



Administration for Children and Families

Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Policies and Initiatives

HHS-2021-ACF-OPRE-YE-1901

Application Due Date: 07/20/2021

Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Policies and Initiatives
HHS-2021-ACF-OPRE-YE-1901

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**Department of Health & Human Services
Administration for Children and Families**

Funding Opportunity Title:	Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Policies and Initiatives
Announcement Type:	Initial
Funding Opportunity Number:	HHS-2021-ACF-OPRE-YE-1901
Primary CFDA Number:	93.575
Due Date for Letter of Intent:	06/25/2021
Due Date for Applications:	07/20/2021

Executive Summary

Notice:

- **Applicants are strongly encouraged to read the entire funding opportunity announcement (FOA) carefully and observe the application formatting requirements listed in *Section IV.2. Content and Form of Application Submission*. For more information on applying for grants, please visit "How to Apply for a Grant" on the ACF Grants & Funding Page at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/howto>.**

This FOA will fund planning grants (Phase I) for partnerships between Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agencies and researchers to develop rigorous, policy-relevant evaluations that will test whether state child care subsidy policies and practices related to setting and implementing subsidy payment rates and/or family co-payments increase low-income families' access to quality child care. These grants, with one 18-month project and budget period, will provide an opportunity for research partnerships to plan and build capacity to implement rigorous evaluations in Phase II, under a separate future FOA.

Projects must be conducted through partnerships between CCDF lead agencies (i.e., subsidy administering agencies in states, territories, tribes, and localities) and research partners from institutions of higher education, research organizations, or other organizations with demonstrated capacity to conduct rigorous research. The research supported by this FOA should be collaborative from start to finish. Specifically, the CCDF lead agency and their research partners must work together throughout Phase I (this FOA) of the project to develop a research and evaluation plan of the effectiveness of subsidy payment rate and family co-payment methods and structures in the subsidy system to ensure CCDF participants' access to quality care for their children. Grantees will be expected to clearly document the specific policies and procedures that will be evaluated, document how they will measure the policy implementation or change, and articulate how these findings will be used in future policy and planning decisions.

Projects will be expected to inform the field at large. As such, grantees will be expected to participate in a consortium of grantees that will meet and communicate regularly to identify

common measures and research protocols, opportunities for collaborative analyses, and develop collective expertise and resources for the field.

These planning grants may be followed by a second competition (Phase II), under a separate FOA, to support execution of the research and evaluation plans. At the end of the planning grant, grantees are expected to articulate a research plan for a rigorous evaluation of the implementation of subsidy policies and practices related to payment rates. Grantees from this FOA will be eligible to compete for funding to implement the research and evaluation activities as part of Phase II.

Grantees will be funded through the cooperative agreement mechanism. See *Section II. Award Information* for a description of the substantial involvement of the Federal Project Officer (PO) in the performance of these cooperative agreements.

I. Program Description

Statutory Authority

Section 658O(a)(5) of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act (42 U.S.C. 9858m(a)(5)).

Description

A. Purpose

This FOA aims to address research questions of relevance while building knowledge about the efficacy of Child care subsidy policies and practices. Over the last 25 years of Child Care Policy Research Partnerships grants, there has been interest in deepening understanding of key subsidy policy topics across sites, but the potential for learning has been limited by the variety of research questions and outcomes and the heterogeneity in measurement. For this reason, a primary goal of this program is to evaluate a single area of policy across sites, examining common research questions, constructs and outcomes. Specifically, funding multiple research partnerships evaluating one policy area will support understanding of the implementation and effects of different methods for setting subsidy payment rates and co-payment amounts on subsidized families' access to care. Research projects should be developed and carried out through research partnerships between CCDF lead agencies and research partners. Together, they will identify specific questions and develop plans for rigorous evaluations examining the implementation and effectiveness of subsidy payment rate and co-pay policies and practices in the state, territory, tribe, or locality. Grantees will be expected to describe their proposed rigorous research designs and methods to adequately address the research questions of interest and provide valuable information that can help guide CCDF lead agencies in the design and improvement of policies. In addition, a collaborative, coordinated research effort across the grantees receiving these research funds will be expected through the project period, in order to increase both the capacity of the individual projects to meet their research objectives and the potential for learning across projects about best practices in subsidy payment rate and co-payment policy and in research and evaluation. Such knowledge may also inform research and policy-making in other states and localities.

B. Background

CCDF is a partnership between the federal government and states, territories, and tribes, administered by the Office of Child Care (OCC) within ACF dedicated to supporting the employment and economic self-sufficiency of low-income working parents by providing access to affordable, high-quality child care that meets health and safety requirements and supports child development. CCDF is the primary federal funding source for child-care subsidies to help eligible low-income working families access child care and to improve the quality of child care for all children. As a block grant, CCDF gives funding to states, territories, and tribes to provide child care subsidies through grants and contracts with providers, as well as vouchers or certificates to low-income families. CCDF promotes improvement in the quality of care by supporting child care licensing and quality improvement systems, and by supporting child care professionals to attain more training and education. CCDF funds providers in a range of settings, including family child care homes (licensed and legal but license exempt) and centers that may be operated by a public, private, or non-profit entity, or a public-private partnership. To learn more about the goals and initiatives of the CCDF and OCC, please visit the OCC website at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/occ/>.

The passage of the CCDBG Act of 2014 reauthorized the law governing CCDF. The law defines health and safety requirements for child care providers, outlines family-friendly eligibility policies, expands quality improvement efforts, and ensures that parents and the public have transparent information about the child care choices available to them. Under the law, states have flexibility within federal guidelines over key policy levers—including subsidy payment rates, co-payment amounts contributed by the family, income thresholds for determining eligibility, and quality improvement investments.

