries Served, Services Provided, and Program Costs—Final Report.” Page 31. Mathematica Policy Research. April 30, 2013.

The beneficiaries who are working, actively seeking work, or ready to work are most at need of immediate, in-depth analysis of their benefits situations. WIPA services ensure that beneficiaries understand how work affects their benefits and how WIPA intervention may reduce or eliminate the potential for overpayments. WIPA services also support beneficiaries to begin, maintain, or increase work activity and will help beneficiaries understand how to sustain health insurance under Medicaid or Medicare while working.

The Role of WIPA in the Disability Service Community:

Beneficiaries with disabilities often access an intricate system of services that assist them to meet daily financial and physical needs. Beneficiaries may fear losing these supports if they start to work. In addition, confusion engendered by the complexity of these programs may act as a barrier between the beneficiary and self-sufficiency through employment. In addition to providing direct services, WIPA projects also collaborate and coordinate services with the full range of Federal, State, and local programs and benefits that exist in the WIPA projects’ service areas. WIPA programs disseminate information about work and work incentives to beneficiaries and service providers and offer outreach to underserved populations. The service is free, accessible, and confidential. WIPA assists beneficiaries to anticipate changes, to find resources that may help beneficiaries to continue working, to make appropriate reports, and to build financial stability and success in their goals.

Success for beneficiaries does not simply mean getting a job. Many work attempts fail because of benefit or service changes beneficiaries do not anticipate or understand. For example, a beneficiary may stop working when they receive an overpayment letter, unexpectedly lose a housing subsidy, or lose other supports due to increased income. In order to prevent such an occurrence, WIPA projects provide support from the point a beneficiary seriously considers

work until the point the beneficiary no longer needs or desires the assistance the WIPA can provide.

WIPA programs not only provide direct counseling about work incentives and benefits, but they serve as a liaison to employment service providers and link beneficiaries to other services. These may include, but are not limited to, services offered by State Vocational Rehabilitation programs, Employment Networks (ENs) (agencies providing rehabilitation services authorized under Section 1148 of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act), America's Job Center services, and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS).

WIPA projects connect beneficiaries to Federal, State, and local poverty programs such as Individual Development Accounts, the Earned Income Tax Credit and HUD Family Self-Sufficiency Plans. In addition, WIPAs act as a source of information, counseling, and referral for the many protections for people with disabilities under the law. Examples include, but are not limited to, protections under:

- HIPAA;
- COBRA;
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- The Work Opportunities and Innovations Act (WOIA);
- Medicaid buy-in programs under the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 and P.L. 106-170; and
- Other Federal, State, and local programs designed to meet the needs of beneficiaries attempting a successful entry into the workforce.

WIPA projects must engage in outreach. WIPA outreach serves to inform local service providers about WIPA services and Social Security's efforts to support work activity. We envision WIPA projects as a clearinghouse for accurate, timely, and appropriate information for beneficiaries, for referrals to other resources in the communities they serve, and as an ongoing comprehensive support to beneficiaries and as a way station on the road to employment. WIPA projects also target transition-aged youth ages 14 to 25, and other underserved populations. Direct beneficiary-centered benefits counseling remains the WIPAs' primary objective. Seeking employment is difficult for everyone. It is especially difficult for individuals with disabilities that have been successful in applying for benefits and related supports to assist them to live with a disability. Our programs require applicants to assert that work is not possible at a substantial level, and in some situations, they must prove the limitations that their disability presents. This process can take many months or even years. The successful beneficiary may then fear returning to the workforce at any level since obtaining benefits was such a struggle. However, the result of remaining entirely on benefits is often poverty.

The risk of long-term poverty is especially high for transition-aged youth receiving SSI benefits. Youth can anticipate long-term poverty if they do not receive sufficient support and encouragement to attempt to work and create an independent and economically self-sufficient future. SSI youth may have family members afraid to lose the security and support SSI provides. In addition, SSI youth are sustained and supported throughout their school years, but must advocate for themselves once they reach adulthood, possibly without the skills to do so.

The current SSI benefit level is below poverty level. Due to the SSI Earned Income Exclusion, SSI beneficiaries who work or are self-employed are usually better off financially. Youth on SSI, however, usually have no work history or experience with which to build secure futures. WIPAs should focus on this population to bridge the gap between school supports and the transition to adult life.

Once the beneficiary is convinced to consider the advantages and benefits of employment, ongoing WIPA support is critical. First, WIPA staff provides a safe haven to seek resources that the beneficiary may not realize exist. Second, WIPA projects provide accurate, clear, and comprehensive information and support to enable the beneficiary to navigate the complex programs and work incentives that may provide a cushion for the beneficiary as he or she reenters the job market.

WIPA projects assist beneficiaries to understand their earnings, the effect of earnings on benefits, and when, how, and what to report. WIPA services will help working beneficiaries avoid overpayments, incorrect payments, and underpayments. Unexpected changes, like discovering an overpayment, may permanently discourage beneficiaries from work. Even when overpayments or other changes to benefits are unavoidable, WIPA staff can anticipate such disruptions and support beneficiaries to respond to the challenges that arise. We believe that the most vulnerable adult beneficiary, and thus the highest priority for WIPA service, is someone who is working or beginning to work.

Protocol for Prioritizing Services:

WIPA awardees do not have sufficient resources to serve everyone in the service area. We intend WIPA awardees to direct eighty-five percent of their efforts to intensive benefits counseling. In order to do this, projects must adhere to a prioritizing protocol.

Working individuals are most vulnerable to unexpected changes in benefit and service entitlement, and especially to overpayments. Beneficiaries at risk for the loss of essential supports such as health care coverage, attendant care, and safe housing should be served as soon as possible and should be provided intensive services to ensure that beneficiaries have necessary supports in place. Social Security will provide extensive guidance to successful WIPA awardees on prioritizing services and triaging beneficiaries in most need of support. In general, successful WIPA applicants will serve beneficiaries, regardless of the referral source, according to the following priorities:

1. Beneficiaries who are working, self-employed full-time, or about to go to work full-time;
2. Beneficiaries working or self-employed part-time or about to go to work part-time;
3. Beneficiaries seriously considering employment, as evidenced by a relationship with a State VR agency, an Employment Network, or other vocational program, or by self-identification and the results of a CWICs queries; and
4. Beneficiaries who are transition-aged youth, Veterans, or members of underserved populations, seeking resources to assist them to obtain training or education with a clear employment goal.

WIPAs may direct approximately fifteen percent of their total efforts to I&R for beneficiaries in the process of considering employment that need additional guidance.

Social Security will provide additional guidance and in-depth training on the service protocol to all successful applicants.

Limitations on Outreach and Contractual Collaborations:

WIPA projects will expend no more than fifteen percent of their total funding or work effort on outreach for the first year of the five-year cooperative agreement award period. In subsequent years, outreach shall be limited to ten percent of the total award. Outreach includes, but is not limited to, describing WIPA services prominently on the organization's website; engaging in dialogue with community, local, and State service providers to increase WIPA referrals; and meeting with diverse audiences to describe WIPA services. WIPA projects shall target outreach efforts to reach underserved populations such as transition-aged youth, Veterans, Native Americans, and other racial, ethnic, disability, and socioeconomically disadvantaged or minority populations.

The National WIPA Training and Technical Assistance (NTC) contractor on behalf of the WIPA projects will develop guidance and training that we will provide to the WIPAs on best practices for outreach activities. At the time of this Funding Opportunity the contractor, providing these services is Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). The VCU contract expires in June of 2015. We will award a new NTC contract no later than June 30, 2015.

Responsibilities, Expectations, and Roles of WIPA Cooperative Agreements:

Adhering to Terms and Conditions of the Award

WIPA staff will adhere to the Terms and Conditions of the cooperative agreement that we will provide as part of the award document. The Terms and Conditions include, but are not limited to, important requirements to protect Personally Identifiable Information (PII), use of the Social Security approved data collection system, entering data exclusively into the secure Social Security furnished laptops, and providing in-depth benefits counseling and comprehensive, long-term support services for SSI beneficiaries with disabilities. We highlight below other critical elements of the Terms and Conditions of the

award for the applicant's information. We will attach the Terms and Conditions of the award to all award documents and we will offer detailed guidance on the requirements contained in the Terms and Conditions to all awardees following award notification.

