



Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB)
Division of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY)

National Communication System for Runaway and Homeless Youth Program

Opportunity number: HHS-2026-ACF-ACYF-CY-0160



Contents

Before you begin	3
 Step 1: Review the Opportunity	<u>4</u>
Basic information	<u>5</u>
Eligibility	<u>7</u>
Agency priorities	<u>10</u>
Program description	<u>12</u>
 Step 2: Get Ready to Apply	<u>25</u>
Find the application package	<u>26</u>
Get registered	<u>27</u>
Learn more	<u>27</u>
 Step 3: Build Your Application	<u>28</u>
Application checklist	<u>29</u>
Application contents and format	<u>31</u>
 Step 4: Learn About Review and Award	<u>49</u>
Application review	<u>50</u>
Award notices	<u>56</u>
 Step 5: Submit Your Application	<u>57</u>
Application submission and deadlines	<u>58</u>
 Step 6: Learn What Happens After Award	<u>60</u>
Post-award requirements and administration	<u>61</u>
 Contacts and Support	<u>63</u>
Modifications	<u>66</u>



Before you begin

If you believe you are a good candidate for this funding opportunity, secure your [SAM.gov](#) and [Grants.gov](#) registrations now. If you are already registered, make sure your registrations are active and up to date.

SAM.gov registration (this can take several weeks)

You must have an active account with SAM.gov. This includes having a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

[See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply](#)

Grants.gov registration (this can take several days)

You must have an active Grants.gov registration. Doing so requires a Login.gov registration as well.

[See Step 2: Get Ready to Apply](#)

Apply by the application due date

Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on Wednesday, August 19, 2026.



To help you find what you need, this NOFO uses internal links. In Adobe Reader, you can go back to where you were by pressing Alt + Left Arrow (Windows) or Command + Left Arrow (Mac) on your keyboard.



Step 1:

Review the Opportunity

In this step

Basic information	<u>5</u>
Eligibility	<u>7</u>
Agency priorities	<u>10</u>
Program description	<u>12</u>

Basic information

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB)

Division of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY)

The National Communication System (NCS) program assists youth who are considering running away, youth who have run away, and youth experiencing homelessness, in communicating with their families, and when necessary, connecting them with shelters and other critical services.

Summary

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), through the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) and its Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) will award one cooperative agreement for a period of three years to operate the NCS for the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) program.

The NCS program leads runaway and youth homelessness prevention efforts nationwide to increase awareness of the services and resources it provides to young people, especially youth at risk of running away or experiencing homelessness and their families. The program assists youth in communicating with their families and, when necessary, connecting them with shelters and other critical services and community-based providers. It also provides information and referral services, technical support, crisis intervention, and prevention resources to families, legal guardians, service providers, and other youth-serving organizations. Throughout this Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), we use the term “youth” to describe children, adolescents, and young adults who are considering running away, who have run away, and who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, homelessness.



Have questions?
See [Contacts and Support](#).

Key facts

Opportunity name: The National Communication System (NCS)

Opportunity number: HHS-2026-ACF-ACYF-CY-0160

Federal assistance listing: 93.623

NOFO version: Original

Key dates

Application submission deadline: August 19, 2026

Expected project start date: September 30, 2026

See [intergovernmental review](#) for other submission processes that may apply to this NOFO.

Funding details

Type: Cooperative agreement

Expected total program funding: \$1,800,000

Total expected awards: 1

Minimum award amount for the first budget period (award floor): \$1,000,000

Maximum award amount for the first budget period (award ceiling): \$1,800,000

We plan to fund a three-year project period. The project period has three, one-year budget periods.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants

These types of entities may apply:

- Public and private nonprofit entities.
- State, county, city or township, and special district governments.
- Independent school districts.
- Public- and state-controlled institutions of higher education.
- Private institutions of higher education.
- Public housing authorities and Indian housing authorities.
- Nonprofits with or without a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than institutions of higher education.
- Native American tribal governments (federally recognized).
- Native American tribal governments (other than federally recognized tribal governments).

Other eligibility criteria

Individuals (including sole proprietorships), foreign entities, and foreign entities are not eligible to apply.

Faith-based and community organizations that meet the eligibility requirements are eligible for awards under this funding opportunity.

For-profit organizations are not eligible.

In accordance with section 331 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHY Act) ([34 U.S.C. 11231](#)), we will prioritize applicants with experience in providing telephone services to vulnerable youth, at-risk youth, and runaway and homeless youth. Telephone services include calls, emails, texts or short message services (SMS), and chat.

Disqualifying factors

We will review your application to make sure it meets these responsiveness requirements.

We will not consider an application that:

- Requests funding above the [award ceiling](#).
- Is submitted after the [deadline](#).
- Is from an individual (including a sole proprietorship), federal entity, or a foreign entity.
- Is received in paper format that didn't have a previously approved exemption from ACF.

Application limits

If you submit the same application more than once under this NOFO, we will only acknowledge the last, on-time submission.

Cost sharing

This program requires you to contribute 10% of the project's total cost. You can calculate this cost-sharing requirement in two ways:

Method 1: Start with the federal share.

Calculation: Divide the federal share by 9.

For example: $\$1,800,000 / 9 = \$200,000$.

Method 2: Start with the total project cost.

Calculation: Multiply the total project cost by 10%.

For example: $\$2,000,000 \times 10\% = \$200,000$.

Types of cost sharing

You can meet your match requirement through any combination of:

- Cash contributed by your organization, partners, or other third parties.
- In-kind (non-cash) contributions from partners or other third parties.

Cost-sharing commitments

If awarded, you must provide the amount of cost-sharing funds you promised, even if you promised more than the minimum required. We put these commitments in the Notice of Award.

If you do not provide your promised amount, we may decrease the amount of funding we give you or use other enforcement actions.

You'll have to include your cost-sharing funds when you fill out your [federal financial reports](#).

Post-award requirements

Before you apply, make sure you understand the requirements that come with an award.

See [Step 6: Learn What Happens After Award](#) for information on regulations that apply, reporting, and more.

Statutory authority

This program is authorized under Title III, Part C, section 321 of the RHY Act ([34 U.S.C. 11231](#)).

Agency priorities

Required alignment with ACF vision, mission, values, priorities, and guiding principles

The recipient of this award must implement any funds awarded under this NOFO to effectuate program goals or agency priorities in accordance with [ACF's vision, mission, values, priorities, and guiding principles](#) when authorized. Funded activities must advance ACF's vision of resilient, safe, healthy, and economically secure children, youth, families, and communities, and support ACF's mission to foster health and well-being through effective, accountable, and compassionate human services when awarded in any programs that authorize these priorities.

Consistent with ACF's values, in carrying out any project that is funded under this NOFO, the recipient is required to adhere to the following principle:

1. **Program integrity and fiscal stewardship:** Administer funds in accordance with all applicable federal statutes, regulations, and award conditions; maintain strong internal controls; and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse.

The recipient is also required to adhere to the following principles when consistent with the authority and scope of the award and its activities:

2. **Evidence-based and outcome-focused practices:** Design and deliver services using evidence-based or evidence-informed approaches, establish measurable performance goals, and use data to monitor outcomes and drive continuous improvement.
3. **Partnership and local leadership:** Coordinate with state, tribal, territorial, local, and community partners, as appropriate, and tailor services to meet community-identified needs while respecting local decision-making authority.

In addition, in keeping with ACF's priorities, the recipient must administer any project that is awarded under this NOFO in accordance with the following objectives when consistent with the scope of the award and its activities in programs that are authorized to advance them:

4. **Family stability and child well-being:** Strengthen families, promote safe and stable home environments, and improve outcomes for children and youth through prevention-focused and developmentally appropriate services.
5. **Work, self-sufficiency, and economic mobility:** Support pathways to employment, job retention, and economic independence for individuals and

families, including through workforce development, education, and supportive services.

6. **High-quality early care and learning:** Where applicable, invest in high-quality early childhood programs that support school readiness, healthy development, and long-term success.

The recipient must demonstrate ongoing compliance with these values and priorities, in all programs that are authorized to advance them, through program design, implementation, reporting, and evaluation. Failure to meaningfully align funded activities with the applicable requirements may result in corrective action, additional reporting requirements, or other enforcement actions consistent with federal grant regulations found at [2 CFR Part 200](#) and the terms and conditions of this award.