Subsidized child care services are available to eligible families through certificates (vouchers), or grants and contracts with providers. Under the law, states must establish eligibility policies, including a period of at least 12 months before eligibility is re-determined, that promote continuity of care for children and families. The program provides parents with the choice of a range of provider settings and types—including centers, family child care homes, relatives, and faith-based providers. Parents may select a participating child care provider that satisfies applicable state and local requirements, including health and safety requirements. Approximately 1.3 million children received a child care subsidy from the CCDF program every month in federal fiscal year (FY) 2018 (see FY 2018 CCDF Data Tables at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/fy-2018-ccdf-data-tables-preliminary>).

The CCDBG Act of 2014 (the Act) and the associated 2016 CCDF Final Rule (the Rule) demonstrate a commitment to increasing access to stable, high-quality child care for children from low-income households. In part, this means ensuring that families who are using CCDF subsidies have access to child care that is comparable in quality to the arrangements used by families not receiving subsidies. Recognizing the business constraints of child care providers, the Rule establishes policies intended to stabilize the revenue streams of providers accepting subsidies and, in turn, to increase the supply of child care and the options available to families receiving subsidies. (For more information about requirements governing CCDF subsidy payment rates, see <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ccdf-fundamentals/setting-payment-rates>.)

First, as part of ensuring equal access, CCDF lead agencies must set base subsidy reimbursement rates (i.e., payment rates) at least at a level sufficient to cover the costs to providers incurred by

federal health, safety, quality, and staffing requirements, and to take into account the cost of higher quality. Lead agencies are also expected to consider their specific context, and thus, must use a recent market rate survey or alternative methodology to set payment rates, with the understanding that setting payment rates at the 75th percentile (thus allowing families to access 75 percent of available care) is recommended for promoting equal access. Second, most families utilizing CCDF-funded care are required to contribute co-payments to providers. The Rule establishes a recommended federal benchmark for affordable co-payments to be no greater than 7 percent of family income, although co-payment rates may differ across states and within priority populations. Within these broad federal guidelines for the CCDF program, states, territories, and tribes have substantial flexibility in setting specific co-payment policies (e.g., which families are required to pay a co-payment, how copayments are collected, if families are required to pay the difference when the provider's charge exceeds the maximum rate). The CCDF Policies Database (<https://ccdf.urban.org/>) explores in more detail state-level variations in relevant policies, including specific information related to payment rates and co-payment structures. In addition, states may be at various stages in the implementation of these policies, as described in a recent analysis of states' implementation of the CCDBG Reauthorization (Lin et al., 2020). Finally, within states, policies decided at the state level may not immediately or consistently translate to the practices of frontline subsidy case workers.

To understand how subsidy payment rates and family co-payment policies affect families' access to care, it is important to consider not only the supply of care, but also the breadth of families' constraints and preferences. Recent work funded by ACF defines "access" as a multi-dimensional construct—one that encompasses the extent to which families are able to secure care with reasonable effort, the affordability of care, care that meets parents' needs, and care that supports children's development (https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/cceepra_access_guidebook_final_213_b508.pdf).

Since FY 2000, the CCDF program has provided funding for research intended to help child care decision-makers in crafting policies and initiatives that support positive outcomes for families and children; to increase the capacity for child care research at the national, state, and local levels; and, to promote linkages among research, policy, and practice. The CCDBG Act of 2014 allowed for up to ½ of 1 percent of total mandatory and discretionary funding in annual appropriations to be set aside for research. In FY 2020, that amount was close to 40 million dollars. To date, these funds have supported research efforts that have increased our knowledge about the efficacy of child care subsidy policies and programs in enhancing employment and economic self-sufficiency of low-income families, and in improving quality in child care and early education settings to support learning and development of children. Descriptions of current and past research projects funded with these research set aside funds can be found at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/topic/overview/child-care>.

C. Program Goals and Expectations

The overall goal of the Coordinated Evaluations of CCDF Policies and Initiatives Planning Grants is to provide CCDF lead agencies and research partners the opportunity to plan for a rigorous, policy-relevant evaluation of child care subsidy policies and practices. Specifically, in Phase I (the current FOA), grantees will develop a research plan to evaluate how subsidy policies and practices related to payment rates (including reimbursement rates to providers and co-

payment amounts paid by subsidy-receiving households) support low-income families' access to quality child care. Results of the projects funded through this FOA are expected to inform policies and evaluations in other sites; identify and demonstrate links between policies, practices or activities, and key outcomes; support building knowledge of the effects of child care subsidy policies and practices on key outcomes of interest; and inform federal subsidy policy.

Grantees will have the opportunity to work with a cohort of other funded grantees, participate in peer learning, and develop and plan for a rigorous evaluation. In Phase I (these Planning Grants), grantees are expected to contribute to the development of common measures and data collection protocols intended to support strong and consistent assessment of key constructs and outcomes of interest across projects, with the flexibility that would allow individual sites to address the questions of their specific evaluations. Coordination across projects will support triangulation of findings and analyses of data across sites. Thus, project activities will include refinement of logic models, evaluation design, data and measurement protocols, and analytic approach. Grantees are expected to participate in a process evaluation of the grant program, if one should take place.

CCDF lead agencies in states, territories, tribes, and localities are likely in different points in their readiness to develop a research and evaluation plan under this grant. This grant program is intended for project teams at all levels of evaluation readiness: those with extensive experience with research and evaluation, and those who have less experience. It is not the intention for each of the evaluation plans to be exactly the same across states, territories, tribes, or localities, including the level of complexity and rigor. Some states may develop more complex research plans, including using the planning grant to do preliminary analyses, assessment of data systems, or conducting pilot studies, while others may develop simpler designs and spend the planning grant learning about research and evaluation and solidifying newer research partnerships. Grantees will have the opportunity to apply for funding as part of Phase II, a separate, future FOA, to implement their research plans, conduct a rigorous evaluation, participate in cross-site analyses as supported by an ACF-designated coordination team, and implement dissemination activities.

Project teams must include a state, territory, tribal, or local CCDF lead agency and a research partner from an institution of higher education, a research organization, or an organization with demonstrated capacity to conduct rigorous policy research. CCDF lead agencies can partner on multiple applications for funding under this grant program; however, it is unlikely that a lead agency would be awarded more than one grant as the grantee or as the partner. This also applies to research institutions, such that organizations may submit multiple applications as the research partner, but an organization would not receive more than one grant as the grantee institution or as the partner.