Distance-based Services within Designated Area

Successful WIPA applicants will provide WIPA services within and across their designated service areas. Unlike earlier programs where we encouraged face-to-face contact with beneficiaries, we strongly encourage each awardee to provide services via distance methods wherever possible. In the face of limited resources, larger service areas, and improved distance technologies, distance and virtual services facilitate immediate beneficiary services, rather than dealing with travel or transportation challenges. We support teleconferencing, videoconferencing, Skype, Face Time, and related technologies to 'virtually' meet in secure environments with beneficiaries. Providing primarily distance support may reduce indirect and overhead budgets, transportation costs, and costs for the physical site. However, we fully support in-person meetings when reasonable.

Accessibility Requirements

Each WIPA will ensure physical, transportation, language, and material access to all beneficiaries in their service area. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Physical access, such as barrier-free offices and meeting places;
- Offices in locations with access to public transportation;
- Distance communication methods accessible to individuals requiring adaptive technology;
- Creating websites and other electronic information and communication options that comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act;
- Providing materials in alternate media such as Braille, large print, or electronic media; and
- Providing services and publications in alternate languages, including sign language and alternate languages reflecting the demographic distribution of the service area.

WIPA projects must consider these requirements when preparing the budget request for this Funding Opportunity, and must describe how the WIPA applicant will ensure access to diverse populations.

Accessible Documentation

Any form of documentation provided by the selected centers (e.g., training manuals, user guides, embedded documents, etc.), including any documentation deliverables required in the request for

applications, must be provided in a fully accessible format. The documents must be provided in one of the following formats: Text, RTF, Microsoft Word, or HTML format, or properly “tagged” PDF. Properly tagged PDFs can be verified by using Adobe Acrobat’s Accessibility Checker. Documentation delivered in a manner that is interactive (e.g., table of contents, index, search, etc.) must be keyboard navigable, move focus to selected items (or have a keyboard alternative), and be comparable in keyboard access to mouse usage. All images (especially screenshots and technical diagrams that are the sole means for conveying instructions) should include alternative text explaining the image so that a person who is blind can understand the screenshot, chart, figure, etc. Documentation must include information on the accessibility features of the product. If keyboard shortcuts are provided to allow access to program functionality, a list of the keyboard shortcuts shall be provided. Documentation that is delivered in a video or multimedia publication must comply with the Section 508 requirements detailed in 36 CFR part 1194.24 and the functional performance criteria detailed in 36 CFR 1194 Subpart C. In addition, we require conformance to SSA’s Accessibility Requirements for all video and multi-media deliverables. We do not accept text equivalents used to replace speech, and we require captions to be synchronized with speech. See <http://www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/communications-and-it/about-the-section-508-standards> for additional information on accessibility and the Section 508 requirements.

Executive Order 13166 directs each agency providing Federal financial assistance to issue guidance to recipients of such assistance on their legal obligations to take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access for limited English proficient (LEP) persons under the national origin nondiscrimination provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and implementing regulations (see http://www.lep.gov/13166/AG_021711_EO_13166_Memo_to_Agencies_with_Supplement.pdf). Applicants can refer to the LEP policy guidance for HHS recipients at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2003-08-08/pdf/03-20179.pdf>. While designed to be a flexible and fact-dependent standard, the starting point is an individualized assessment that balances the following four factors: (1) The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the program or awardee; (2) the frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the program; (3) the nature and importance of the program, activity, or service provided to people’s lives; and (4) the resources available to the awardee/recipient and the cost. A recipient may conclude that different language assistance measures are sufficient for the different types of programs or activities in which it engages, or that, in certain circumstances, recipient-provided language services are not necessary. Applications should include plans for accommodating LEP persons in light of these four factors.

Suitability Requirements

All staff assigned to the WIPA cooperative agreement, whether paid from Social Security funds, in-kind contributions, or under another arrangement, must have a favorable level five (5) suitability determination from our agency. CWIC and other direct-service staff must hold a level five (5) suitability determination prior to working with beneficiaries. All WIPA staff must apply for level five (5) suitability immediately following notification of the award of a cooperative

agreement, or must successfully transfer level five suitability to the new cooperative agreement from a prior award. We will provide guidance on securing suitability to all awardees.

Firewall requirements

WIPA awardees may have a parent organization serving as or housing an EN under P.L. 106-170, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, but we will not enter into a cooperative agreement with any entity that we determine would have a conflict of interest. Therefore, in these situations, the applicant must submit with their application:

- A description of the separation of all administrative, budgeting, and direct service duties of the WIPA cooperative agreement and the EN contract staff and services, including assurances that the same individuals are not serving as employees of both the WIPA and the EN;
- An organizational and workload chart with clear delineation of roles and responsibilities;
- A detailed explanation of how the parent organization will resolve issues when a beneficiary or other stakeholder files a conflict of interest complaint against a CWIC or WIPA;
- An assurance in the form of an affirmative statement that the WIPA will provide the beneficiary comparable information on all available public and private service providers, including all ENs, in their community;
- An assurance in the form of an affirmative statement that the applicant will not automatically refer or unduly influence beneficiaries to assign their tickets to the awardee's EN; and
- An assurance in the form of an affirmative statement that beneficiaries receiving services from the WIPA will receive advice about all available work incentive programs, even if those programs could have an impact on milestone or outcome payments under the Ticket to Work program for the EN housed within their organization.

Unlike prior iterations of the WIPA program, **we will not consider any exceptions** to the firewall requirement between a WIPA and an EN. The WIPA must qualify as a stand-alone and autonomous program.

Similarly, we may award WIPA funding to a Protection and Advocacy (P&A) entity that receives a grant under Section 1150 of the Social Security Act. Applications from P&A organizations must include:

- A description of the separation of PABSS files and WIPA files; direct service staff assignments; intake procedures; case management procedures; and complaint processes. Direct service staff includes individuals who have direct contact with beneficiaries, and supervisors with access to case files. Projects may include executive and administrative staff that do not have direct contact with beneficiaries and do not access case files on both the WIPA and PABSS personnel documentation;
- If projects wish to use staff with direct service responsibilities or staff with access to beneficiary information on both WIPA and PABSS awards, the project must submit a written request for an exception regarding the separation of direct service personnel. The

request should describe why this individual's service on both awards benefits the programs, and how the P&A organization will ensure that there is no conflict of interest under the WIPA or PABSS programs; and

- This statement should include a clear explanation of how the P&A organization will handle complaints about WIPA services from beneficiaries or other organizations. We must give advance approval before staff with dual responsibilities may work on both the WIPA and PABSS projects.

Availability for Services

Each WIPA awardee must serve beneficiaries at least five business days per week, with the exception of holidays. We permit flexible hours, and prefer that each awardee have some availability in the evenings or on weekends in order to support beneficiaries with nontraditional work schedules.

Project Focus, Benchmarks, and Performance Measures

The majority of WIPA effort must be directed to one-to-one service to beneficiaries who are working or actively seeking employment or self-employment. These are the populations most in need of support to encourage them to gain, retain, or expand work activity.

- Each WIPA awardee must agree to meet or exceed the performance Benchmarks that we will provide. We base these Benchmarks on our experience and data collected from earlier WIPA projects, and they are a reasonable representation of WIPA output. The Benchmark document is attached as Appendix D.
- We will provide information, guidance, and training on Benchmarks and on any other topics and subjects requiring such support throughout the life of the award.
- We may develop new Benchmarks and related performance measures based on our two-year data analysis. We will provide training, ongoing support, and technical assistance to all projects on any new performance measures we develop during the fall of 2015.

Summary-Writing Software

We will require WIPA projects to use a uniform and customized BS&A preparation software that we will provide. The purpose of this software is to produce accurate, comprehensive, and consistent BS&A reports. The software requires custom programming of the Federal, State, and local programs unique to each WIPA and the associated service areas. We will provide guidance on how this information must be gathered and submitted. Through a contract, the software will be loaded onto the laptops that we provide to all WIPAs.

Through our training and technical assistance contractor, we will provide expert training to all of the WIPA projects to ensure that staffs have a complete understanding of the Federal, State, and local benefits and services available in their service area as well as the use of the Summary software.

This process will save time, increase comprehensiveness of written analyses, and improve consistency across WIPA projects, but it is not a substitute for developing State and local benefit expertise. As stated elsewhere in this document, the CWIC generating the BS&A will have the responsibility to ensure that the analysis is appropriate, accurate, and applicable to each beneficiary's unique situation.

WIPA Interaction with Social Security and Social Security Supported Programs:

WIPA projects must have staff available to meet with us for site reviews as requested and must respond to our requests for information within established deadlines.

WIPA staff must participate with us in national calls. These calls allow us and our contractors to communicate information to WIPA staff in a uniform and interactive forum and ensure that project staffs are aware of changes to policies and the availability of resources.