A Home for Every Child

ACF's A Home for Every Child initiative advances the goal that every young person has a safe, stable, and nurturing home. The Runaway and Homeless Youth National Communication System provides 24/7 crisis intervention, information, and referrals to connect youth and families to safety and support. Without these services, youth face heightened risks of exploitation, trafficking, and prolonged instability, underscoring the importance of immediate access to help and pathways to stable housing. Youth who can safely return to a more permanent home, whether through the foster care system, kinship care, or family of origin, will be assisted to do so.

Program description

The NCS program is a nationwide, 24-hour crisis communication and referral system designed to assist youth in crisis and their families. Its primary purpose is to help youth communicate safely and confidentially with family members, legal guardians, and service providers, while also delivering crisis intervention services to youth who are considering leaving home, have left home, or are experiencing homelessness.

The NCS program operates continuously, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, across the United States and its territories, ensuring youth and families have immediate access to support, whenever needed. Services are delivered through toll-free telephone lines and multiple online and digital platforms, including chat, text, and email, to align with the communication preferences of young people.

Core functions of the NCS program include:

- Providing crisis intervention and counseling.
- Facilitating communication between youth and families.
- Identifying and connecting youth to local, state, tribal, and national resources.
- Supporting family reunification, when appropriate.
- Promoting prevention of runaway episodes and youth homelessness.

The program also emphasizes outreach, education, and youth engagement to increase awareness of services and to strengthen prevention efforts nationwide.

The program prioritizes positive youth development, services, and practices that acknowledge the impact of trauma and difficult life experiences. Services address the complex and intersectional challenges that youth face, including mental health concerns, family conflict, substance use, dating violence, sexual abuse or exploitation, human trafficking, and housing instability. The program also supports families and caregivers by providing crises intervention and prevention counseling, referrals, and resources aimed at preventing runaway episodes and youth homelessness.

The NCS program is a critical component of the nationwide response to running away episodes and youth homelessness, which has an immediate impact on the health, safety, and well-being of children, youth, their families, and the community. It is imperative the organization selected for this project have the institutional capacity to:

- Handle the demand for services.
- Respond professionally to children, youth, and their families.
- Operate without interruption.

This project addresses the priority of Promoting Quality Early Learning Environments and Improved Child Outcomes by improving child health and well-being and ensuring that the children served by the program have the opportunity to thrive.

Program components

The NCS program consists of the following distinct program components:

- **Communication system:** Will include no-cost telephone and multiple online/digital services, such as text and chat, which will serve a wide range of expected contacts from youth, parents, legal guardians, and others. The funded cooperative agreement will operate an electronic communication system to assist youth and families requesting support, referrals services, and assistance related to their experiences and situations.
- **Crisis intervention model:** Will focus on empowering youth to identify specific issues and develop solution-focused options and action plans to address their issues. This includes identifying local community-based resources to meet immediate critical needs and sharing resources and referrals to assist the youth with planning long-term solutions, such as individual or family counseling and substance abuse treatment.
- **Referral database:** Will be an up-to-date, nationwide referral database organized by state and U.S. territory, which ensures the NCS program can effectively refer youth and their families to local organizations and agencies.
- **NCS web portal, prevention and community education:** Will be a public website providing information about the NCS program and its services and developing and disseminating resources and activities to prevent youth from running away and/or experiencing homelessness.
- **Data analysis, evaluation, and reporting:** Will include:
 - An analysis and evaluation of the communication system.
 - Crises intervention model.
 - Referral database and NCS web portal.
 - Prevention and community education efforts.
 - Reporting of key program accomplishments on an annual and ad hoc basis.

Project requirements

Service readiness and responsiveness

Projects must implement a strategy for ensuring continuous operational readiness to respond to urgent contacts 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. This strategy must include:

- A communication system that is, at a minimum, available to process non-urgent requests for service referrals and information within 15 business days of the project start date.
- Plans for staffing, supervision, and coverage across all communication channels including telephone, text, chat, and other digital platforms.
- Procedures for prioritizing and responding to high-risk or urgent contacts.
- Processes for managing contact volume, wait times, and peak demand periods.
- Policies and procedures for collecting, managing, and safeguarding non-identifying data related to telephone and digital contacts for reporting, performance monitoring, and quality improvement purposes.

Technology infrastructure

You must have the technology infrastructure to support NCS program operation. The system must include:

- Toll-free telephone operations and multi-channel contact management.
- Text, chat, web-based, mobile communication platforms, and other technology-driven platforms to align with how youth communicate and seek help.
- Case management, documentation, and internal administration.

Systems must ensure reliability, confidentiality, data integrity, and compliance with applicable federal requirements.

System design and operations

Your service delivery system, including its overall capacity and any anticipated limitations. Must have the ability to:

- Manage anticipated volumes of telephone, text, chat, and online contacts at the national level, with a capacity to respond to the anticipated demand of at least 100,000 yearly contacts.
- Route contacts efficiently and transition users between communication channels as appropriate.
- Support call conferencing and coordination with parents, legal guardians, supervisors, or service providers.

- Enable timely and effective referrals, including automated and warm referrals to local service providers.
- Adapt to and integrate new or emerging technologies to enhance service delivery over the project period.

Quality assurance and continuous improvement

You must have a quality assurance and continuous improvement framework that will be used to monitor service quality and measure progress toward program goals and objectives. This framework must include:

- Procedures for routine monitoring and review of contacts across all communication channels.
- Performance metrics related to responsiveness, wait times, unanswered contacts, and referral outcomes.
- Processes for identifying, documenting, and addressing service delivery issues, data integrity concerns, and technological challenges.
- Mechanisms for using quality assurance findings to inform staff training, supervision, and system improvements.

You will also participate in RHY Program Network quarterly meetings to coordinate efforts with FYSB's partner network, hosted by the RHY Training, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building Center.

Evaluation, data analysis, and reporting

A strategy for evaluating the project's performance, conducting data analysis, and developing and disseminating reports.

Monthly reports must include:

- Number of calls received, answered, and missed.
- Number of chats and texts received and answered.
- Number of visits and unique visitors to the NCS web portal.
- Non-identifying information about callers or web portal users.
- Number and types of assistance the NCS has provided.
- Information on calls and contacts received from youth in crisis, attempting to leave their homes and communities.

Annual and ad hoc reports must include:

- The operations and success of the Communication System, Crisis Intervention Model, NCS Database, and NCS Portal.
- Prevention and community education activities.

Crisis intervention model

You must implement a crisis intervention approach that will meet the needs of youth and families from different cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds, including:

- American Indian tribes and Alaska Native villages.
- Individuals with limited English proficiency.
- Individuals with disabilities.
- Youth who have experienced multiple forms of victimization, including commercial sexual exploitation, labor or sex trafficking, and dating violence.

Service delivery

A crisis intervention model that guides hotline services to include how crisis intervention services will be delivered in a manner that is:

- Accessible across multiple communication platforms.
- Responsive to the immediate and longer-term needs of youth and families.

You must use a youth-empowerment, solution-focused crisis intervention model that supports youth in identifying their presenting concerns, exploring options, and developing realistic action plans. The description must explain how the model emphasizes youth autonomy while ensuring safety and appropriate support.

Core crisis intervention principles

Your crisis intervention approach must incorporate the following core principles:

- **Establishing rapport and trust:** Methods for creating a safe, non-judgmental environment that promotes open communication and builds trust with youth and family members.
- **Identifying the precipitating event:** Procedures for helping youth describe the events and stressors leading up to the crisis, including exploration of prior experiences that may have contributed to the breakdown in coping.
- **Clarifying the presenting problem:** Strategies for assisting youth and family members in focusing on the specific issue or situation driving the current crisis.
- **Stabilization and immediate support:** Processes for identifying and addressing immediate safety concerns and critical needs during and immediately following the crisis.

- **Resource identification and referral:** Approaches for identifying and connecting youth and families to appropriate community-based resources to address both immediate needs and longer-term solutions, including:
 - Emergency shelter.
 - Individual or family counseling.
 - Substance use treatment.
 - Victim services and legal advocacy.
- **Supporting informed decision-making:** Methods for offering options and guidance while respecting the youth's right to make independent decisions based on their needs, values, and circumstances.
- **Strengths-based engagement:** Strategies for identifying and building on the strengths, resiliency, and existing supports of youth and their families when discussing solutions and referrals.

Services focused on human trafficking

You must train project staff to screen and identify youth who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing human trafficking or exploitation.

You must integrate human trafficking prevention and intervention strategies.