The specific goals and expectations of the grant program include the following:

Goal 1. To develop research plans for rigorous evaluations examining the implementation and outcomes of subsidy payment rate and co-payment policies and practices in the state, territory, or tribe.

Projects funded through this funding opportunity will develop research plans for evaluations examining the implementation and outcomes of subsidy payment rate and co-payment policies and practices in the state, territory, tribe, or locality. In order to support knowledge building across projects, each project must design their evaluations to address the following overarching

research question:

How do subsidy payment rates and co-payment structures affect parents' access to child care, specifically with regard to whether care is affordable, meets parents' needs, requires reasonable effort, and supports children's development?

Research plans will incorporate rigorous methods appropriate for addressing critical questions in the specific policy context, developed in close collaboration between CCDF lead agencies and research partners. In line with the consideration of child care access as a multi-dimensional construct, sponsored research will examine the impact of these policies on families' access to care along the following five access dimensions:

1. meets the parents' needs,
2. supports children's development,
3. affordability,
4. reasonable effort, and
5. equity (Thomson et al., 2020)

As part of their projects, successful applicants will target these outcomes and will examine whether specific payment rate and co-payment policies are effective in supporting families' access to care. They will have clearly articulated theories of change that describe the mechanisms through which the policies are hypothesized to affect outcomes.

Key issues underlying these policies that are of significant interest to ACF include the following:

1. How do payment rate policies and practices affect access to care among subsidized families and low-income, working parents who are eligible for subsidies, as defined by the state?
2. How do co-payment policies affect access to care? In other words:
 - Do co-pays affect affordability and availability of subsidized care?
 - Do co-pays, and exemptions and adjustments of co-pay policies based on specific family characteristics (i.e., the number of children in care, whether care is part-time or full-time, and whether the care is being provided for a child with special needs), affect parent preferences, choices, and use of different types of care?
3. Are there differential effects of payment rate and/or co-payment policies for key populations of interest (i.e., families with different characteristics and needs, children of different ages, children with special needs)?
4. What is the impact (on access to care) of limiting family co-pays to 7 percent of their income?

In addition, when designing the evaluation, each grantee will consider examining the impact of policies and practices on key constructs over time. Although specific designs will be based on the specific context, timeline of policy implementation, and research priorities, each grantee will allow for refining measurement of some constructs and outcomes of interest to support learning across grantees. Key constructs within grantees' evaluations will include the following:

- Alignment of payment practices for subsidy-receiving providers that are comparable to

other providers (e.g., pay based on enrollment rather than attendance, pay for registration fees);

- Consistency of implementation of payment structures and practices throughout state, territory, or tribe;
- Supply of providers eligible for subsidized care and accepting child care subsidies (i.e., child care centers, small and large family child care homes, in-home providers, etc.)—percentage and characteristics of providers available to eligible children, including ages served, number of subsidized children they serve, service hours, prices charged for care, geographic location, quality of care;
- Percentage and characteristics of subsidized children in each type of care, in different levels of care quality;
- Demand for care among subsidy-eligible families (i.e., number of children/families on waiting lists, what families report they want/need), including among key vulnerable populations (i.e., children in foster care, children from families experiencing homelessness, infants and toddlers, children with disabilities, and children who need care during nontraditional hours); and
- Subsidized families' access to child care, defined multi-dimensionally.

Projects funded through this grant are expected to develop plans that utilize rigorous research designs, methods, and analytic techniques that are appropriate and sufficient to address the research questions of interest and contribute to the knowledge base regarding how policies related to payment rates and co-payment structures affect subsidized families' access to care.

Grantee teams should develop innovative research projects that draw on the resources and opportunities available to rigorously examine the questions above about subsidy reimbursement rates and co-payment rates and structures. Rigorous research incorporates the following criteria:

- **Credibility:** Ensuring what is intended to be evaluated is actually what is being evaluated; making sure that descriptions of the phenomena or experience being studied are accurate and recognizable to others; ensuring that the method used is the most definitive and compelling approach that is available and feasible for the question being addressed. If conclusions about program efficacy are being examined, the study design should include a comparison group (i.e., randomized control trial or quasi-experimental design).
- **Applicability:** Generalizability of findings beyond current project (i.e., when findings fit into contexts outside the study situation). Ensuring the sample being studied represents one or more of the populations being served by the program.
- **Consistency:** When processes and methods are consistently followed and clearly described, someone else could replicate the approach, and other studies can confirm what is found.
- **Neutrality:** Producing results that are as objective as possible and acknowledge the bias brought to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the results.

Please see ACF's Evaluation Policy for a more detailed definition of "rigor" at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/acf_evaluation_policy_november_2012.pdf.

Grantees will also contribute to the field's understanding of best methods to demonstrate the relationship between policies and practices related to subsidy payment rates and co-payments and

families' access to high-quality care. To do this, the consortium of grantees will coordinate their plans with regards to common measurement of access to care and other key constructs, similar data collection, data management, and analytic approaches, and contributing data to pooled analyses across sites.

Goal 2. To develop research partnerships that support collaboration among child care researchers and CCDF lead agencies which build the capacity of lead agencies to plan and conduct rigorous research that can inform federal, state, territory, tribal, and/or local subsidy policy.

Research sponsored by CCDF funding is intended to provide valuable information that can help inform child care decision-makers in crafting policies and initiatives to support positive outcomes for families and children. Sponsored project teams must include a state, territory, tribal, or local CCDF lead agency and a research partner from an institution of higher education, a research organization, or an organization with demonstrated capacity to conduct rigorous policy research. If the policies related to payment rate setting and co-payment structures are determined at the county level or other jurisdiction/area in the state, applications from partnerships between the lead agency at that level and research organizations will be entertained. Partnerships may be formalized through memoranda of understanding, contracts, or sub-award agreements during the course of the grant.