As part of the collaboration and coordination requirements for WIPA, project staffs will work to develop collegial and supportive relationships with the local Social Security offices within the WIPA service area. WIPA project staffs will reach out to Social Security Area Work Incentive Coordinators (AWIC) and PASS cadre staff to build relationships. Similarly, WIPA staff shall connect with Social Security field office staff within the service area to foster and maintain positive and collaborative communication.

CWICs must become familiar with the EN available within their service area. CWICs refer beneficiaries to appropriate ENs based on the beneficiary's expressed needs and interests. We require CWICs to work in cooperation with Federal, State, local, and private agencies, and other organizations that serve beneficiaries with disabilities seeking employment. We will make information available regarding the names and locations of ENs.

What Social Security Will Provide to WIPA Awardees

- Through the Training and Technical Assistance contractor, we will offer expert technical assistance, in-depth training, certification, and recertification for CWICs and any other WIPA staff providing information to beneficiaries.
- We will provide secure laptop computers and an approved data collection system for WIPA awardees to use for all beneficiary specific service data. We will provide technical assistance and training in how to use the data collection system, as well as technical Help Desk support for the hardware and software. We retain the right to the laptop computers. The WIPA data system should contain the only repository of electronic information and PII on beneficiaries served by the WIPA.
- We will require users to meet suitability and eligibility criteria as well as provide other assurances prior to issuing the laptops we provide. We will provide successful applicants

support and guidance on submitting necessary documentation and on working with our suitability team;

- We will assign each awardee a Social Security Project Officer. Project Officers have the responsibility to ensure WIPA awardees meet the program objectives, adhere to the Terms and Conditions of the award, and are in good standing with our agency. WIPA awardees must send all publications and presentations to their Project Officer for technical review and approval in advance of dissemination. We will also assign Grants Managers to each WIPA. Grants Managers, from the Office of Acquisitions and Grants, provide guidance and support on financial and budget related matters.

Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) Responsibilities:

Basic Duties

CWICs provide beneficiaries with accurate, understandable information about work incentives and related employment issues and prepare accurate and detailed reports regarding a beneficiary's status. This includes helping beneficiaries understand and use programs that support entry into the workforce, including the Social Security Ticket to Work and PASS. CWICs refer beneficiaries to Federal, State, or local work incentives programs or services supporting return-to-work. We encourage CWICs to develop relationships with service providers within the service area in order to inform these providers about WIPA services, and, in return, CWICs should become more knowledgeable about resources available to beneficiaries with disabilities. This will improve the appropriateness and range of referrals CWICs can provide to beneficiaries receiving services. We also encourage CWICs to collaborate with local Department of Labor (DOL) American Job Centers, as well as with other community partners that provide employment related services to Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities.

Training, Certification, and Continuing Education Requirements

Any WIPA staff providing information, counseling, guidance, and support to Social Security beneficiaries, must complete the CWIC training and certification from our approved Training and Technical Assistance contractor prior to providing assistance to our beneficiaries. We provide this training and certification free of charge however; projects are responsible for all costs for travel and accommodations.

CWICs facilitate the use of all of Social Security's work incentives, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE);
- PASS;
- Student Earned Income Exclusion;
- Earned Income Exclusion for SSI;
- Blind Work Expenses under SSI for statutory blind beneficiaries;

- Extended Medicaid for working beneficiaries authorized under Section 1619(b) of the Act;
- Trial Work Period under the Title II program;
- Work incentives used in Substantial Gainful Activity determinations; and
- Extended Period of Medicare Coverage.

In addition, CWICs must complete training on the other Federal benefit programs and work incentives, as well as the State, local, and private benefit programs and work supports that exist in their service area. WIPA managers must support CWICs by striving to maintain those relationships and connections in the community and State necessary to providing high quality, accurate, and appropriate services. Prior to working with beneficiaries, CWICs must complete a rigorous training and certification process provided by a Social Security contractor, and like all WIPA staff, receive a favorable level five suitability determination from our agency.

Through a contractor, we offer an intensive initial training using a comprehensive manual. Following the initial training class, CWIC trainees must pass a provisional certification process prior to working with beneficiaries. CWICs use actual benefits counseling situations to earn full certification and must earn at least eighteen continuing education credits annually following full certification in order to retain their certification and authority to work with beneficiaries. We will make applicable and informative training available to meet this requirement through our training and technical assistance contract. The contractor will also provide a system of accountability so that CWICs may monitor accumulated credits and determine the credit value of each course offered.

In addition to training on Social Security and SSI work incentives, CWICs must become experts in researching and understanding Medicare, Medicaid, other Federal programs, and State and local programs that assist individuals with disabilities or individuals living in poverty. Our contractor provides information about the Federal benefits, but CWICs must take responsibility to learn the applicable State and local programs beneficiaries may access. It is the CWIC's responsibility to ensure that the information the beneficiary receives during benefits counseling, in the BS&A, and through other communications, is correct and complete.

Benefits Summary and Analysis

One of the most important documents a CWIC will develop is the BS&A. The BS&A provides a written record of what the CWIC explained or will explain to the beneficiary in meetings. The BS&A is a synopsis of the benefits the consumer receives and an analysis of the interaction of those benefits with each other and with work income, as well as a description of other services and supports that may benefit the individual.

The BS&A is a critical resource for beneficiaries and a protection for the CWIC. Beneficiaries receiving services are often confused about the services and supports they use. The BS&A provides a clear reference to reinforce the counseling the beneficiary receives. It also protects the CWIC by documenting the information the CWIC gave the beneficiary. If, for example, a beneficiary has an overpayment in the future, the BS&A may offer proof that the CWIC

provided accurate information, including the requirement to report changes that would affect entitlement.

Another purpose of the BS&A is to outline the goals the beneficiary has and to help them to meet those goals. If the plan requires actions by the beneficiary, the CWIC, or others, the CWIC should develop a Work Incentives Plan (WIP) to spell out the actions and responsibilities. The WIP reinforces the BS&A, but it also provides an easy “to do” list to use as a reference as the beneficiary progresses towards his or her employment goal.

Minimum Percentage of Direct Services for CWICs

The work CWICs perform is highly technical. It also requires the ability to communicate to a diverse group of beneficiaries and service providers with different levels of understanding. CWICs must be excellent communicators. They also must become experts in Federal, State, and local programs, not only through training, but also through research, practice, and experience. CWIC trainees will dedicate extensive time and resources to achieve certification. CWIC expertise is a perishable skillset, and one that is enhanced with practice. We therefore require a minimum level of services from each CWIC in order to maximize the training and skills development, and to maintain competency. In order to provide services under the WIPA cooperative agreement, CWICs must commit at least forty percent of their total work effort to direct services to beneficiaries, whether Social Security or another source funds the services. If another source funds a portion of the minimum percentage of time committed to direct beneficiary services, the applicant must document the nature of that funding (including in-kind funding) and the total percentage of time each CWIC will spend on direct services under all funding sources.

Benefits Counseling Process

CWICs work with beneficiaries to identify and verify benefits they receive. This includes, but is not limited to, requesting verification letters from benefit providers, confirming services with providers, or otherwise ensuring that the advice and counseling CWICs give reflects the beneficiary’s current circumstances. Most often, the verification process involves securing a Benefits Planning Query or BPQY. When requesting benefits verification from our agency via a BPQY, CWICs must complete two release forms. One of the releases provides our field office staff permission to release Social Security data, and the other release gives us permission to release IRS data. Both of these releases must indicate that the beneficiary seeks benefits counseling from a WIPA provider. The BPQY contains critical information about the status of the beneficiary’s entitlement as reflected in Social Security records. At times however, that information may be obsolete. One of the CWIC’s duties is to review the data on the BPQY and ensure it accurately reflects the beneficiary’s status. If the BPQY is not accurate, the CWIC shall assist the beneficiary to provide the information and verification documents we need to update our records. We strongly recommend counseling beneficiaries to obtain their own BPQY, however, in many circumstances, the CWIC may be asked to assist the beneficiary with the process.

CWICs counsel beneficiaries and educate them about the effect of work on these benefits and supports, and assist beneficiaries to identify additional benefits, services, and supports necessary to facilitate successful employment. We require that CWICs document these services by developing written BS&A documents that they provide to the beneficiaries. In many situations, CWICs will also develop a WIP to document the steps the beneficiary, the CWIC, and other members of the beneficiary's employment team must take to assist the beneficiary to achieve successful employment outcomes. As previously stated, CWICS must upload and store BS&As, WIPs, work reports and other relevant information and documentation into the Social Security designated database on the laptops that we provide. CWICs will work with beneficiaries to educate them about their reporting responsibilities, what records they need to maintain, and the best approaches for reporting earnings to income-sensitive programs or programs affected by work activity. CWICs will periodically re-contact beneficiaries who are working or beginning to work to assist them to report income and to access all available work incentives appropriate to the beneficiary's situation and choice.