Human trafficking of children and youth

Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of a person to perform labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Per 22 U.S.C. 7102(11), the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 as amended, human trafficking (severe forms of trafficking in persons) means:

- Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.
- The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Youth who are missing from foster care, are experiencing homelessness, or have unstable housing are at a higher risk of experiencing human trafficking, particularly at times when they are struggling to access resources to meet basic needs. Individuals who exploit children often fulfill these needs to build trust and create dependency as a precursor to trafficking. These children may be coerced into engaging in sex acts or compelled labor for shelter, food, clothing, and other basic needs.

Screening for trafficking concerns

Your NCS project staff must be trained to utilize standardized screening tool(s) that are validated and evidence- and trauma-informed to identify trafficking concerns and evaluate youth needs throughout the service relationship. You may elect to use one or multiple tools, but the tools must be able to identify youth who have experienced labor and/or sex trafficking and assess for common indicators and risks for human trafficking.

It is best practice to screen for trafficking concerns during the youth's initial call on the hotline, any time a youth calls the hotline, and any time trafficking is suspected. Even in situations when a youth may not exhibit obvious indicators for trafficking, the recipient should utilize a validated universal screening approach and incorporating screening protocols at various stages, in addition to identifying trafficking concerns. This practice will also help mitigate early signs of risk and prevent trafficking before it occurs or re-occurs.

While screening is an initial step in identifying trafficking concerns, it can elicit unintended trauma responses. Therefore, it is imperative for you to first address the youth's basic needs (food, sleep, safety and safety planning, comfort, etc.) before any screening occurs. It is also important for you to consider each individual youth's experience, cognition, mental health, and the effects of trauma when assessing their responses prior to and during screening and intake. See table below for acceptable screening tools.

Table: Validated Screening Tools for Human Trafficking of Children and Youth

Tool identifier	In-depth	Short/rapid	Demographic	Environment
Commercial Sexual Exploitation-Identification Tool		X	Ages 10+; sex trafficking only	Multiple settings, including child welfare and juvenile justice systems, schools, homeless youth shelters, health care and mental health settings
Human Trafficking Screening Tool	X	X	Ages 18–24; sex trafficking only	Runaway and Homeless Youth system settings
Quick Youth Indicators for Trafficking		X	Youth who are homeless; sex trafficking and labor trafficking	Service provider setting
Rapid Appraisal for Trafficking		X	Ages 18+; sex trafficking and labor trafficking	Health care setting
Short Screen for Child Sex Trafficking		X	Ages 12–18; sex trafficking only	Health care setting

Source: [National Advisory Committee on the Sex Trafficking of Children and Youth in the United States, Best Practices and Recommendations for States \[PDF\]](#), (2020)

Services for victims of trafficking

As disclosures may happen during screening and/or at any point during time of service, you must develop protocols for response to disclosures. The protocols must include but not be limited to assessment for trafficking-specific case management, safety planning, referrals and follow-up for clinical and therapeutic support, mentorships, and medical services. Youth who have experienced human trafficking have unique needs that must be considered when screening and assessing for service needs, interventions, and community referrals. All interventions must be centered around the youth's voice to ensure the youth is an active participant in their care and decision-making for services, and safety planning must be at the center of all support. Further, if it is determined to be in the youth's best interest, the youth's caregiver and/or relevant family members may be brought in for parts of the service planning efforts; however, this should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Trafficking-specific education and outreach

You are required to integrate human trafficking content throughout program education and outreach activities. All approaches and materials must be trauma-informed, person-centered, developmentally appropriate, and responsive to age, developmental and cognitive abilities, and other relevant factors. For education and outreach resources see [reference websites](#).

Outreach

You must include information on human trafficking in all outreach activities. Outreach materials must provide audience-appropriate information about human trafficking, including how to identify potential trafficking schemes, how to seek help, and how to access available services and resources. You must ensure that outreach activities include information on referral options, including the [National Human Trafficking Hotline](#).

Mandatory reporting

Human trafficking of children (labor and sex trafficking) is now defined under “child abuse and neglect” in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Pub. L. 93-247. Therefore, if an NCS project staff identifies potential concerns of human trafficking, you are required to comply with all federal, state, tribal, and local mandated reporting requirements in the same way your organization reports abuse and neglect within that jurisdiction (child welfare, law enforcement, etc.)

Referral database

You must develop, maintain, and continually update a comprehensive referral resource database that supports effective crisis response, service coordination, and referrals for youth and families. You must have technical and operational capacity to maintain an accurate, current, and accessible resource locator that supports hotline, text, chat, and digital service delivery.

The resource database will be used to facilitate timely and appropriate referrals and support communication among service providers at the local, state, tribal, and national levels.

Cooperative agreement — description of ACF's involvement

A cooperative agreement is an award instrument used when we anticipate substantial involvement between the awarding office and the grant recipient during performance of the expected project. It extends beyond normal oversight and stewardship responsibilities and functions.

A FYSB Federal Project Officer (FPO) will collaborate with your organization by:

- Providing approval for enhancements and changes to the work plan and budget during the project period.
- Being actively involved in the development of long-term strategies for project implementation.
- Participating in meetings and conferences you host.
- Participating in focus groups or listening sessions regarding NCS services, partner participation, and youth input and feedback, as appropriate.
- Communicating changes to performance expectations, FYSB policies, and providing appropriate technical assistance to implement those changes.
- Supporting efforts to evaluate NCS services.
- Consulting on current and proposed new data collection elements.

In addition, FYSB will review:

- Resumes for key project staff.
- List of names, expertise, and locations (including city, county, and state) of individuals, organizations, and agencies in your referrals database.
- All policies, procedures, and protocols used or created for handling both urgent and non-urgent calls, emails, and online communications to the NCS.
- Guidelines regarding required training for NCS personnel.

- Content on the NCS program web portal.
- Plans regarding how you will make use of volunteers in the NCS program, if applicable. The plan will include recruitment processes, volunteer protocols (including expected time to be donated to the NCS program), and volunteers' required training.
- Marketing plans, awareness campaigns, annual reports, and data collections on services offered and delivered through the NCS.

Funding policies and limitations

Changes in HHS regulations

As of October 1, 2025, HHS adopted [2 CFR 200](#), with some exceptions included in [2 CFR 300](#). These regulations replace those in 45 CFR 75.

General policies

- We will only make awards if this program receives funding. If Congress appropriates funds for this purpose, we will move forward with the review and award process.
- Support beyond the first budget period will depend on:
 - Appropriation of funds.
 - Satisfactory progress in meeting your project's objectives.
 - A decision that continued funding is in the government's best interest.
- If we receive more funding for this program, we will consider:
 - Funding more applicants.
 - Extending the period of performance.
 - Awarding supplemental funding.
- To the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders, you may not use funds from this NOFO for any diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEI and DEIA) activities. This includes:
 - DEI- or DEIA-related research.
 - Activities that discriminate or show preference based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, or other protected traits.
 - Any efforts that promote a "discriminatory equity ideology." To the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders, ACF will also not allow funds awarded under this NOFO to support any services or activities that inculcate or promote gender ideology.

For guidance on other types of costs that we restrict or do not allow, see General Provisions for Selected Items of Costs of the Uniform Guidance, [2 CFR part 200](#).

Program-specific limitations and policies

We do not allow the following costs under this notice of funding opportunity (NOFO):

- Construction.
- Purchase of real property.
- Major renovation.
- Pre-award.
- Costs for renovation of existing structures may not normally exceed 15% of the federal award. Costs for acquisition are not allowable by statute.
- Fundraising including campaigns, endowments, gifts, and similar expenses.
- Distribution of sterile needles or syringes.
- Abortions. See [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Public Law No. 117-328, div. H, tit. V, 506-507](#) for exceptions.

Indirect costs

Indirect costs are those shared across multiple projects and not easily separated.

To charge indirect costs you can select one of two methods:

Method 1 — Approved rate. If you currently have an indirect cost rate approved by your cognizant federal agency, you may use that rate.

Method 2 — *De minimis* rate. If you do not have a negotiated indirect cost rate, you may elect to charge a *de minimis* rate (see [2 CFR 200.414\(f\)](#)). This rate may be up to 15% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). See the definition of MTDC ([2 CFR 200.1](#)). You can use this rate indefinitely.

You may not charge costs included in your indirect cost pool as direct costs.

Subawards

As the prime recipient, you must maintain a substantive role in the project. This means that you conduct funded activities and provide services necessary and integral to completing the project.