The research partner and lead agency (or agencies) must actively collaborate with each other through all phases of the grant (i.e., selecting research questions, defining constructs and outcomes of interest, designing research, developing procedures to access and use existing data or protocols to collect new data). Partnerships may involve multiple lead agencies or sites to support comparison of varied subsidy payment rate and co-payment policies, if appropriate. In fact, collaborative projects that would explore common questions across states are encouraged. Projects funded through this grant will significantly inform policies and practices. Ongoing collaboration between partners ensures that the research will be of direct use to the lead agency, as well as to the field at large.

Grantees will consult with other child care policy stakeholders, especially organizations that are critical to the implementation of child care policies or initiatives central to the proposed research objectives. For example, the following entities may also be included as part of a research partnership project, in addition to the CCDF lead agency and research partner:

1. Partnerships across state and/or local agencies;
2. Departments and agencies that administer child care programs for low-income children, including public or private child care centers, Head Start, or public pre-K;
3. Resource and referral organizations;
4. State agencies or organizations that oversee Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) or licensing initiatives;
5. Planning councils, commissions, advisory groups, and other organizations that participate in child care planning and policy making;
6. Non-academic research organizations;
7. Tribal, county, or local agencies that administer child care subsidy programs;

8. Family child care providers or networks; and
9. Providers of technical assistance or consumer education, and other stakeholders.

It is expected that by the end of the period of performance, grantees would be able to submit a competitive application for funding of the implementation of their research plan (in Phase II grants). Please note the following: Submitting an application to Phase II does not guarantee funding. The applicant will need to demonstrate that they are ready to implement a rigorous research and evaluation design to address the questions identified above (within Goal 1).

Goal 3. To foster active communication and collaboration among grantees in order to strengthen individual projects and to build knowledge about child care subsidy policies.

Grantees will be expected to participate in a consortium of grantees, supported by an ACF-designated evaluation coordination team. After award, grantee teams for each partnership will work together with other consortium members to explore the use of common constructs and measures, data collection protocols, tools, data management protocols, and analyses, wherever appropriate to allow greater understanding of the policies being evaluated. Grantees' evaluation plans will use approaches that measure and explore multiple dimensions of access to child care, as outlined in *Section I. Program Description, C. Program Goals and Expectations, Goal 1* and described in the recent work supported by ACF (<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/defining-and-measuring-access-to-high-quality-early-care-and-education-ece-a-guidebook-for-policy-makers-and-researchers>).

Grantees will be expected to meet and communicate regularly with federal staff and the consortium to share lessons learned, identify opportunities for collaboration and cross-site measurement, plan for dissemination, and develop collective expertise and resources to be shared with the field at large. Specifically, the coordination of research plans will enable the consortium to explore how similar policies and initiatives may yield different effects based on differences in policy, administrative practices, or targeted populations.

Grantees will provide staffing time and effort for collaborative activities that will improve the quality of consortium projects and products. Grantees will focus their effort primarily on planning and coordinating with consortium members. Grantees will develop common data collection protocols and measures, as well as finalize the proposed evaluation design, methodology, and analytic approach based on detailed logic models. Project research designs will incorporate measures and analyses developed with consortium members. Each grantee's final evaluation plan will include an implementation study and a rigorous test of the effectiveness of the policies and any changes in practice. Project research designs will incorporate measures and analyses developed with consortium members.

Grantees will work with a research coordinating team, funded by ACF to support the work of all grantees' project teams and facilitate collaborative research and dissemination efforts. With the help of a designated coordinator, each grantee will contribute to the documentation of site-specific policies, of data sources, and of evaluation plans in order to complete the following:

1. inform policy evaluations in other sites,
2. identify potential links between policies, practices or activities, and outcomes,
3. support building knowledge of the effects of subsidy policies and practices on key

- outcomes of interest, and
4. inform federal subsidy policy.

In addition, each project team must participate in the development of cross-project publications and presentations, supported by the coordinator.

To support shared learning and dissemination, grantees must attend, and should budget for, the following required meetings and conferences:

- **Consortium Kick-Off Meeting:** Key project personnel (e.g., Principal Investigator(s) and CCDF lead agency partners) are expected to attend the 2-day, in-person, kick-off meeting. This meeting is typically held in Washington, DC (although it could be held virtually), within the first 3 months of the project period. Upon award, grantees will be notified of the date of this meeting.
- **Consortium Meetings:** For the duration of the project period, Grantees will meet monthly by videoconference to support joint exploration and shared learning about research methods.
- **Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC) Annual Meeting:** It is expected that key project personnel (e.g., Principal Investigator(s) and CCDF lead agency partners) will attend the CCEEPRC Annual Meeting, which is typically held in Washington, DC (although it could be held virtually), for 2 full days. The meeting brings together grantees, contracted researchers funded by ACF, and federal and state CCDF administrators to discuss child care policy research. This meeting is an excellent opportunity for grantee teams to build relationships with key stakeholders and to discuss implications of research developments and the work of the research partnerships. Grantees will attend each year of the project.
- **Annual Grantee Meeting:** It is expected that key project personnel (i.e., Principal Investigator(s), Project Directors, lead agency representative) will attend the annual grantee meeting to discuss project developments, issues of common interest, and potential collaborative products and resources. This meeting is typically held 1 day prior to or following the CCEEPRC meeting in Washington, DC (although it could be held virtually).

Additionally, grantees are encouraged, but not required to attend:

- **State and Territories CCDF Administrators Meeting (STAM).** STAM is hosted annually in Washington, DC, typically in August.
- **ACF's National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC).** NRCEC is hosted bi-annually in Washington, DC, typically in June. The next meeting will be held in summer 2022.

Goal 4. To increase the dissemination of child care research at the national, state, territory, tribal, and/or local levels.

Results of the research activities funded through this announcement, including the implications of results for subsidy policies at the national and state levels, will be made widely accessible.

Grantees must create a project dissemination plan describing project dissemination goals, target audiences, and products/activities (e.g., written briefs, specific venues for presentation, briefings for key stakeholders, website, direct emails). The overall project dissemination plan should serve to guide the creation and execution of dissemination activities and products over the course of the project.