On occasion, beneficiaries will request that the CWIC assist them in reporting earnings to providers in a timely and appropriate manner. This type of CWIC support can minimize benefit overpayments and may reduce the likelihood of an unanticipated change in benefits causing the beneficiary's work effort to derail.

CWICs provide general information on the adequacy of health benefits coverage offered by an employer and the extent to which other health benefits coverage may be available to the beneficiary, including Medicare or Medicaid. CWICs also advise beneficiaries about the availability of P&A services and procedures for accessing such services. Under certain circumstances, CWICs may refer a beneficiary to the State PABSS program housed in the State P&A. We encourage CWICs to develop and nurture a close working relationship with the State PABSS program.

CWICS and all WIPA staff entering data must use only the Social Security secure laptop and data system. CWICs shall maintain a thorough record of services in this data system, including uploading BS&A documents and any PII pertaining to the beneficiary seeking services.

Although CWICs provide the bulk of the direct service to beneficiaries, WIPA staff may include administrative staff such as the Primary Investigator or Executive Director, accounting staff, secretarial staff, website and other Information Technology staff, data entry staff, or other individuals who do not provide information or counseling to beneficiaries. All of these individuals must have level five (5) suitability, but we do not require CWIC certification unless they also provide direct services. Often, the CWIC supervisor is an agency administrator or organization manager. **While not mandatory, we strongly encourage CWIC managers to receive the same training and certification as CWICs.** In this way, the CWIC supervisory staff is able to provide expert guidance, support, and technical assistance to the CWIC team as well as have an understanding of a CWIC's responsibilities and role. Through our training contractor, we will offer specialized opportunities for supervisors in addition to the core training and certification.

Intake and I&R Staff

An intake specialist is usually the first person with whom the beneficiary interacts when requesting services. Many projects have intake staff. These individuals take the caller's basic information and refer the contact information to an I&R person or to a CWIC for in-depth services. Intake staff may or may not require certification, depending on the WIPA service workflow. For example, if an intake person provides any information to the beneficiary, answers any questions about benefits, he or she must have suitability and CWIC certification. If the intake person only asks for contact information, then suitability is sufficient. We will provide guidance to each successful applicant.

I&R staff provide beneficiaries with basic benefits information and on occasion referrals to other Federal, State and local services and supports. I&R staff require not only suitability, but also full CWIC certification. Because they provide information to beneficiaries, they must have sufficient training and expertise to ensure the information they provide is correct, appropriate, and applicable.

Summary of WIPA Services:

We will provide successful awardees with training on the performance Benchmarks based on historic service data in an effort to guide WIPA service priorities and practices. These Benchmarks capture the distribution and allocation of certain performance efforts and provide a set of standards of execution. We have attached the benchmark document as Appendix B.

A summary breakdown of WIPA services shall include the following:

1. Prioritizing services via distance and remote methods;
2. Targeting services to SSI youth and youth in transition;
3. Addressing the needs of underserved populations and beneficiaries who are working, about to start work, or are or seriously seeking employment or self-employment;
4. Responding promptly to referrals sent to the WIPA project from the Help Line (the timeframe for accepting referrals must be no more than two business days; approximately 20 to 25 percent of a typical WIPA's referrals were directed from the Help Line during 2014);
5. Verification of all benefits via documentation provided by the beneficiary through Social Security or by another service or benefits provider;
6. Referrals to services and supports that may either assist the beneficiary in their work goals, or assist the beneficiary to receive services to reduce poverty, stabilize essential life functions, or remove barriers to work;
7. Limit I&R to 15 percent of total work effort;
8. Clear, courteous, accurate, and appropriate oral and written communication geared to the beneficiary's needs and stated preferences, including reports. This includes communication in other formats and languages, including American Sign Language;
9. In-depth, accurate, and long-term counseling to support work activity;

10. Documentation of counseling and status in a BS&A, using approved formats;
11. Developing WIPs to assist beneficiaries to structure activities necessary to meet work goals or to report work activity;
12. Pro-active follow-up activities to ensure beneficiaries continue to receive necessary supports; and
13. Maintaining expert and current understanding of benefits, work incentives, and programs affecting beneficiaries, including State and local benefits available within the WIPA's service area.

Relationship of WIPA to Help Line:

The Help Line is a national, toll-free call center for beneficiaries seeking return-to-work related information, support, and services. Beneficiaries contact the Help Line regarding procedures for assigning a Ticket to Work, for I&R about work incentives, information about ENs, and for referral to WIPA services. Currently, the Help Line provides approximately one-fifth of all WIPA referrals.

In view of the reduced concentration on outreach and I&R by WIPAs, and the intensified focus on work-oriented beneficiaries, we anticipate enhancing the Help Line's role in outreach and for I&R for beneficiaries who, under prior iterations of the WIPA program, may have contacted the WIPA directly or been referred to a WIPA by service personnel in the community for assistance with I&R type questions. In fact, WIPAs may push those clear I&R inquiries to the Help Line for support from trained Help Line staff. The Help Line staff consists of fully trained and certified call representatives capable of providing introductory and basic work incentives guidance. The WIPAs will receive extensive guidance and training on the Help Line's role and the WIPA's role relative to the Help Line. The Help Line will not be the only referral source for WIPA services. We anticipate expanding the role the Help Line now plays in WIPA referrals, including promoting and marketing their enhanced role more broadly and encouraging WIPA projects to refer individuals seeking general information to the Help Line. We will continue to refine and triage the referrals to WIPAs from the Help Line through training and support to the Help Line staff.

The Help Line will refer beneficiaries directly to the servicing WIPA via a secure web-based data system. If the caller is an adult beneficiary, the Help Line will complete a demographic form (called the I&R assessment), read a privacy statement, and submit the referral directly to the WIPA. If the caller is a minor under 18, or an individual over 18 receiving SSI who has not completed an age-18 redetermination, the Help Line will not complete the initial assessment, but will make the referral directly to the WIPA project after reading the privacy statement.

WIPA projects shall work collaboratively with the Help Line and must ensure that all referrals receive prompt and appropriate responses within two business days of the referral.

II: Award Information

A. Award Amounts and Service Areas

We are announcing a Funding Opportunity for competitive applications to fund approximately 92 WIPA projects. The projects selected will provide services for a particular service area, as delineated in their application and in response to this announcement. This Funding Opportunity outlines the services and responsibilities for WIPA awardees and the CWICs they employ. Appendix A describes the rationale we used to determine award amounts, proposed service areas and award amounts.

We strongly encourage applicants to use the proposed service areas detailed in this Appendix, however, applicants may include additional areas within the same State or another State, provided the application offers a strong justification and supporting statement. When preparing your application, please remember that no applicant entity shall be awarded more than \$300,000.00 in funding from this Funding Opportunity. This includes any funding allotments planned for subcontractor arrangements. To supplement Appendix A describing the geographical distribution and corresponding award amounts, we will post service maps on the FAQ website at: http://www.ssa.gov/oag/grants/ssagrants_current.htm#sb=1. In the event we do not receive any applications or should we receive inadequate applications for a particular service area or areas, we will expedite a subsequent Funding Opportunity posting for that area or areas.

B. Type of Award

All awards under this program are cooperative agreements. A cooperative agreement, as distinct from a grant, anticipates substantial involvement between our agency and the awardee during the performance of the project. A comprehensive annual review process will allow us to evaluate, recommend changes, and approve each WIPA's activities.

The terms of the award are in addition to, not in lieu of, otherwise applicable guidelines and procedures. The issuance of the Terms and Conditions occurs along with the notice of award.

The awardee must apply annually to continue the cooperative agreement and to receive funds in subsequent years of the five-year agreement. The awardee will produce a continuation application, subject to our review and approval.

We will engage in a dialogue with awardees throughout the award period regarding progress, accomplishments, challenges, and the preparation of a continuation application each year.

Awardees shall be prepared for the occasional on-site reviews. We determine which projects we will visit. We will discuss logistics and expectations with the project staff in advance of any site review. We are however, authorized to make unannounced reviews.