Monitoring your subrecipient's activities alone as described in [2 CFR 200.332](#) is not a substantive role.

We do not fund awards where your role is primarily a conduit for passing funds to other organizations unless that arrangement is authorized by statute.

All subrecipients must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) through the System for Award Management (SAM.gov).

Subrecipients must meet the [eligibility requirements](#) of this NOFO.

Salary rate limitation

The salary rate limitation in the current appropriations act applies to this program. You may not use awarded funds to pay a salary at a higher rate than the rate for Executive Level II.

For the Executive Level II salary, please see the [Office of Personnel Management information on executive and senior level employee pay](#).

The salary limitation reflects a person's base salary (including any portion of the salary that is paid with indirect costs). It does not include fringe benefits or any income the person is allowed to earn outside of the duties of the applicant organization.

This salary limitation also applies to subawards, contracts, and subcontracts under an ACF grant or cooperative agreement.

Program income

If you earn any money from your award-supported project activities (known as program income), you must use it for the purposes and under the conditions of the award. Find more about program income at [2 CFR 200.307](#).



Step 2:

Get Ready to Apply

In this step

Find the application package	<u>26</u>
Get registered	<u>27</u>
Learn more	<u>27</u>

Find the application package

The application package has all the forms you need to apply. You can find it at this NOFO's Grants.gov opportunity page. Then select the Package tab.

We recommend that you select the **Subscribe** button from the View Grant Opportunity page for this NOFO to get updates.

If you cannot use Grants.gov to download application materials or have other technical difficulties, including issues with application submission, [contact Grants.gov](#) for assistance.

Get registered

SAM.gov

You must have an active account with SAM.gov to apply. SAM.gov registration can take several weeks. Begin that process today.

To register:

- Go to [SAM.gov Entity Registration](#) and select Get Started. From the same page, you can also select the Entity Registration Checklist for the information you will need to register.
- You must agree to the [financial assistance general certifications and representations \[PDF\]](#) specifically. Those for contracts are different.

When you register, you will also receive your required Unique Entity Identifier (UEI).

Once you register:

- You will have to maintain your registration throughout the life of any award.
- If your organization has multiple UEIs, use the one associated with your physical location.

Grants.gov

You must also have an active account with [Grants.gov](#). You can see step-by-step instructions at the Grants.gov [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#).

Need help? See [Contacts and Support](#).

Learn more

Visit [Applying for an ACF Grant Award](#) on the ACF Grants page.



Step 3:

Build Your Application

In this step

Application checklist	<u>29</u>
Application contents and format	<u>31</u>

Application checklist

Make sure that you have everything you need to apply. You will find the forms in Grants.gov.

File one: Narratives

Use the Project Narrative Attachment form.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ Table of contents	Yes
☐ Project summary	Yes
☐ Project narrative	Yes
☐ Line-item budget and budget narrative	Yes

File two: Attachments

Insert each in a single Other Attachments form.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ ACF priorities alignment attestation	No
☐ Indirect cost agreement	Yes
☐ Legal proof of nonprofit status	Yes
☐ Organizational capacity supporting information (including organization chart)	Yes
☐ Third-party agreements	Yes

Standard forms

Use each required form in Grants.gov.

Component	Included in page limit?
☐ Project Abstract Summary	No
☐ Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	No
☐ Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	No
☐ Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)	No
☐ Key Contacts	No
☐ Grants.gov Lobbying form	No
☐ Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	No
☐ Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	No

Application contents and format

You will submit two files plus the [standard forms](#) in the application package.

Your organization's authorized official must certify your application.

See [intergovernmental review](#) to find out if you need to make any other submissions.

Required format

Page limit for file one and file two combined: 95 pages.

File format: Portable Document Format (PDF) is recommended, but not required. ACF supports the following file formats when you attach files to the Project Narrative Attachment form and the Other Attachments form:

Accepted file formats

- Adobe PDF (.pdf)
- Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx)
- Microsoft Excel (.xls or .xlsx)
- Microsoft PowerPoint (.ppt)
- Image formats (.JPG, .GIF, .TIFF, or .BMP only)

Document formats

Paper size: 8 ½ inches x 11 inches

Margins: 1 inch all around

Language: English

If possible, include page numbers.

Do not include external links to information you want reviewers to assess because reviewers will score the application solely on information provided in the application.

Fonts

Font: Times New Roman

Color: Black

Size: 12-point font

Footnotes and text in tables and graphics may be 10-point.

Spacing

Table of contents: Must be single-spaced

Project summary: Must be single-spaced

Project narrative: Must be double-spaced

Line-item budget and budget narrative: Can be single-spaced

Attachments: Can be single-spaced

Tables and footnotes throughout: Can be single-spaced

See [disqualifying factors](#) to understand what may disqualify your application from consideration.

File one: Narratives

To submit file one, you will use the Project Narrative Attachment form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes:

- Table of contents.
- Project summary, one page.
- Project narrative.
- Line-item budget and budget narrative.

Table of contents

At the beginning of file one, insert a table of contents that guides a reader through the contents of both files in your application. If possible, include links to the relevant content in file one.

Project summary

Provide a one-page summary of the project description. Do not cross-reference to other parts of your application. The summary must include:

- At the top, the project title, applicant name, address, phone numbers, email addresses, and any website URL.
- A brief description of the project, including the needs and population you will address, your proposed services or research questions.

Project narrative

The project narrative is where you address all your proposed activities. It is a critical section of your application, which we evaluate using [merit review criteria](#) and rank based on application scores.

Remember that substance and measurable outcomes are more important than length. We are particularly interested in project narratives that convey strategies for achieving intended performance.

In it, you must:

- Explain how the project will meet the purpose of the NOFO, as described in [the program description section](#).
- Make sure your narrative is clear, concise, and complete.
- Use cross-referencing rather than repetition.
- Be sure to include any required supporting documents noted. You generally provide these in your [attachments](#).
- Use the headings and order of the sections that follow.

Response

Approach

Outline your action plan. Describe the scope of your proposed project and describe in detail how you will accomplish it. Account for all functions or activities you identify in your application.

Explain potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing your project goals. Explain the strategies you will use to address them.

The organization must demonstrate and provide specific plans that reflect:

- An understanding of the scope and nature of services.
- The demand for services.
- The capacity to provide high-quality responses to youth, families, and those seeking support from the NCS.
- The ability to provide uninterrupted services in all circumstances.

Program implementation plan

A detailed plan describing how you will implement all of the components outlined in the [program description](#), including the:

- Communication system.
- Crisis intervention model.
- Referral database.
- NCS web portal, prevention, and community education activities.
- Evaluation, data analysis, and reporting.

Communications system

You must describe your proposed approach for operating the communication system. The approach must demonstrate your capacity to operate a toll-free hotline and multiple online and digital communication platforms, including text and chat, in a way that is accessible, responsive, secure, and aligned with the communication preferences of young people.

You must address how your proposed communication system will support youth and families seeking crisis support, referrals, and information related to RHY experiences and associated circumstances. The description of your communication system must include all elements listed in [Step 1, Program Description, Project requirements](#).

Crisis intervention model

You must describe your proposed crisis intervention approach for delivering hotline services that effectively support youth and families experiencing crisis related to RHY circumstances. The approach must demonstrate your capacity to provide youth-centered crisis intervention services as described in [Step 1, Program Description, Project requirements](#).

- **Emergency response and crisis protocols**

You must describe the emergency response and crisis intervention protocols that will be implemented to address high-risk or imminent situations. This description must include:

- Procedures for assessing risk and determining when emergency intervention is required.
- The ability to conference in or directly connect youth to local runaway and homeless youth shelters, emergency services, or other appropriate community resources.
- Protocols for supervisory consultation and escalation when necessary.

You must also describe strategies for minimizing operational challenges that may impact service delivery.

Services focused on human trafficking

You must include your strategy to train all project staff to conduct standardized screening to identify youth who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing human trafficking or exploitation.

You must describe the human trafficking prevention and intervention strategies you will utilize, including strategies for trafficking-specific education and outreach, as described in [Project requirements, Services focused on human trafficking](#).

Referral database

You must describe your approach to the development, maintenance, and ongoing updating of a comprehensive referral resource database that supports effective crisis response, service coordination, and referrals for youth and families. The approach must demonstrate your technical and operational capacity to maintain an accurate, current, and accessible resource locator that supports hotline, text, chat, and digital service delivery.