Project products and data may be archived with the Child and Family Data Archive (<https://www.childandfamilydataarchive.org/cfda/pages/cfda/index.html>) or another suitable archive. Early in the project, grantee teams will confer with the archive and establish an understanding of the effort, expectations, and a timeline appropriate for archiving. Grantees will work with the archive to select the data sets that are most appropriate for archiving and decide among the options for dissemination that best address all concerns related to privacy, intellectual property rights, data ownership, and other issues. Specifications and additional information regarding data preparation and archiving can be found on the following webpage: <https://www.childandfamilydataarchive.org/cfda/pages/cfda/share.html>.

D. Additional Project Requirements

Under the cooperative agreements, substantial involvement is anticipated between ACF and the grantees throughout the duration of the funded projects. Please see *Section II. Federal Award Information, Description of ACF's Anticipated Substantial Involvement Under the Cooperative Agreement* for more information.

E. Subawards

Project teams may, but are not required or encouraged to, structure and fund their partnerships through subawards. Consistent with the eligibility criteria, any eligible entity may serve as a subrecipient (i.e., a recipient of the subaward). If partnerships will be structured with a subaward, applicants must include a subaward selection process that includes a risk assessment of potential subrecipients. Consistent with the expectations for project teams discussed throughout this funding opportunity, the applicant must clearly identify and justify the roles, responsibilities, and management plan for all subrecipients.

Recipients under this grant program may opt to transfer a portion of substantive programmatic work to other organizations through subaward(s). The prime recipient must maintain a substantive role in the project. ACF defines a substantive role as conducting activities and/or providing services funded under the award that are necessary and integral to the completion of the project. Subrecipient monitoring activities alone, as specified in 45 CFR § 75.352, do not constitute a substantive role. Furthermore, ACF does not fund awards where the role of the applicant is primarily to serve as a conduit for passing funds to other organizations unless that arrangement is authorized by statute.

Subrecipient(s) must meet the eligibility requirements identified in the FOA, *Section III.1. Eligible Applicants*. Additionally, all subrecipient(s) must obtain a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number, or after government-wide implementation, a Unique Entity Identifier assigned by the System for Award Management (SAM), if they do not already have one. Prime recipients are required to check the SAM to verify that the subrecipient(s) is/are not debarred,

suspended, or ineligible.

Please reference "Award Term and Condition on Subawards" on the [ACF Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#) website for further requirements involving subawards.

F. Appendix

Lin, V., Maxwell, K., Daily, S., & Stepleton, K. (2020). *Initial Implementation of the 2014 Reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant*, OPRE Report #2020-111, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/initial-implementation-2014-reauthorization-child-care-and-development-block-grant>

Office of Child Care. (2019). *Fiscal Year 2018 CCDF Data Tables (Preliminary)*. Available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/data/fy-2018-ccdf-data-tables-preliminary>

Office of Child Care. (2020). *Setting Payment Rates*. Available at: <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ccdf-fundamentals/setting-payment-rates>

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Thomson, D., Cantrell, E., Guerra, G., Gooze, R., & Tout, K. (2020). *Conceptualizing and Measuring Access to Early Care and Education*. OPRE Report #2020-106. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Available at: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/conceptualizing_and_measuring_access_508_final.pdf

Urban Institute. (2020). *The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Policies Database*. Available at: <https://ccdf.urban.org/>

II. Federal Award Information

Funding Instrument Type:	Cooperative Agreement
Estimated Total Funding:	\$2,250,000
Expected Number of Awards:	15
Award Ceiling:	\$150,000 Per Project Period
Award Floor:	\$75,000 Per Project Period
Average Projected Award Amount:	\$150,000 Per Budget Period
Anticipated Project Start Date:	09/30/2021

Length of Project Periods:

Length of Project Period:	18-month project period and budget period
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Additional Information on Awards:

Awards made under this announcement are subject to the availability of federal funds.

Applications requesting an award amount that exceeds the *Award Ceiling* per budget period, or per project period, as stated in this section, will be disqualified from competitive review and

from funding under this announcement. This disqualification applies only to the *Award Ceiling* listed for the first 12-month budget period for projects with multiple budget periods. If the project and budget period are the same, the disqualification applies to the *Award Ceiling* listed for the project period. Please see *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

Note: For those programs that require matching or cost sharing, recipients will be held accountable for projected commitments of non-federal resources in their application budgets and budget justifications by budget period or by project period for fully funded awards, even if the projected commitment exceeds the required amount of match or cost share. **A recipient's failure to provide the required matching amount may result in the disallowance of federal funds.** See *Section III.2.* of this announcement for information on cost-sharing or matching requirements.

Description of ACF's Anticipated Substantial Involvement Under the Cooperative Agreement

- Monitor the project and provide technical assistance and feedback when necessary.
- Provide leadership to maximize cooperation and collaboration among grantees, including organizing periodic consultations and monthly teleconferences to discuss research activities, share information and promote coordination among the sponsored projects.
- Schedule and host grantee meetings—two in-person meetings and regular teleconferences throughout project period, as well as set the agenda and coordinate activities for each meeting.
- Collaborate in activities specified in the award and review and approve specific project milestones including a set of common measures and the production of project materials.
- Act as a liaison between the grantee and OCC to help ensure that project developments are communicated to federal stakeholders and that research products developed by consortium are accessible to the policy community.
- ACF will work collaboratively with grantees to facilitate accomplishment of project goals.
- ACF will facilitate collaboration and coordination with other grantees, the coordinating center, ACF program offices (e.g., OCC) and their technical assistance providers, and other contractors.

III. Eligibility Information

III.1. Eligible Applicants

Eligibility under this FOA is defined under section 658O(a)(5) of the CCDBG Act (42 U.S.C. 9858m(a)(5)). The statutory authority for this funding opportunity does not limit eligible entities to receive this funding.