C. Availability and Duration of Funding

1. Approximately \$20.0 million will be available to fund the initial 12-month budget period of a proposed five-year cooperative agreement(s) for approximately 92 WIPAs pursuant to the announcement;
2. We anticipate new awards starting on August 1, 2015;
3. **NO INDIVIDUAL AWARD MAY EXCEED \$300,000 FOR EACH BUDGET PERIOD.**
4. **NO INDIVIDUAL WIPA OTHER THAN THE U.S. TERRITORIES WILL RECEIVE LESS THAN \$100,000. INDIVIDUAL U.S. TERRITORIES MAY RECEIVE NO LESS THAN \$50,000 FOR EACH BUDGET PERIOD;**
5. Applicants must include detailed budget estimates for the first year, using the funding level requested in the application;
6. We cannot guarantee award amounts for future funding of the WIPA program;
7. Funding is subject to future appropriations and budgetary approval;
8. We expect WIPA support during future fiscal years at an annual level of approximately \$20.0 million; and
9. This RFA allows for the unequal division of funds among multiple WIPA sites based on disability populations across the country.

Although we anticipate 92 awards, nothing in this announcement restricts our ability to make more or fewer awards, to make an award of a lesser amount than requested (subject to minimum awards as stated above) or a greater amount than requested without exceeding \$300,000.

III: Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

We are seeking applications from domestic institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, commercial organizations, State governments, and Native American tribal organizations.

Exclusions

We may not award WIPA cooperative agreements to agencies administering Medical Assistance for a State or Territory.

No cooperative agreement funds may be paid as profit to any cooperative agreement recipient. For-profit organizations may apply with the understanding that no funds may be paid as profit. Profit is considered as any amount in excess of the allowable costs.

In accordance with an amendment to the Lobbying Disclosure Act, popularly known as the Simpson-Craig Amendment, those entities organized under section 501(c)4 of the Internal

Revenue Code that engage in lobbying are prohibited from receiving Federal cooperative agreement awards.

B. Cost Sharing

Recipients of a cooperative agreement are required to contribute a non-Federal match of at least five percent toward the total approved cost of each award. The total approved cost of the project is the sum of the Federal share (maximum of 95 percent) and the non-Federal share (minimum of 5 percent). The non-Federal share may be cash or in-kind (property or services) contributions. Applicants may not use other Federal funds to account for the matching funds or services.

To identify what the Total Project Costs are, see the example below:

Step 1. Calculate the Total Project Costs (TPC): $\text{Federal Funds} \div 0.95 = \text{TPC}$, for example: $\$100,000 \div 0.95 = \$105,263$ (TPC)

Step 2. Calculate Cost Share: $\text{TPC} - \text{Total Federal Funds} = \text{Minimum 5\% Cost Share}$, for example: $\$105,263 - \$100,000 = \$5,263$.

C. Other

Each WIPA director must have a demonstrated capability to organize, administer, and direct the project. The project director will be responsible for the organization and operation of the WIPA and for communication with us on all pertinent matters. The director must also have a minimum time commitment of 25 percent to WIPA activities.

In addition to the director, skilled personnel and organizational resources capable of providing a strong presence in the community, along with a history of employment related supports and services, should be available from the applicant. The organization sponsoring the WIPA must demonstrate a strong commitment to the WIPA mission and objectives. The applicant may demonstrate commitment by providing dedicated space, salary support for key personnel, dedicated equipment, or other financial support for the proposed WIPA.

All applicants must be registered in <https://www.sam.gov/portal/SAM/#1> before submitting an application; and provide a valid Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number.

Applicants may submit only one application in response to this announcement.

We will assess the risk posed by applicants or recipients when they have demonstrated a history of failure to comply with general or specific terms and conditions of a Federal award, or failure to meet expected performance goals. In addition, we will review all selected applicants for any violations of Federal statutes, such as debarment and suspensions, to determine eligibility to receive Federal funds.

IV: Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

We require that applicants submit an electronic application through <http://www.grants.gov/> for Funding Opportunity Number WIPA-WIP-15-001. The Grants.gov “Register” webpage is available to help explain the registration and application submission process. In addition, new Federal award applicants may find the Grants.gov “Register” Link’ at the following link to be helpful (<http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>).

If you experience problems with the steps related to registering to do business with the Federal Government or application submission, your first point of contact is the Grants.gov support staff at support@grants.gov, 1–800–518–4726. If your Grants.gov difficulties are not resolved, you may also contact the SSA Grants Management Team at Grants.Team@ssa.gov for assistance.

Questions and answers regarding this Funding Opportunity will be posted to a dedicated website at http://www.ssa.gov/oag/grants/ssagrants_current.htm#sb=1.

You may submit questions to SSA-TA@grantreview.org. All potential applicants should monitor the website frequently to ensure that they have the latest updates and information.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

As stated above, we require that applicants submit an electronic application through www.Grants.gov for Funding Opportunity Number WIPA-WIP-15-001.

A complete application package consists of one electronic submission. It should include the following items:

1. Project Abstract/Summary (not to exceed two pages);
2. Table of Contents;
3. Part I – Application for Federal Assistance (Standard Form 424);
4. Part II – Budget Information;
5. Form SF-424A – Sections A through F;
6. Budget Narrative for Section B - Budget Categories (refer to the Uniform Guidance Cost Principles, Audit and Administrative Requirements for Federal Grants, 2 CFR Part 200

(http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_docs; “The Omni (Super)–Circular consolidates and clarifies grants policies previously published in eight different federal circulars. Final guidance now exists under Title 2 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).”

7. Detailed Personnel - must include salary and fringe breakdown for all key personnel being charged to the award (for recommended format, see sample worksheet at: <http://www.ssa.gov/oag/grants/how.do.i.apply.html#sb=1>).
8. Other Support (Federal and Non-Federal)
9. Budget Justification
 - i. Personnel – List each position by title and name of employee, if available. Show the annual salary rate and the percentage of time to be devoted to the project. Compensation paid for employees engaged in award activities must be consistent with that paid for similar non-Federally-funded work within the applicant organization.
 - ii. Fringe Benefits – Fringe benefits should be based on actual known costs or an established formula. Fringe benefits are for the personnel listed in budget category (A) and only for the percentage of time devoted to the project.
 - iii. Travel – Itemize travel expenses of project personnel by purpose (e.g., staff to training, field interviews, advisory group meeting, etc.). Show the basis of computation (e.g., six people to 3-day training at \$X airfare, \$X lodging, \$X subsistence). In training projects, travel and meals for trainees should be listed separately. Show the number of trainees and the unit costs involved. Identify the location of travel, if known. Indicate source of Travel Policies applied, whether the applicant’s written policies or the Federal Travel Regulations.
 - iv. Equipment – List non-expendable items that are to be purchased. Non-expendable equipment is tangible property having a useful life of more than two years and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit. (Note: An organization’s own capitalization policy may be used for items costing less than \$5,000). Expendable items should be included either in the “supplies” category or in the “Other” category. Applicants should analyze the cost benefits of purchasing versus leasing equipment, especially high cost items and those subject to rapid technical advances. Rented or leased equipment costs should be listed in the “Contractual” category. Explain how the equipment is necessary for the success of the project. Attach a narrative describing the procurement method to be used.
 - v. Supplies – List items by type (office supplies, postage, training materials, copying paper, and expendable equipment items costing less than \$5,000, such as books, hand held tape recorders) and show the basis for computation. (Note: An organization’s own capitalization policy may be used for items costing less than \$5,000). Generally, supplies include any materials that are expendable or consumed during the course of the project.

- vi. Consultants/Contracts/Sub-awards – Indicate whether applicant’s formal, written Procurement Policy or the Federal Acquisition Regulations are followed. Consultant Fees: For each consultant enter the name, if known, service to be provided, hourly or daily fee (eight-hour day), and estimated time on the project. Consultant Expenses: List all expenses to be paid from the award to the individual consultants in addition to their fees (i.e., travel, meals, lodging, etc.). Contracts: Provide a description of the product or service to be procured by contract and an estimate of the cost. Applicants are encouraged to promote free and open competition in awarding contracts. A separate justification must be provided for sole source contracts in excess of \$150,000.
- vii. Other Costs – List items (e.g., rent, copying, telephone, janitorial services, security services, and investigative or confidential funds) by major type and the basis of the computation. For example, provide the square footage and the cost per square foot for rent, or provide a monthly rental cost and how many months to rent.
- viii. Enter the type of Federal agency approved indirect cost rate (provisional, predetermined, final or fixed) that will be in effect during the funding period, the estimated amount of the base to which the rate is applied and the total indirect expense. Also, enter the date the rate was approved, where applicable. Attach a copy of the rate agreement if it was negotiated with a Federal agency other than ours.

2 CFR Part 200.414 subparagraph (f) states, “In addition to the procedures outlined in the appendices in paragraph (e) of this section, any non-Federal entity that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate, except for those non-Federal entities described in Appendix VII to Part 200—States and Local Government and Indian Tribe Indirect Cost Proposals, paragraph (d)(1)(B) may elect to charge a de minimis rate of) 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described in §200.403 Factors affecting allowability of costs, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time.”