You must address how the resource database will be used to facilitate timely and appropriate referrals and support communication among service providers at the local, state, tribal, and national levels.

- **Resource database development and maintenance**

You must describe the methods and processes that you will use to develop, maintain, and regularly update a comprehensive resource database, as stated in [Step 1, Program description, Project requirements](#). The description must address:

- Procedures for identifying, vetting, and onboarding new service providers and resources.
- Processes for regularly verifying and updating contact information, service availability, eligibility criteria, and capacity.
- Referral and resource database management, including maintenance and updating of local and national service resources.
- Strategies for distributing and utilizing the database to the maximum extent appropriate across communication channels and staff roles.
- Internal controls to ensure that database information is accurate, consistent, and reliable.

You must also describe how you will document any updates and how you will identify and remove any outdated or inactive resources.

- **Technical capacity and system integration**

You must describe the technical capacity of your proposed or existing systems to support a robust and interoperable referral database. This description must address:

- The ability to link or interface with state, local, tribal, and other relevant databases to maintain an extensive and current resource directory.
- Systems that support real-time access to referral information for hotline responders.
- Data management features that support reporting, tracking referral trends, and identifying service gaps.
- Safeguards to protect data integrity and system security.

You must explain how the database will support efficient referrals and minimize duplication of effort across service systems.

- **Facilitating communication and service coordination**

You must describe how your referral database will be used to facilitate communication and coordination among service providers to support effective service delivery. This must include:

- Mechanisms for sharing information with partner agencies, as appropriate and permitted.
- Processes for warm referrals, follow-up coordination, or feedback from service providers.
- Strategies for maintaining active relationships with key referral partners.

- **Scope of referral resources**

You must describe how the resource database will include a broad range of service providers, including:

- Creation and maintenance of an up-to-date nationwide database, covering all U.S. states and territories, of at least 700 contact referrals within six months of the award start date.
- Local and statewide hotlines serving young people.
- National hotlines and other relevant organizations.
- Tribal organizations and services.
- Emergency and short-term shelter programs.
- Drop-in centers.
- Community-based organizations.
- Transitional housing programs, including maternity group homes, and long-term housing providers.
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care-funded projects.
- Emergency services.
- Legal advocacy and legal aid organizations.

- Medical and health care services.
- Child welfare agencies.
- Behavioral health and substance use treatment providers.
- Domestic violence shelters and victim service programs.

- **Resource information requirements**

You must describe how the database will maintain up-to-date and detailed information for each listed agency, organization, or service provider, including:

- Current contact information.
- Areas of expertise and populations served.
- Types of services offered.
- Capacity, availability, and eligibility requirements.

You must explain how responders will use this information to make appropriate, timely, and effective referrals for youth and families.

NCS web portal, prevention, and community education

You must describe a national outreach and communications plan that addresses how you will:

- Implement and manage an NCS web portal, which will provide information, resources, and services to young people and their families within four months of the award start date.
- Increase awareness of the NCS program and its services.
- Promote the NCS toll-free number and available online and digital communication platforms.
- Ensure that youth, families, and other concerned individuals understand how and when to access NCS services.
- Expand national, state, tribal, territorial, and local partnerships to amplify outreach efforts.

You must explain how you will tailor outreach strategies to different audiences and geographic contexts.

- **Public-facing information and prevention content**

You must describe how you will develop, curate, and share accurate, accessible, and timely information through NCS platforms, including:

- Information about the NCS program and its services.
- Trends and relevant data related to youth in crisis, runaway prevention, and youth homelessness.
- Runaway prevention education and awareness materials.

- Information on available services for:
 - Youth in crisis.
 - Youth considering running away.
 - Youth who have left home.
 - Youth experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

You must explain how materials will be developmentally appropriate and accessible to individuals with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency.

- **NCS web portal and digital engagement**

You must describe how you will design and maintain the NCS web portal to serve multiple audiences including youth, families, service providers, youth-serving organizations, educators, and the general public. The description must address:

- Clear, audience-specific content and navigation.
- Integration of digital communication channels, including online chat, text, email, and other web-based tools.
- Accessibility standards and mobile-friendly design.
- Use of the web portal to host prevention resources, training materials, webinars, and public education content.

- **Evaluation of outreach and prevention efforts**

You must provide a preliminary evaluation plan describing how they will assess:

- How well the target audiences have received information about NCS services and resources.
- How audiences are accessing, engaging with, and utilizing outreach and prevention materials.
- The effectiveness of outreach strategies in increasing awareness and service utilization.

You must describe how you will use evaluation findings to refine outreach approaches and improve prevention efforts.

- **Technical assistance, training, and capacity building**

You must describe your approach to providing technical assistance, training, and educational outreach, including how you will:

- Provide technical assistance to organizations and individuals seeking to increase awareness of challenges and needs of RHY.
- Deliver and host online and in-person training, webinars, and presentations for diverse audiences.

- Participate in regional, state, tribal, territorial, and national conferences, meetings, roundtables, and other outreach or prevention events.
- Use the NCS web portal to host and disseminate training and educational content.

- **Partnerships, cooperation, and brand visibility**

You must describe strategies to:

- Increase partnerships and collaboration with national, state, tribal, and local stakeholders.
- Coordinate with partner hotlines and develop shared outreach materials highlighting available hotline services.
- Enhance national brand recognition among youth and communities, including exploring opportunities for rebranding the NCS, as appropriate.
- Develop and execute a strategic plan to lead a National Youth Homelessness Outreach, Prevention, and Education month campaign.
- Plan, develop, and host a national meeting focused on best practices and strategies to advance a national youth homelessness prevention framework.

- **Prevention resource development and dissemination**

You must describe your approach to:

- Assisting in the development of prevention resources, as requested by the FYSB.
- Disseminating briefings, data summaries, and infographics highlighting trends among individuals contacting the NCS.
- Increasing awareness of NCS and RHY services in school settings, including development and delivery of curriculum-based or education-focused resources nationwide.
- Developing training materials to increase RHY grant recipient capacity to improve educational outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability such as webinars, toolkits, and tip sheets.

- **Innovative engagement approaches**

You must describe innovative strategies for:

- Effectively reaching youth and families nationwide and across U.S. territories.
- Increasing national visibility of the NCS program.
- Integrating youth who have experienced homelessness into prevention, outreach, service delivery, and evaluation efforts.

- **Youth voice and engagement**

You must describe a strategy for recruiting, supporting, and meaningfully incorporating youth who have experienced homelessness or housing instability into the design, implementation, and evaluation of:

- NCS services.
- Outreach and prevention resources.
- Program products, training, and public-facing materials.

You must explain how you will pay, support, and sustain youth engagement

Impact

Evaluation, data analysis, and reporting

You must describe your strategy for evaluating program performance, conducting data analysis, and developing and disseminating routine and ad hoc reports, as described in [Project requirements](#).

Project performance evaluation plan

Describe how you will evaluate your project's performance and how it will contribute to continuous quality improvement. This plan must describe:

- How you will monitor ongoing activities and progress toward the project's goals and objectives.
- The inputs, key activities, and expected outcomes of the funded activities. Inputs might include your collaborative partners, key staff, budget, service processes, or other resources.
- How you will measure the inputs, activities, and outcomes.
- How you will use the resulting information to improve your funded activities.
- Any processes that support overall data quality.
- The organizational systems and processes you will use to track performance outcomes.
- How your organization will collect and manage data in a way that allows for accurate and timely reporting of performance outcomes. This might include assigned skilled staff, data management software, and data integrity.
- Any potential obstacles to implementing the project performance evaluation and how you will address them.
- A timeline for how you will review information from the performance evaluation and apply it to your ongoing project.

Your strategy should include collecting data for the monthly reports and include annual and ad hoc reports on:

- The operations and success of the Communication system, Crisis intervention model, NCS database, and NCS portal.
- Prevention and community education requirements.