Applicants are required to submit written evidence that research is a primary organizational activity of the research partner as part of the application submission. Research partners are described in *Section I. Program Description, C. Program Goals and Expectations*. The required documentation is described in *Section IV.2. The Project Description, Additional Eligibility Documentation*. Lack of the required documentation will disqualify the application from review and from award. See *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

Applicants are required to provide either:

1. a letter showing approval of the application from, or
2. a letter of proof that the applicant is,

the CCDF lead agency that is responsible for setting relevant subsidy policies (i.e., lead agency in states, territories, tribes, or localities). Applicants who fail to submit either forms of the required documentation will be disqualified from review and reward. The required documentation is described in *Section IV.2. The Project Description, Additional Eligibility Documentation*. See *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

Faith-based organizations may apply for this award on the same basis as any other organization, as set forth at and, subject to the protections and requirements of this part and 42 U.S.C. 2000bb et seq., the Department will not, in the selection of recipients, discriminate against an organization on the basis of the organization's religious character, affiliation, or exercise.

Applications from individuals (including sole proprietorships) and foreign entities are not eligible and will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement. See *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

III.2. Cost Sharing or Matching

Cost Sharing / Matching Requirement: No

For all federal awards, any shared costs or matching funds and all contributions, including cash and third-party in-kind contributions, must be accepted as part of the recipient's cost sharing or matching when such contributions meet all of the criteria listed in 45 CFR § 75.306.

For awards that require matching by statute, recipients will be held accountable for projected commitments of non-federal resources in their application budgets and budget justifications by budget period, or by project period for fully funded awards, even if the projected commitment exceeds the amount required by the statutory match. **A recipient's failure to provide the statutorily required matching amount may result in the disallowance of federal funds. Recipients will be required to report these funds in the Federal Financial Reports.**

For awards that do not require matching or cost sharing by statute, where "cost sharing" refers to any situation in which the recipient voluntarily shares in the costs of a project other than as statutorily required matching, recipients will be held accountable for projected commitments of non-federal resources in their application budgets and budget justifications by

budget period, or by project period for fully funded awards. These include situations in which contributions are voluntarily proposed by a recipient or subrecipient and are accepted by ACF. Non-federal cost sharing will be included in the approved project budget so that the recipient will be held accountable for proposed non-federal cost-sharing funds as shown in the Notice of Award (NOA). **A recipient's failure to provide voluntary cost sharing of non-federal resources that have been accepted by ACF as part of the approved project costs and that have been shown as part of the approved project budget in the NOA, may result in the disallowance of federal funds. Recipients will be required to report these funds in the Federal Financial Reports.**

III.3. Other

Application Disqualification Factors

Applications from individuals (including sole proprietorships) and foreign entities are not eligible and will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.

Award Ceiling Disqualification

Applications that request an award amount that exceeds the *Award Ceiling* per budget period or per project period ("per project period" refers only to fully funded awards), as stated in *Section II. Federal Award Information*, will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement. This disqualification applies only to the *Award Ceiling* listed for first 12-month budget period for projects with multiple budget periods. If the project and budget period are the same, the disqualification applies to the *Award Ceiling* listed for the project period.

Required Electronic Application Submission

ACF requires electronic submission of applications at www.Grants.gov. **Paper applications received from applicants that have not been approved for an exemption from required electronic submission will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.**

Applicants that do not have an Internet connection or sufficient computing capacity to upload large documents to the Internet may contact ACF for an exemption that will allow the applicant to submit applications in paper format. Information and the requirements for requesting an exemption from required electronic application submission are found in "ACF Policy for Requesting an Exemption from Electronic Application Submission" at www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/howto#chapter-6.

Missing the Application Deadline (Late Applications)

The deadline for electronic application submission is 11:59 p.m., ET, on the due date listed in the Overview and in Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times. Electronic applications

submitted to www.Grants.gov after 11:59 p.m., ET, on the due date, as indicated by a dated and time-stamped email from www.Grants.gov, will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement. That is, applications submitted to www.Grants.gov, on or after 12:00 a.m., ET, on the day after the due date will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.

Applications submitted to www.Grants.gov at any time during the open application period, and prior to the due date and time, which fail the www.Grants.gov validation check, will not be received at, or acknowledged by, ACF.

Each time an application is submitted via www.Grants.gov, the submission will generate a new date and time-stamp email notification. Only those applications with on-time date and time stamps that result in a validated application, which is transmitted to ACF, will be acknowledged.

The deadline for receipt of paper applications is 4:30 p.m., ET, on the due date listed in the Overview and in Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times. Paper applications received after 4:30 p.m., ET, on the due date will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement. **Paper applications received from applicants that have not received approval of an exemption from required electronic submission will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.**

Evidence of Research as a Primary Organizational Activity

Applications that do not include written evidence that research is a primary organizational activity of the research partner will be disqualified from review and from funding under this FOA. See *Section III. I. Eligible Applicants, Additional Information on Eligibility*, and *Section IV.2. Project Description, Additional Eligibility Documentation* for more information. Research partners are described in *Section I. Program Description, C. Program Goals and Expectations*.

Letter of Approval from, or Proof of, CCDF Lead Agency

Applications that do not include either:

1. a letter showing approval of the application from, or
2. a letter of proof that the applicant is,

the CCDF lead agency that is responsible for setting relevant subsidy policies (i.e., lead agency in states, territories, tribes or localities), will be disqualified from review and from funding under this FOA. See *Section III.1. Eligible Applicants, Additional Information on Eligibility*, and *Section IV.2. Project Description, Additional Eligibility Documentation*.

Notification of Application Disqualification

Applicants will be notified of a disqualification determination by email or by USPS postal mail within 30 federal business days from the closing date of this FOA.

IV. Application and Submission Information

IV.1. Address to Request Application Package

OPRE Review Team: Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
Policies and Initiatives
c/o ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031
Email: ccdf.eval@icf.com

Electronic Application Submission:

The electronic application submission package is available in the FOA's listing at www.Grants.gov.