If the applicant does not have an approved rate, nor plans to propose a 10% de minimus rate, the applicant may allocate costs as direct if both the applicant’s accounting system, and written policies and procedures, allow for using direct cost allocation principles. The applicant must be sure to identify and explain how the costs will be allocated to this program.

- ix. Cost Share – Clearly identify category and amount of match, including calculation.
- x. Indirect Costs – Indicate the indirect cost requested. If lower than negotiated rate, include a detailed explanation.
- xi. Budget Summary – Please include a summary with the following information:

Budget Summary	Amounts
A. Personnel	\$
B. Fringe Benefits	\$
C. Travel	\$
D. Equipment	\$
E. Supplies	\$
F. Contracts/Sub-awards	\$
G. Other Costs	\$
H. Total Direct Costs	\$
I. Indirect Costs	\$
Total Project Costs	\$

- 10. Copy of the applicant’s approved indirect cost rate agreement (if applicable).

Part III – Project Narrative. The project narrative should be organized in five sections:

- a. Agency’s Organizational Background, Expertise, and Experience – no more than 10 pages that include:

A background analysis of the key factors contributing to the organizational capacity to support a WIPA cooperative agreement. The analysis should discuss concisely and comprehensively the host agency’s grasp of work incentives, benefits counseling and analysis, return to work programs, and Social Security laws and regulations. In not more than 10 pages, provide a summary of past work undertaken by the applicant that relates directly or indirectly to work incentives and related priorities of this request. This discussion should include more than a listing of the projects completed by the applicant organization. The description should provide a sense of institutional commitment to the WIPA program and return to work programs. The application must list, in an appendix, recent or current projects, along with a brief summary, a contact person, and references, including the address and telephone numbers of references the applicant references.

- b. Staffing Proposal, Key Personnel, Experience, and Background – no more than eight pages:

The applicant must include a staffing and organization proposal for the WIPA, including an analysis of the types of background and experience of staff members, the applicant's organizational structure, and linkages with the host institution and other organizations. In this section, the applicant should specify how the organization would ensure an effective approach to comprehensive benefits counseling services throughout and within their service area.

The applicant should identify the project director and key staff, in particular the CWIC staff. Full resumes of all proposed staff members must be included as a separate appendix to the application. The applicant must include the aggregate anticipated time commitment to WIPA services as well as commitments for each proposed staff member. The application should specify how the applicant would minimize start-up and transition delays. Note that once we award the cooperative agreement, changes in key staff will require our prior approval.

- c. Collaboration, Coordination, and Partnerships – no more than five pages, not including letters of support:

WIPA projects must be an integral part of the disability employment community. Applicants should include letters of support from Federal, State, and local providers, indicating the willingness to work collaboratively and intent to refer beneficiaries for WIPA services to the applicant organization. The applicant should describe plans for solidifying relationships with Social Security field offices in the applicant's service area, Area Work Incentive Coordinators, and Work Incentive Liaisons. The successful applicant should already have strong partnerships with ENs, State VR agencies, or have clear plans for creating cooperative relationships with ENs and State VR offices in the service area. The applicant should describe other collaborative arrangements with employment related services and supports and, if applicable, employers in the community.

- d. Data Collection and Reporting – in no more than four pages, the applicant must explain:

Data collection is a critical aspect of the WIPA cooperative agreement. We must have a strong commitment from the successful applicants to consistently collect record, enter, and submit beneficiary data as required by the Terms and Conditions of the award. WIPAs shall use only the Social Security approved database for data collection and for generating reports and must use only the secure laptops that we provide to enter beneficiaries' data. Applicants should describe the process for entering beneficiary data so that records remain current, accurate, timely, and complete; WIPAs should not accumulate a backlog of data and must strategize to minimize any backlogs. Applicants shall also describe their commitment to confidentiality and security of all beneficiaries' PII. We expect projects to minimize or eliminate most paper records and instead securely store and upload all reports, verifications, BPQYs, or other benefits confirmations in the secure laptop we provide. Finally, applicants shall immediately alert us to any obstacles to meeting these conditions. We will assess a WIPA awardee's

performance and success in meeting or exceeding the Benchmarks using the data in the secure system.

- e. Accessibility, Knowledge of Disability Laws, Regulations, Policies, and Practices – in no more than four pages:

Applicants must describe their experience and commitment to providing accessible materials, assistive and adaptive technologies, fully accessible physical sites and locations, interpretation services, and materials in alternate formats and languages. This should include a description of the accessibility features of the applicant's offices, as well as the practices the applicant undertakes to reach and serve individuals with deafness, blindness, and intellectual disabilities. The applicant should also describe how they will address the needs of underserved ethnic and native communities in their proposed service area, and how they ensure interpreter services for American Sign Language and languages other than English. The applicant should also demonstrate a working knowledge of the most significant and relevant Federal statutes, including Sections 503, 504, and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act as amended, The Americans with Disabilities Act as amended, and other critical civil rights legislation affecting individuals with disabilities.

11. Assurances—

- a. (a) *Form SF-424B*;

12. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities, Form SF-LLL, if applicable (See Section VI-Administrative and National Policy for 20 CFR Part 438);

13. Prospective Awardee's Pre-Award Risk Assessment Form

Our agency is required to conduct risk assessments for all awards (2 CFR Part 200.205). The following items may be considered during the assessment:

- a. Financial stability;
- b. Quality of management systems and ability to meet management standards;
- c. History of performance;
- d. Reports and findings from audits; and
- e. Applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities.

14. Resumes of Key Personnel

15. Any appendices/attachments (include letters of support here)—any files uploaded or attached to the Grants.gov application must be of the following file formats and must contain a valid file format extension in the filename – Microsoft Word, Excel or PowerPoint, Corel WordPerfect, ASCII Text, accessible Adobe PDF. Even though www.grants.gov allows applicants to attach any file format as part of their

application, we restrict this practice and accept only the file formats identified above. We will not accept for processing any file submitted as part of the Grants.gov application that is not in a file format identified above or that contains password protection. Any such file will be excluded from the application review process. We will not accept the use of compressed file formats such as ZIP or RAR. The applicant must submit the application in an easily read and copied format. We recommend not submitting scanned copies through Grants.gov, unless the applicant confirms the clarity and accessibility of the documents. Applicants may not submit multiple pages on a single sheet to avoid exceeding the page limitation. We will exclude all documents that do not conform to the above from the application review process.

C. Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number and System for Federal Award Management (SAM)

All applicants and prospective sub-awardees other than individuals must:

1. Be registered in SAM.gov (<https://www.sam.gov/portal/SAM/#1>);
2. Provide a valid DUNS in its application; and
3. Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or application, or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency.

We cannot make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant complies with these requirements.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Letter of Intent

Prospective applicants are asked to submit, preferably with an e-mail attachment, within 10 days of publication of this RFA, an e-mail, fax, postcard or letter of intent that includes:

- The program announcement number (WIPA-WIP-15-001);
- The name of the organization that is applying; and
- The name, mailing address, e-mail address, telephone number, and fax number for the organization's contact person.

The notice of intent is not required, is not binding, and does not enter into the review process of a subsequent application. The purpose of the notice of intent is to allow our staff to estimate the number of independent reviewers needed and to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the review. The notice of intent should be electronically mailed to: SSA-TA@grantreview.org

Applications

Applicants must submit applications through www.grants.gov by 5:00 PM eastern standard time on March 30, 2015.

E. Intergovernmental Review

Executive Order 12372 and 12416 - Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs

This program is not covered by the requirements of Executive Order 12372, as amended by Executive Order 12416, relating to the Federal policy for consulting with State and local elected officials on proposed Federal financial assistance.

Catalog of Domestic Federal Assistance:

Program No. 96.008, Social Security Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program

F. Funding Restrictions

The recipient must apply to continue the cooperative agreement to receive funds in subsequent years of the five-year award. The successful applicant will produce a continuation application, subject to our review and approval. Awards are contingent on availability of continuation funding.

G. Other Submission Requirements

We require that applicants submit an electronic application through www.grants.gov for Funding Opportunity Number WIPA-WIP-15-001. Before an applicant, institution, or organization can submit an electronic application, please go to www.grants.gov and follow the steps under the “Get Registered” link. Please note:

1. Your organization will need to obtain a DUNS number and register with SAM/E-Biz POC as part of the Grants.gov registration process (see Section VI-Administrative and National Policy for 2 CFR Subtitle A, Chapter 1 and Part 25).
2. If your organization does not have a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) or Employer Identification Number (EIN), allow for extra time. A valid TIN or EIN is necessary for SAM registration.
3. The SAM registration also validates the EIN against Internal Revenue Service records, a step that will take an additional one to two business days. See Section IV, B. (10) above for requirements of file formats of attachments uploaded with applications.
4. Registering an account with SAM is a separate process from submitting an application. Applicants are encouraged to register early. In some cases, the registration process can take approximately two weeks to be completed. Therefore, registration should be completed in sufficient time to ensure that it does not impair your ability to meet required submission deadlines.