Resources and capabilities

Organizational capacity

Provide the following information for your full project team, including the applicant organization and any cooperating partners, contractors, and subrecipients:

- Provide evidence that your team has the relevant experience and expertise to carry out your project.
- Describe your team's experience (including partner organizations) in administering, developing, implementing, managing, and evaluating similar projects.
- Provide evidence that your team, including partner organizations, has the organizational capability to fulfill their roles and functions effectively.
- Disclose your plan to enter into subaward agreements. If you are planning subawards, describe the work each subrecipient will complete.
- Describe your experience in providing electronic communications services to young people, including those considering running away, youth who have run away, and youth experiencing homelessness, including telephone, internet, mobile applications, and other technology-driven services. ([45 CFR § 1351.12\(d\)](#)).
- Describe your experience providing high-quality crisis intervention, safety planning, information and referral, counseling services, and support to youth considering running away, youth on-the-run, and youth experiencing homelessness, their families, and the general public. Include experience delivering these services through a toll-free hotline and web-based or other digital communications systems.
- Show your capacity to respond to the anticipated demand of at least 100,000 yearly contacts. Provide estimates of the expected volume of calls for:
 - Crisis response.
 - Immediate referrals to shelters and other runaway and homeless youth services.
 - Referrals for additional services such as mental health or substance abuse counseling.
 - Sexual assault victim services.
- Indicate the strategies for responding to contacts with limited English proficiency.
- Provide evidence of your capacity to operate at a nationwide level, including service to Native American tribes and Alaska Native villages, the Commonwealth

of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and Northern Mariana Islands.

- Explain how you will begin or continue providing full-scale hotline services at the start of the project period with no lapse in service. If applicable, describe how you will ensure a seamless transition of services between the current recipient and your organization.
- Indicate how long your organization has been providing these services. Include:
- Your organization's mission statement.
 - An organizational chart.
 - A project management plan.
- Include your strategy for:
 - Hiring staff, including the criteria you will use.
 - Training staff on:
 - Nationwide resources.
 - NCS technological systems
 - NCS policies and protocols.
 - Effective responses to youth contacting NCS crisis services.
 - Service delivery that reflects the populations that NCS serves.
 - Responding to surges in demand for NCS services, such as during major media campaigns or national media coverage.
 - Addressing contingencies, such as national disasters, while ensuring uninterrupted service.
- Provide some supporting information in the organizational capacity supporting information section of your [attachments](#).

Current and pending funding support

Provide a list of your current and pending funding for ongoing projects and proposals. Include all sources, such as federal, state, and local governments, public or private foundations, and for-profit organizations.

Indicate which projects and proposals require committed time from the project director, principal investigator, or other key personnel of the project you are proposing in this application.

Show the total award amount, awarding entity, and the amount of time each key staff member will devote to each project.

Plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities

You must ensure proper award oversight. The regulation that governs this oversight is [2 CFR part 200](#). It includes standards for:

- Financial and program management.
- Property management.
- Procurement.
- Performance and financial monitoring and reporting.
- Subrecipient monitoring and management.
- Record retention and access.
- Remedies for noncompliance.
- Prior written approval.

Describe your framework to make sure that your federal funds and activities have proper oversight. Include:

- A description of the governance, policies and procedures, and systems you use for record-keeping and financial management.
- A description of the procedures you use to identify and mitigate risks and issues. These might include audit findings, continuous performance assessment findings, and monitoring.
- The key staff who will be responsible for maintaining oversight of program staff and any partners or subrecipients.

Protection of sensitive or confidential information

Describe how you will collect and safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other information that is considered sensitive. Make sure your approach is consistent with applicable federal, state, local, and tribal laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality. Provide:

- The methods and systems you will use to make sure that you properly handle confidential and sensitive information, including information from any subrecipients or contractors.
- A plan for the disposition of such information at the end of the period of performance.

For more information, see [2 CFR 200.303\(e\)](#).

Dissemination plan

Propose a plan to disseminate reports, products, and project outputs to key target audiences. Include:

- Dissemination goals and objectives.

- Strategies to identify and engage with target audiences.
- How you will allocate enough staff time and budget for dissemination.
- A preliminary plan to evaluate whether target audiences receive project information and use it as intended.
- The dissemination timeline.

Line-item budget and budget narrative

The line-item budget and budget justification supports the information you provide in the Budget Information Standard Form SF-424A.

HHS now uses the definitions for [equipment](#) and [supplies](#) in [2 CFR 200.1](#). The new definitions change the threshold for equipment to the lesser of the recipient's capitalization level or \$10,000 and the threshold for supplies to below that amount.

Justify the costs you ask for and provide detail, including calculations for the “object class categories” in the Budget Information Standard Form. You will provide this information for the initial budget period only. See information on [funding periods](#).

As you develop your budget, consider:

- If the costs are necessary, reasonable, allocable, and consistent with your project's purpose and activities.
- How you calculate your costs in ways that are clear and repeatable.
- The restrictions on spending funds. See the [funding policies and limitations](#).
- Please also review the Standard Form instructions.

To create your line-item budget and justification, see [detailed budget instructions on our website](#).

In general, you must:

- Indicate the method you will use for your indirect cost rate. See the [indirect costs](#) section for further information.
- Include estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail necessary for the calculation to be duplicated.
- For any cost sharing, include a detailed listing of any funding sources identified in Block 18 of the SF-424 Application for Federal Assistance.
- For applicants planning to use subawards, if your subaward budget is more than 50% of total direct costs, justify why you are subawarding that portion of the project. Explain:
 - How you plan to maintain a substantive role in the project.
 - Why you cannot achieve your goals without the subrecipients' participation.

Proprietary or personally identifiable information

Clearly identify any salary or other proprietary information or personally identifiable information within your application. Identification will ensure this information is not shared with reviewers. Note on page one of the attachments file (file two) where the information to be redacted is located.

If you have an [exemption for a paper submission](#), you can protect salary information and any proprietary information by placing that information only in the original application. You can remove the information from the copies, keeping summary information.

File two: Attachments

To submit file two, you will use the Other Attachments form found in the Grants.gov application package for this NOFO.

This file includes all attachments.

ACF priorities alignment attestation

Note: Not included in the page limit. This should be submitted with the application or before award.

You must self-certify that you will align with the ACF priorities that are relevant to this funding opportunity, as identified in both the Program description and Step 4, under Merit review process, Scoring criteria, Alignment with ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles, elements 2 and 3. You must provide the following on your organization's letterhead.

I hereby attest and certify that:

_____ (Applicant Name) affirms its commitment to supporting and advancing ACF's published Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), consistent with applicable federal statutes, regulations, and Administration priorities.

Insert Date of Signature:

Print Name and Title of the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR):

Signature of AOR:

Indirect cost agreement

If you include indirect costs in your budget using an approved rate, include a copy of your current agreement approved by your [cognizant agency for indirect costs](#). If you use the *de minimis* rate, you do not need to submit this attachment.

See the [indirect costs](#) section for more information.

Legal proof of nonprofit status

If your organization is a nonprofit, you need to attach proof. We will accept any of the following:

- A reference to your listing in the IRS's most recent list of tax-exempt organizations.
- A copy of a current tax exemption certificate from the IRS.
- A letter from your state's tax department, attorney general, or another appropriate state official saying that your group is a nonprofit and that none of your net earnings go to private shareholders or others.
- A certified copy of your certificate of incorporation or similar document. This document must show that your group is a nonprofit.
- Any of these documents for a parent organization. Also include a statement signed by an official of the parent group that your organization is a nonprofit affiliate.

Organizational capacity supporting information

You must attach the following information to support the information in your [organizational capacity](#) section:

- Organizational charts, including all partners.
- Resumes, biographical sketches, or curricula vitae for all key personnel.
- Job descriptions for each vacant key position.
- List of your board of directors.
- Financial statements adhering to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), if available, for up to the two most recently completed fiscal years (this requirement does not apply to start-up organizations).
- Audit summary report including auditor's opinion, if applicable.
- Copy or description of your organization's fiscal control and accountability procedures.
- Copy or description of your organization's personnel policies.
- Information on compliance with federal, state, and local government standards.
- Your agency's policies ensuring that all employees, contractors, volunteers, and consultants who have regular and unsupervised private contact with youth served by the recipient undergo required background checks including:

- State or tribal criminal history records checks including fingerprint checks.
 - Sex offender registry checks.
- Any additional checks required under state or tribal law.
- Your agency's current policies for collecting FBI criminal history records and child abuse and neglect state registry check information, including an explanation of why you do not require these checks and any barriers to meeting this requirement.
- Your agency's procedures for documenting the justification of any hire when that person has an arrest, pending criminal charge, or conviction in their background.

Third-party agreements

You must submit agreements with all third parties involved in the project. Third parties include subrecipients, contractors, and other cooperating entities. Third-party agreements include letters of commitment, memoranda of understanding, and memoranda of agreement. We do not consider general letters of support to be third-party agreements.