Applications in Paper Format:

For applicants that have received an exemption to submit applications in paper format, Standard Forms, assurances, and certifications are available in the "Select Grant Opportunity Package" available in the FOA's Grants.gov Synopsis under the Package tab at www.Grants.gov. See *Section IV.2. Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission* if applicants do not have an Internet connection or sufficient computing capacity to upload large documents (files) to www.Grants.gov.

Federal Relay Service:

Hearing-impaired and speech-impaired callers may contact the Federal Relay Service (FedRelay) for assistance at www.gsa.gov/fedrelay.

IV.2. Content and Form of Application Submission

FORMATTING APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS

Each applicant applying electronically via www.Grants.gov is required to upload only two electronic files, excluding Standard Forms and OMB-approved forms. No more than two files will be accepted for the review, and additional files will be removed. Standard Forms and OMB-approved forms will not be considered additional files.

FOR ALL APPLICATIONS:

Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR)

AOR is the designated representative of the applicant/recipient organization with authority to act on the organization's behalf in matters related to the award and administration of grants. In signing a grant application, this individual agrees that the organization will assume the obligations imposed by applicable Federal statutes and regulations and other terms and conditions of the award, including any assurances, if a grant is awarded.

Point of Contact

In addition to the AOR, a point of contact on matters involving the application must also be identified. The point of contact, known as the Project Director or Principal Investigator, should not be identical to the person identified as the AOR. The point of contact must be available to answer any questions pertaining to the application.

Application Checklist

Applicants may refer to *Section VIII. Other Information* for a checklist of application requirements that may be used in developing and organizing application materials.

Accepted Font Style

Applications must be in Times New Roman (TNR), 12-point font, except for footnotes, which may be TNR 10-point font. Pages that contain blurred text, or text that is too small to read comfortably, will be removed.

English Language

Applications must be submitted in the English language and must be in the terms of United States (U.S.) dollars. If applications are submitted using another currency, ACF will convert the foreign currency to U.S. currency using the date of receipt of the application to determine the rate of exchange.

Page Limitations

Applicants must observe the page limitation(s) listed under "PAGE LIMITATIONS AND CONTENT FOR ALL SUBMISSION FORMATS:". Page limitation(s) do not include SFs and OMB-approved forms.

All applications must be double-spaced. An application that exceeds the cited page limitation for double-spaced pages in the Project Description file or the Appendices file will have extra pages removed and those pages will not be reviewed.

Application Elements Exempted from Double-Spacing Requirements

The following elements of the application submission are exempt from the double-spacing requirements and may be single-spaced: the table of contents, the one-page Project Summary, required Assurances and Certifications, required SFs, required OMB-approved forms, resumes, logic models, proof of legal status/non-profit status, third-party agreements, letters of support, footnotes, tables, the line-item budget and/or the budget justification.

Adherence to FOA Formatting, Font, and Page Limitation Requirements

Applications that fail to adhere to ACF's FOA formatting, font, and page limitation requirements will be adjusted by the removal of page(s) from the application. Pages will be removed before the objective review. The removed page(s) will not be made available to reviewers.

Applications that have more than one scanned page of a document on a single page will have the page(s) removed from the review.

For applicants that submit paper applications, double-sided pages will be counted as two pages.

When the maximum allowed number of pages is reached, excess pages will be removed and will not be made available to reviewers.

NOTE: Applicants failing to adhere to ACF's FOA formatting, font, and page limitation requirements will receive a letter from ACF notifying them that their application was amended. The letter will be sent after awards have been issued and will specify the reason(s) for removal of page(s).

Corrections/Updates to Submitted Applications

When applicants make revisions to a previously submitted application, ACF will accept only the last on-time application for pre-review under the Application Disqualification Factors. The Application Disqualification Factors determine the application's acceptance for competitive review. See *Section III.3. Application Disqualification Factors* and *Section IV.2. Application Submission Options*.

Copies Required

Applicants must submit one complete copy of the application package electronically. Applicants submitting electronic applications need not provide additional copies of their application package.

Applicants submitting applications in paper format must submit one original and two copies of the complete application, including all Standard Forms and OMB-approved forms. The original copy must have original signatures.

Signatures

Applicants submitting electronic applications must follow the registration and application submission instructions provided at www.Grants.gov.

The original of a paper format application must include original signatures of the authorized representatives.

Accepted Application Format

With the exception of the required Standard Forms (SFs) and OMB-approved forms, all application materials must be formatted so that they are 8 ½" x 11" white paper with 1-inch margins all around.

If possible, applicants are encouraged to include page numbers for each page within the application.

ACF generally does not encourage submission of scanned documents as they tend to have reduced clarity and readability. If documents must be scanned, the font size on any scanned documents must be large enough so that it is readable. Documents must be scanned page-for-page, meaning that applicants may not scan more than one page of a document onto a single page. Pages with blurred text will be removed from the application.

PAGE LIMITATIONS AND CONTENT FOR ALL SUBMISSION FORMATS:

Page Limits. Applicants must limit the entire application to **100 pages**. This page limit applies to the length of the Project Description File and the Appendices File, combined.

Organization of Application. Applicants are strongly advised to use heading and subheadings that correspond to the required application sections. Sections must be carefully labeled to ease reviewers' identification of information relevant to the application review criteria. Additional headers and subheaders may also be used to organize the content of each section.

The required Standard Forms (SF), assurances, and certifications are submitted separately from the Project Description and Appendices files, therefore, they are not included in the 140-page limit.

The **Project Description File** includes the following sections. Applicants must number the pages of the file, beginning with the Table of Contents. We suggest organizing the file according to the sections and in the order presented below. See additional instructions later in this section (under "*The Project Description*") for details on preparing the full project description.