Applicants were previously required to register with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR). However, SAM has integrated the CCR and seven other Federal procurement systems into a new, streamlined system. If an applicant has an active record in CCR, there will be an active record in SAM. Nothing more is needed unless a change in the business circumstances requires updates to the Entity record(s) in order for the applicant to be paid, receive an award, or to renew the Entity prior to expiration. Please consult the SAM website listed above for additional information.

Applicants must successfully register with SAM prior to submitting an application or registering in the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act Sub-award Reporting System (FSRS) as a prime awardee user. See Section IV, Application and Submission Information, for more guidance on SAM registration. Prime recipients must maintain a current registration with the SAM database, and may make sub-awards only to entities that have DUNS numbers.

Organizations must report executive compensation as part of the registration profile at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/> by the end of the month following the month in which this award is made, and annually thereafter (based on the reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006 (P.L. 109-282), as amended by section 6202 of Public Law 110-252 and implemented by 2 CFR Part 170)). See Section VI, Award Administration Information, for more information on FFATA.

If you experience problems with the steps related to registering to do business with the Federal Government or application submission, your first point of contact is the Grants.gov support staff at support@grants.gov, 1-800-518-4726. If your Grants.gov difficulties are not resolved, you may also contact the SSA Grants Management Team at Grants.Team@ssa.gov for assistance.

H. Guidelines for Application Submission

Applicants should carefully follow these guidelines in submitting applications:

1. All applicants requesting our funds for cooperative agreements under this announcement must submit the standard forms provided in the application kit.
2. The application must be executed by an individual authorized to act for the applicant organization and to assume for the applicant organization the obligations imposed by the Terms and Conditions of the award.
3. Length: Applications should be as concise as possible, adhere to the page length recommendations for each section as enumerated above, and ensure successful communication of the applicant's proposal to the reviewers. The project narrative portion of the application may not exceed 75 pages (excluding the resume and funding appendices), equivalent to being typewritten on one side using standard (8 ½" x 11") size paper and 12-point font. Attachments that support the project narrative

- count toward the 75-page limit. Attachments not applicable to the project narrative (including letters of support), do not count toward this page limit.
4. Attachments or Appendices should only be included to provide supporting documentation. See Section IV, B. (15) above for file format requirements of attachments uploaded with award applications.
 5. On all applications developed by more than one organization, the application must identify only one institution as the lead organization and the official applicant. The other(s) may be included as sub-awardees or subcontractors.

V: Application Review Information

A. Criteria

The evaluation criteria correspond to the outline for the development of the Budget and Project Narrative Statement of the application described above. The application should be prepared in the format indicated by the outline described in the components of a complete application.

We will base selection of the successful applicant(s) on the technical and financial criteria laid out in this announcement. Reviewers will determine the strengths and weaknesses of each application in terms of the evaluation criteria listed below.

The point value following each criterion heading indicates the maximum numerical relative weight that reviewers will give each section in the review process. An unacceptable rating on any individual criterion may render the application unacceptable. Any application receiving less than 80 points in total may not be considered. We reserve the right to modify this cut off at any time during the review and post review process. Consequently, applicants should take care that they fully address all criteria in the applications. We will closely review the following five areas:

1. Background, Experience, Expertise, and Prior Success Providing Benefits Counseling Services (30 points)

We will evaluate the application based on an assessment of the depth, breadth, and relevance of the applicant organization's experience in implementing, managing, and conducting similar services or supports to individuals with disabilities. Applicants should include project accomplishments within three years prior to the issuance of this Funding Opportunity. The applicant should have a successful history with similar or related projects for a minimum of two years. The organizational experience of an applicant does not have to be specific to a WIPA, but the applicant should ensure that experience and background relate to the services described in this RFA. We will evaluate the following criteria based on the extent the application demonstrates:

- Development, implementation, or management of programs providing intensive benefits counseling services to beneficiaries with disabilities;
- The relevance and similarity of cited projects to this requirement;

- An understanding of disability issues and programs, including, but not limited to, Federal, State, and local benefit programs and employment supports;
- An understanding of accessibility and the ability to provide services in accessible formats, languages, and locations;
- A familiarity with disability laws, regulations, policies, and practices including Federal mandates for accessibility;
- An understanding of return-to-work issues for beneficiaries with disabilities;
- The ability to coordinate and collaborate with other agencies and services in the projected service area to assist beneficiaries to access required supports;
- The ability to resolve critical issues and crises on an ongoing basis;
- Quality of service and compliance with contractual, cooperative agreement, or award requirements;
- History of customer support and satisfaction, timeliness of problem identification, effectiveness of recommended solutions, and effective and responsive reactions to inquiries and to technical assistance requests, services, and administrative support issues;
- Effective and efficient management, businesslike correspondence, responsiveness to requirements, prompt notification of problems, reasonable/cooperative behavior;
- Effective and efficient management of a workforce including compliance with training and security requirements; and
- Effective and efficient management of subcontractors, use of subcontractors and consultants with a proven record of accomplishment of successful completion of work in a similar capacity as the tasks covered in the RFA.

2. Technical and Organizational Management Services (20 points)

The applicant must describe the technical approach with sufficient specificity and detail to demonstrate clearly that the applicant fully understands the intent of the RFA. We will consider merely paraphrasing the RFA without elaboration or stating compliance with the requirements to be an inadequate response. We will consider technical soundness, demonstrated subject matter expertise in designing major components, and proposed plans for completion of cooperative agreement tasks.

Further, we will consider:

- The extent to which the applicant demonstrates understanding of the background, history, purpose, proposed approach, and goals of this program;
- The technical soundness and specificity of proposed plans for completion of services and requirements;
- The extent of understanding of the objectives of the project and the work involved;
- Subject matter expertise in the area of employment, work incentives, and Federal programs affecting the lives of beneficiaries with disabilities and individuals living in poverty;
- Soundness of approach to serving beneficiaries throughout and within proposed service area, including, but not limited to, youth in transition, veterans, non-English speakers,

Native American tribal lands, as well as other diverse, disadvantaged, or underserved populations;

- Soundness of approach to meeting the training and technical assistance needs of CWICs for State and local benefits;
- Soundness of approach to ensuring the ongoing quality of services the applicant would provide if awarded;
- Soundness of the process, creativity, and usability for developing and enhancing distance-based and remote services, including the innovative use of distance technologies;
- Demonstrated understanding of the service prioritization requirements of this program and the approach to ensuring compliance with service triaging and providing direct benefits counseling to working beneficiaries and beneficiaries about to work or seriously considering work;
- Well-defined lines of authority, responsibility, and communication, including methods for quality assurance;
- Sound estimates of the amount of time and effort that staff will expend in the completion of work, including travel plans;
- Demonstrated understanding of the tasks and subtasks, potential problem areas, and methods for resolving issues in a timely manner at a proper level of authority; and
- Appropriateness and value of any arrangements or agreements with subcontractors, consultants, other teaming arrangements, professional affiliations, or other means of ensuring that necessary resources will be available to meet the needs of the cooperative agreement. The applicant should clearly indicate the extent of any subcontracting or consultants required, including the identification of the subcontractor, what tasks they would perform, qualifications for completing these tasks, why the applicant must subcontract to perform the task, and management techniques to identify and remedy subcontractor performance problems.

3. Quality of the Staff (20 points)

WIPA staff performs a very technical service requiring exceptional analytical and communications skills. We will evaluate applications based on the following:

- The labor mix of the proposed staff, and how well the level and balance of effort fits with the priorities of the cooperative agreement. This will include the number of hours required to accomplish the various aspects of work effort, descriptions of the labor categories, and a complete staffing chart by task and subtask indicating who will be performing in what capacity, number of hours, etc.;
- The extent to which the proposed staffing plan ensures that appropriately qualified staff are available to meet the requirements of the cooperative agreement on an ongoing basis. This includes personnel procedures for coping with attrition, hiring to fill vacancies, and ensuring high quality personnel recruitment and performance;
- The extent to which the proposed staffing plan provides a reasonable and practical means of accessing and obtaining additional staff or other technical experts in specialized,

diverse, or unique areas and the applicant's commitment to supporting continual education of direct service staff;

- A clear description of how the qualifications of the applicant's key personnel relate to and demonstrate the ability to meet the technical requirements of the contract and how the necessary training and certification procedures and effort will be met or exceeded; and
- If the applicant requires subcontractors or consultants to carry out required tasks, the qualifications, appropriateness and availability of proposed subcontractor staff and consultants.