Any such agreement must:

- Describe each party's roles and responsibilities for project activities.
- Describe the support and resources that the third party is committing to the proposed project.
- Be signed by the person in the third-party organization with the authority to make such commitments.
- Detail work schedules and estimated compensation with an understanding that the parties will negotiate a final agreement after award.
- Identify the primary applicant and all collaborators responsible for project activities if the agreement is for a collaboration or consortia application.

Standard forms

You will need to complete some other required standard forms other than those in files one and two. You can find them in the NOFO [application package](#) or review them and their instructions at [Grants.gov Forms](#).

Forms	Submission requirement
Project Abstract Summary	With the application.
Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)	With the application.
Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)	With the application.
Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)	With the application.
Key Contacts	With the application.
Grants.gov Lobbying form	With the application or before award.
Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)	If applicable based on instructions, with the application or before award.
Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	With the application. Cite your primary location and up to 29 additional performance sites.

Important: Public information

When filling out your SF-424 form, pay attention to Box 15: Descriptive Title of Applicant's Project.

We share what you put there with [USAspending](#). This is where the public goes to learn how the federal government spends taxpayer money.

Instead of just a title, insert a short description of your project and what it will do.

[See instructions and examples \[PDF\]](#).



Step 4:

Learn About Review and Award

In this step

Application review	<u>50</u>
Award notices	<u>56</u>

Application review

Initial review

We will review your application to make sure that it meets the responsiveness requirements listed in the [disqualification factors section](#). If your application does not meet these criteria, we will disqualify it and we will not move it to the merit review (scoring) phase.

We will let you know if your application is disqualified within 30 days of the application deadline. You will not receive any notice from ACF if your application failed Grants.gov validation checks.

If you submit more than two files in addition to your forms, we will remove the extra files. We will let you know if this happens.

We will also remove blurred or illegible pages and any file formats that are not supported.

We will not review any pages that exceed the page limit.

If your application fails to adhere to ACF's NOFO formatting, font, and page limitation requirements, we will adjust your application by removing page(s) from the application. We will remove the pages before the merit review and will not send them to reviewers.

If we do so, we will send you a letter after we make awards to notify you that we amended your application.

Merit review process

A panel reviews all applications that pass the initial review. The panel members use the criteria shown in each section of the project narrative and in the line-item budget and budget narrative section.

Our reviewers typically are not federal employees. See the section on [proprietary and personally identifiable information](#).

Criteria summary

Criterion	Total number of points = 110
1. Response (approach)	40 points
2. Impact	10 points
3. Resources and capabilities (organizational capacity/third-party agreements)	35 points
4. Support requested (budget)	15 points
5. ACF priority alignment	10 points

Scoring criteria

1. Response (approach)

Maximum points: 40

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- 1.1 Show how your organization will accomplish all of the components for the Communications system described in the **Program description** and **Approach** sections. **(0 to 10 points)**
- 1.2 Implement all of the components for the Crisis intervention model described in the **Program description** and **Approach** sections. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 1.3 Implement all of the components for the Referral database described in the **Program description** and **Approach** sections. **(0 to 8 points)**
- 1.4 Describe how you will implement all components for the NCS web portal, prevention, and community education described in the **Program description** and **Approach** sections. **(0 to 10 points)**
- 1.5 Describe how you will compile, analyze, and report all required data elements described in the **Approach** section. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 1.6 Describe a feasible and well-defined plan to assess project performance and use findings to support continuous quality improvement. **(0 to 2 points)**

2. Impact

Maximum points: 10

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- 2.1 Describe clear, measurable targets for project outputs and service delivery, including projected volumes of calls and digital contacts (including missed contacts), response times for emergency contacts, referrals provided, and non-urgent service requests. **(0 to 10 points)**

3. Resources and capabilities

(organizational capacity/third-party agreements)

Maximum points: 35

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- 3.1 Describe your organization's experience in providing high-quality services supporting runaway and homeless youth, including. You must specify the length and time the organization has provided these services. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 3.2 Show your organizational capacity and ability to effectively implement and manage the project's programmatic and financial aspects. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 3.3 Show your organizational capacity and ability to effectively implement and manage all technological requirements for the communications system. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 3.4 Show, in detail, the professional qualifications of project staff who will be responsible for assisting individuals who contact the NCS, providing service referrals, sharing tips with law enforcement, and coordinating with child welfare agencies. **(0 to 4 points)**
- 3.5 Provide evidence of your capacity to respond to surges in demand for NCS services in response to major media campaigns and national media coverage and identify strategies to address contingencies, such as national disasters, while ensuring uninterrupted services. You must include a dissemination plan. **(0 to 3 points)**
- 3.6 Plan for the proper handling and safeguarding of confidential or private information. **(0 to 3 points)**
- 3.7 Describe effective data management systems and organizational processes to collect, use, and report data to monitor performance and improve program quality. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 3.8 Describe your ability to lead the RHY field and cooperate with a network of allied organizations, as shown by a proven track record of working on similar hotlines or telephone resources of varied sizes and scopes. You must describe the

roles, responsibilities, resources, contributions, and commitments of any partners or third-party agreements. **(0 to 5 points)**

4. Support requested (budget)

Maximum points: 15

The reviewer will assess how well you:

- 4.1 Provide a clear, logical, accurate, and complete budget. The line-item budget narrative must be understandable and must justify the costs proposed. You must demonstrate the necessity, reasonableness, and allocation of proposed costs in relation to the proposed activities and outcomes. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 4.2 Use the budget narrative to explain how you calculated each budget category and how the budget supports project activities. The budget narrative includes budget funding allocated to meet background check requirements. **(0 to 5 points)**
- 4.3 Show that you will use all funds received under the NCS program to establish and operate an NCS to provide information and assistance to young people and their families and those seeking information on issues related to runaway prevention, service referrals, crisis intervention, and youth homelessness. **(0 to 3 points)**
- 4.4 Provide a clear and comprehensive plan for oversight of federal award funds and activities. You must demonstrate how the funds requested are necessary to accomplish the scope of services as required by the authorizing RHY legislation and the program requirements. **(0 to 2 points)**

We do not consider voluntary cost sharing during merit review.

5. Alignment with ACF vision, mission, values, priorities, and guiding principles (Up to 10 points)

ACF's published Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles inform programmatic and administrative expectations under this funding opportunity.

Applicants must demonstrate alignment by describing how the proposed project advances relevant ACF priorities through program design and evaluation. Applicants should clearly identify which ACF priorities are relevant and explain how those priorities are reflected in the proposed approach. Applicants are encouraged to provide examples of prior experiences that can show alignment efforts that have already been achieved. Examples should describe strategies used, measurable results (if available), and lessons learned.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to organize their response using the three criteria below.

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the application demonstrates clear, specific, and measurable connections between ACF priorities and the proposed project. Scores will reflect the strength, clarity, and specificity of those connections.

Scoring Considerations for the next three criteria:

- **High-scoring applications** will demonstrate clear understanding, intentional integration, and measurable alignment with ACF priorities across all three criteria.
- **Moderate-scoring applications** may reference ACF priorities but provide limited specificity, uneven integration, or minimal connection to measurable outcomes.
- **Low-scoring applications** will show minimal or unclear understanding of ACF priorities and lack meaningful connection to program design or performance.

1. Demonstrated Review and Understanding (Up to 2 Points)

The extent to which the applicant demonstrates that it has reviewed ACF's Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles and explains their relevance to the proposed project.

Reviewers will look for:

- Identification of specific ACF priorities (not general or vague references).
- A clear explanation of how those priorities relate to the proposed project.

2. Operationalization in Program Design and Implementation (Up to 3 Points)

The degree to which the following one or more ACF priorities are translated into specific elements of the proposed project:

- Promoting Quality Early Learning Environments and Improved Child Outcomes.

Reviewers will assess if the applicant:

- Connects identified ACF priorities to program design, service delivery, and implementation.
- Demonstrates how priorities influence partnerships, staffing, or key program decisions.
- Provides clear, actionable examples of how alignment will be carried out in practice.

3. Integration into Performance and Continuous Improvement (up to 5 Points)

The extent to which the following one or more ACF priorities are reflected in measurable outcomes and ongoing program improvement:

- Promoting Quality Early Learning Environments and Improved Child Outcomes.

Reviewers will assess the extent to which the application:

- Aligns performance measures and expected outcomes with identified priorities.
- Includes evaluation methods or performance indicators that reflect those priorities.
- Describes how data will be used for continuous quality improvement.