4. Quality of Collaboration and Cooperation (15 points)

WIPA projects act as a liaison between the beneficiaries they serve and many services and supports in the communities they serve. The applicant should provide a description of the organization's relationships with Federal, State, and local organizations within their proposed service area, and how the applicant will use these relationships to facilitate referrals or services.

The applicant may wish to include letters of support or references from award administrators on previous awards, as well as letters of support from other service providers within the service area that provide support to individuals with disabilities entering the workforce.

5. Appropriateness of the Budget for Carrying out the Planned Staffing and Activities (15 points)

We will consider whether (1) the budget assures an efficient and effective allocation of funds to achieve the goals and objectives of this Funding Opportunity and (2) the applicant has additional funding from other sources, in particular, the host institution, including the five percent match. We may consider applications that demonstrate leveraged funding from other sources to supplement the core WIPA cooperative agreement as indicative of a higher level of commitment.

Applicants are required to contribute a minimum of five percent cost share of total project costs. The funding for that match may not include Federal funds (see Section III (A) for cost share calculation).

B. Review and Selection Process

In addition to any other internal reviews, we will form review panels of external experts. Each panel will objectively review and score the cooperative agreement applications using the evaluation criteria listed above. The panel will recommend applicants based on (1) the application scores, (2) the feasibility and adequacy of the project plan and methodology, and (3) the demonstrated expertise of identified staff. We will consider the panel's recommendations when awarding the cooperative agreements.

Although the results from the review panel are the primary factor used in making funding decisions, they are not the sole basis for making awards. We will consider other factors as well. When the panel scores are close, we will look favorably on applications from or affiliated with historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic American colleges and universities, and other minority-serving institutions. Any such affiliations should be noted in the application for appropriate consideration.

All applicants must use the guidelines provided in the Social Security application kit at www.grants.gov by March 30, 2015 for preparing applications requesting funding under this cooperative agreement announcement. These guidelines describe the minimum amount of required project information. However, when completing the Project Narrative, please follow the guidelines listed above.

All awardees must adhere to Social Security's Privacy and Confidentiality Regulations (see Section VI-Administrative and National Policy for 20 CFR Part 401), as well as provide specific safeguards surrounding client information sharing, paper records and computer data, and other issues potentially arising from administrative data.

Protection of PII - Awardees are subject to our background checks and fingerprinting in accordance with our personnel, security, and suitability requirements. In addition, awardees are required to adhere to our policy regarding the protection of PII. When making awards, we will distribute the necessary packages, including forms and consents for completion, for both PII and Suitability Determination as needed.

Panel Recommendations: Once each application is scored and ranked, the panel will review the top applicants and recommend applications that together best address the range of responsibilities described in Part I.

Risk Assessment: Per 2 CFR Part 200.207, we will assess the risk posed by applicants or recipients when they have demonstrated a history of failure to comply with general or specific terms and conditions of a Federal award, or failure to meet expected performance goals. Based on this assessment, we or a pass-through entity may impose additional specific award conditions as needed. These additional award conditions may include items such as:

- Requiring payments as reimbursements rather than advance payments
- Withholding authority to proceed to the next phase until receipt of evidence of acceptable performance within a given period of performance
- Requiring additional, more detailed financial reports
- Requiring additional project monitoring
- Requiring the non-Federal entity to obtain technical or management assistance; or
- Establishing additional prior approvals
 - SSA or a pass-through entity must notify the applicant or non-Federal entity as to:
 - The nature of the additional requirements
 - The reason why the additional requirements are being imposed
 - The nature of the action needed to remove the additional requirement, if applicable
 - The time allowed for completing the actions, if applicable, and

- The method for requesting reconsideration of the additional requirement imposed

Any special conditions must be promptly removed once the conditions that prompted them have been corrected.

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

We anticipate issuing awards by August 1, 2015. We will notify successful applicants on or before August 1, 2015.

VI: Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Selected applicants will receive an official electronic notice of award signed by an SSA Grants Management Officer on or around August 1, 2015. We will notify unsuccessful applicants by official letter.

B. Administrative and National Policy

All applicants, award recipients, and subrecipients are subject to the following as they apply:

- **Financial Assistance use of Universal Identifier and Central Contractor Registration**
2 CFR Subtitle A, Chapter 1, and Part 25. This requires all awardees and first-tier sub-awardees (other than individuals) to have a Dun and Bradstreet DUNS number and maintain current registrations in the CCR database.
http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=19add9f70bb13b678cb09a05c336a565&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl and <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>
- **Requirements for FFATA Implementation**
2 CFR Part 170. This requires all organizations to report sub-awards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards via a specified website.
http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=19add9f70bb13b678cb09a05c336a565&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl
www.fsrs.gov
- **Trafficking in Persons: Grants and Cooperative Agreements**

2 CFR Part 175. This regulation requires that all awarding agencies include a condition authorizing termination of the award if the awardee or a sub-awardee engages in certain activities related to trafficking in persons. http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=19add9f70bb13b678cb09a05c336a565&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr175_main_02.tpl

- **Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards**

2 CFR Part 200. This section establishes the administrative requirements, principles for determining costs applicable to grants and cooperative agreements, and audit requirements.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_docs

- **Nonprocurement Debarment and Suspension**

2 CFR Part 2336. This section adopts the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance in subparts A through 1 of 2 CFR Part 180, as supplemented by the SSA policies and procedures for nonprocurement debarment and suspension.

<http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=19add9f70bb13b678cb09a05c336a565&rgn=div8&view=text&node=2:1.2.16.11.1.0.15.1&idno=2>

http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=19add9f70bb13b678cb09a05c336a565&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr180_main_02.tpl

- **Privacy and Disclosure of Official Records and Information**

20 CFR Part 401. This section describes our policies and procedures for implementing the requirements of the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a and section 1106 of the Social Security Act concerning disclosure of information about individuals, both with and without their consent. <http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=a698569ed966bc36f0732b38075798ff&rgn=div8&view=text&node=20:2.0.1.1.2.1.1.1&idno=20>

- **Restrictions on Lobbying**

20 CFR Part 438. This regulation prohibits the use of any appropriated funds to pay any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of SSA, a member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a member of Congress in connection with any of the following: awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal award, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=4d4e4cd3c0761d790499244346a7c26f&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title20/20cfr438_main_02.tpl

- **Security Administration Implementation of OMB Guidance for Drug-Free Workplace Requirements**

20 CFR Part 439, (20 CFR Part 2339). This section requires that the award and administration of SSA grants and cooperative agreements comply with the OMB guidance implementing the portion of the Drug-Free Workplace Act of 188.
http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&sid=19add9f70bb13b678cb09a05c336a565&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr182_main_02.tpl

C. Reporting Requirements–

1. Triennial Reporting of Program Performance - Every three months during the award period, the awardee will produce a progress report. The awardee's progress reports should provide a concise summary of the progress being made toward completion of activities in the annual work plan, efforts to meet or exceed the WIPA Benchmarks, and innovative approaches to providing services to beneficiaries eligible for WIPA support. Details regarding the format and due dates of the progress reports will be provided in the Terms and Conditions at the time of award along with a report template. Awardees may include and attach data reports generated from the National WIPA database to enhance the triennial reports.
2. In order to meet the annual reporting requirement contained in Section 1149 (c) of the Social Security Act, within 30 days of the end of each performance period, the awardee shall submit an annual accounting of services provided. Details regarding the format and due dates of the annual report will be provided in the Terms and Conditions documentation along with a report template. Awardees may use data reports generated from the National WIPA database for this report.
3. Data Reports as required.
4. FINAL report at end of five year award period.
5. Federal Financial Reports (SF-425) - In addition, the awardee will submit three quarterly and one annual financial status reports to our agency, for each budget period. We will provide detailed instructions for submitting financial reports and the required forms with each year's award.
6. Sub-award Reporting - Award recipients must report each action that obligates \$25,000 or more in Federal funds for a sub-award to an entity. Specific instructions for reporting sub-awards are included in the Federal Regulation 2 CFR Part 170 (see Administrative and National Policy above).

VII: Agency Contact(s)

For matters related to the application and submission process and the programmatic content of this announcement, contact SSA-TA@grantreview.org. All Frequently Asked Questions and Answers will be posted and regularly updated at:
http://www.ssa.gov/oag/grants/ssagrants_current.htm#sb=1.