Risk review

Before making an award, we review the risk that you will mismanage federal funds or fail to complete the project objectives. We need to make sure you've handled any past federal awards well and demonstrated sound business practices.

We use [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) Responsibility/Qualification and Exclusions to check this history for all awards likely to be over \$250,000.

If we find a significant risk, we may choose not to fund your application or to place specific conditions on the award.

For more details, see [2 CFR 200.206](https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-200/subpart-200.206).

Selection process

When making funding decisions, we consider:

- Merit review and scoring results, including the ten points for Alignment with ACF Vision, Mission, Values, Priorities, and Guiding Principles to the extent permitted by law. These are key in making decisions but are not the only factor.
- Organizations serving emerging, unserved, or underserved populations.
- The larger portfolio of agency-funded projects by considering geographic distribution.
- The past performance of the applicant.
- The application's compliance with this NOFO's prohibition on using funds awarded under this NOFO to support [DEI and DEIA activities](#), to the extent permitted by law, including any relevant court orders.
- Funding Preference for Alignment with Agency Priorities. Before final funding decisions are made, division leadership will review awards for consistency with applicable laws and alignment with [agency priorities](#).

We may:

- Fund applications in whole or in part.
- Fund applications at a lower amount than requested.

- Decide not to allow a prime recipient to subaward if they may not be able to monitor and manage subrecipients properly.
- Decide not to fund a project with high start-up costs or unreasonably high operating costs.
- Choose not to fund applicants with management or financial problems.
- Designate your application as “approved but unfunded” if it was successful but there was not sufficient funding to make an award. You may receive funding if additional funds become available within the fiscal year.
- Choose to fund no applications under this NOFO.

We will not fund:

- A [disqualified application](#).
- An incomplete application.

Award notices

If you are successful, we will email or transmit through our grant systems a Notice of Award (NoA) to your authorized official. We will email you if your application is disqualified or unsuccessful.

The NoA is the only official award document. The NoA tells you about the amount of the award, important dates, and the terms and conditions you need to follow. Until you receive the NoA, you have not received an award. Project costs that you incur before you receive a NoA are at your risk.

By drawing down funds, you accept the terms and conditions of the award. The award incorporates the requirements of the program and funding authorities, the grant regulations, the GPS, and the NOFO.

If you want to know more about NoA contents, go to [Notice of Award at ACF's website](#).



Step 5:

Submit Your Application

In this step

Application submission and deadlines

58

Application submission and deadlines

Application

Deadline

Due on Wednesday, August 19, 2026.

- For electronic submissions, the due time is 11:59 p.m. ET.
- If you receive an exemption from electronic submission, the due time is 4:30 p.m. ET. See the section on [exemptions for paper submissions](#).

Grants.gov creates a date and time record when it receives the application. If you submit the same application more than once, we will accept only the last on-time submission.

The grants management officer may extend an application due date based on emergency situations such as documented natural disasters or a verifiable widespread disruption of electric or mail service.

Grants.gov submission

You must submit your application through Grants.gov unless we give you an exemption for a paper submission. See information on [getting registered](#).

For instructions on how to submit in Grants.gov, see the [Quick Start Guide for Applicants](#).

Make sure your application passes the Grants.gov validation checks. Do not encrypt, zip, or password protect any files. We encourage you to leave yourself plenty of time to upload documents.

See [Contacts and Support](#) if you need help.

Issues with federal systems

If you experience a systems issue with Grants.gov or SAM.gov, please refer to [ACF's Policy for Applicants Experiencing Federal Systems Issues \[PDF\]](#).

Exemptions for paper submissions

We need to give you an exemption before you can apply on paper. See the [ACF Policy for Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission \[PDF\]](#).

Once we have approved your exemption, download your forms package under the Package tab in Grants.gov.

To submit your application, mail it to:

FYSB Ops Center c/o F2 Solutions

Attn: National Communication System NOFO

HHS-2025-ACF-ACYF-CY-0160

1401 Mercantile Ln

Suite 401

Largo, MD 20774

Follow these requirements when you submit your paper application:

- Print your application and all copies one-sided.
- Submit one original and two copies of the complete application, including all required forms.
- Submit both the original and additional copies in a single package. If you plan to submit more than one application under this NOFO or others, you must submit them separately. Clearly label each package with the NOFO title and funding opportunity number.
- Your authorized organization official must sign the application. The original application must include an original signature.

Intergovernmental review

[Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs](#) does not apply to this NOFO. You do not need to take any action.



Step 6:

Learn What Happens After Award

In this step

Post-award requirements and administration [61](#)

Post-award requirements and administration

Administrative and national policy requirements

There are important rules you'll need to follow if you get an award. You must follow:

- All terms and conditions in the Notice of Award, including the [ACF Standard Terms and Conditions](#) and, if applicable, any program-specific terms and conditions. We incorporate this NOFO by reference.
- The rules listed in [2 CFR 200](#), Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements, effective October 1, 2025. These replace those in 45 CFR 75, with some exceptions in [2 CFR 300](#).
- The HHS [Grants Policy Statement \(GPS\)](#). This document has terms and conditions tied to your award. If there are any exceptions to the GPS, they'll be listed in your Notice of Award.
- All federal statutes and regulations relevant to federal financial assistance, including those highlighted in the [HHS Grants Policy Statement](#), Appendix D: HHS Administrative and National Policy Requirements and the [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#).
- [45 CFR Part 87 Appendix B, Equal Treatment for Faith-Based Organizations](#). This appendix explains the obligations of and protections for faith-based organizations applying for grants.
- Applicable program statute and regulations at the [RHY Act, 34 U.S.C. 11201-11281](#), and the [RHY Final Rule, 45 CFR Part 1351](#), to improve performance standards and program requirements for runaway and homeless youth programs, and [RHY's Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#).
- Records containing the identity of individual youths under this grant may under no circumstances be disclosed or transferred to any individual or to any public or private agency.

Reporting

As a recipient, you will have to submit performance and financial reports. To learn more about reporting, see [Reporting at the ACF website](#).

- Performance report form: **ACF-OGM-PPR**
 - Performance report frequency: Semiannually
- Financial report form: **SF-425 FFR**
 - Financial report frequency: Semiannually
- Final report outlining entire project, including challenges, successes, and lessons learned.
 - Report frequency: 90 days after end of 3-year project period.



Contacts and Support

In this step

Agency contacts	<u>64</u>
Help with systems	<u>64</u>
Reference websites	<u>65</u>
Paperwork Reduction Act disclaimer	<u>65</u>

Agency contacts

Program

Tim D. Joyce

Federal Project Officer

Family and Youth Services Bureau

timothy.joyce@acf.hhs.gov

202-401-3438

Grants management

Sarah Viola

Grants Management Specialist

Administration for Children and Families

sarah.viola@acf.hhs.gov

202-401-4832

Help with systems

Grants.gov

Grants.gov provides 24/7 support. Hold on to your ticket number.

- Phone: 1-800-518-4726.
- Email: support@grants.gov.

SAM.gov

If you need help, you can:

- Call 866-606-8220.
- Live chat with the [Federal Service Desk](#).

Reference websites

- [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services \(HHS\)](#)
- [Administration for Children and Families \(ACF\)](#)
- [Grants.gov.](#)
- [Applying for an ACF Grant Award.](#)
- [Grants.gov Accessibility Information](#)
- [Code of Federal Regulations \(CFR\)](#)
- [United States Code \(U.S.C.\)](#)
- [Award Terms and Conditions](#)
(see also the [ACF Standard Terms and Conditions \[PDF – 318 KB\]](#))
- [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#)
- [ACF Property Guidance](#)
- [Family and Youth Services Bureau](#)
- [Runaway and Homeless Youth Training, Technical Assistance, and Capacity Building Center](#)
- [National Runaway Safeline](#)
- [Important NOFO-related definitions](#)
- [Look Beneath the Surface Campaign](#)
- [SOAR Online](#)
- [Office on Trafficking in Persons Resource Library](#)
- [FYSB Grant Application Resources](#)

Paperwork Reduction Act disclaimer

As required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, 44 U.S.C. 3501-3521, the public reporting burden for the project description (project narrative, line-item budget, and justification) is estimated to average 60 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering, and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection information.

The project description information collection is approved under OMB control number 0970-0139, which expires April 30, 2029. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Modifications

Modification description	Updated date