1. Table of Contents
2. Project Summary
3. Approach
 - a. Objectives and Significance
 - b. Research Design and Methodology
 - c. Description of the Research Partnership
 - d. Management Plan
 - e. Organizational Capacity (for details, see *Section IV.2. Project Description, Organizational Capacity*)
 - f. Staff Roles and Qualifications
 - g. Subawards (optional)
4. Budget and Budget Justification

The **Appendices** file includes the following sections. We suggest organizing the file according to the sections and in the order presented below:

1. Additional Eligibility Documentation: Letter of Approval from, or Proof of CCDF Lead Agency, Evidence of Research as a Primary Organizational Activity
2. Supporting Documentation of Organizational Capacity and Staff Qualifications
3. Letters of Support, Third-Party Agreements and/or Memoranda of Understanding
4. References
5. Protection of Sensitive and/or Confidential Information
6. Plan for Oversight of Federal Awards Funds
7. Proof of Legal Status of Applicant Entity (if applicable)
8. Other Materials in Support of the Proposal

ELECTRONIC APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants are required to submit their applications electronically unless they have requested and received an exemption that will allow submission in paper format. See *Section IV.2. Application Submission Options* for information about requesting an exemption.

Electronic applications will only be accepted via www.Grants.gov. **ACF will not accept applications submitted via email or via facsimile.**

Each applicant is required to upload ONLY two electronic files, excluding SFs and OMB-approved forms.

File One: Must contain the entire Project Description, and the Budget and Budget Justification (including a line-item budget and a budget narrative).

File Two: Must contain all documents required in the Appendices.

Adherence to the Two-File Requirement

No more than two files will be accepted for the review. Applications with additional files will be amended and files will be removed from the review. SFs and OMB-approved forms will not be considered additional files.

Application Upload Requirements

ACF strongly recommends that electronic applications be uploaded as Portable Document Files (PDFs). One file must contain the entire Project Description and Budget Justification; the other file must contain all documents required in the Appendices. Details on the content of each of the two files, as well as page limitations, are listed earlier in this section.

To adhere to the two-file requirement, applicants may need to convert and/or merge documents together using a PDF converter software. Many recent versions of Microsoft Office include the ability to save documents to the PDF format without need of additional software. Applicants using the Adobe Acrobat Reader software will be able to merge these documents together. ACF recommends merging documents electronically rather than scanning multiple documents into one document manually, as scanned documents may have reduced clarity and readability.

Applicants must ensure that the version of Adobe Acrobat Reader they are using is compatible with Grants.gov. To verify Adobe software compatibility please go to Grants.gov and click on "Applicants" at the top bar menu and select "Adobe Software Compatibility", which is listed under "Applicant Resources." The Adobe verification process allows applicants to test their version of the software by opening a test Workspace PDF form. Grants.gov also includes guidance on how to download a supported version of Adobe, as well as troubleshooting instructions for use, if an applicant is unable to open the test form.

The Adobe Software Compatibility page located on Grants.gov also provides guidance for applicants on filling out a Workspace PDF form. In addition, it addresses local network and/or computer security settings and the impact this has on use of Adobe software.

Required Standard Forms (SFs) and OMB-approved Forms

Standard Forms (SFs) and OMB-approved forms, such as the SF-424 application and budget forms and the SF-P/PSL (Project/Performance Site Location), are uploaded separately at Grants.gov. These forms are submitted separately from the Project Description and Appendices

files. See *Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications* for the listing of required Standard Forms, OMB-approved forms, and required assurances and certifications.

Naming Application Submission Files

Carefully observe the file naming conventions required by www.Grants.gov. Limit file names to 50 characters (characters and spaces). Special characters that are allowed under Grants.gov's naming conventions, and are accommodated by ACF's systems, are listed in the instructions available in the "Select Grant Opportunity Package" at Grants.gov. Please also see <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/submitting-utf-8-special-characters.html>.

Use only file formats supported by ACF

It is critical that applicants submit applications using only the supported file formats listed here. While ACF supports all of the following file formats, **we strongly recommend that the two application submission files (Project Description and Appendices) are uploaded as PDF documents in order to comply with the two file upload limitation.** Documents in file formats that are not supported by ACF will be removed from the application and will not be used in the competitive review. This may make the application incomplete and ACF will not make any awards based on an incomplete application.

ACF supports the following file formats:

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

Do Not Encrypt or Password-Protect the Electronic Application Files

If ACF cannot access submitted electronic files because they are encrypted or password protected, the affected file will be removed from the application and will not be reviewed. This removal may make the application incomplete and ACF will not make awards based on an incomplete application.

FORMATTING FOR PAPER APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS:

The following requirements are only applicable to applications submitted in paper format. Applicants must receive an exemption from ACF in order for a paper format application to be accepted for review. For more information on the exemption, see "*ACF Policy on Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission*" at www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/howto#chapter-6

Format Requirements for Paper Applications

All copies of mailed or hand-delivered paper applications must be submitted in a single package. If an applicant is submitting multiple applications under a single FOA, or multiple applications under separate FOAs, each application submission must be packaged separately. The package(s) must be clearly labeled for the specific FOA it addresses by FOA title and by

Funding Opportunity Number (FON).

Applicants using paper format should download the application forms package associated with the FOA's Synopsis on www.Grants.gov under the Package tab.

Because each application will be duplicated, do not use or include separate covers, binders, clips, tabs, plastic inserts, maps, brochures, or any other items that cannot be processed easily on a photocopy machine with an automatic feed. Do not bind, clip, staple, or fasten in any way separate sections of the application. Applicants are advised that the copies of the application submitted, not the original, will be reproduced by the federal government for review. **All application materials must be one-sided for duplication purposes. All pages in the application submission must be sequentially numbered.**

Addresses for Submission of Paper Applications

See *Section IV.7. Other Submission Requirements* for addresses for paper format application submissions.

Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications

Applicants seeking grant or cooperative agreement awards under this announcement must submit the listed Standard Forms (SFs), assurances, and certifications with the application. All required Standard Forms, assurances, and certifications are available in the Application Package posted for this FOA at www.Grants.gov.

Forms / Assurances / Certifications	Submission Requirement	Notes / Description
Unique Entity Identifier (DUNS) and Systems for Award Management (SAM) registration.	Required of all applicants. To obtain a DUNS number, go to http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform . Active registration at the SAM website must be maintained throughout the application and project award period. SAM registration is available at http://www.sam.gov .	See <i>Section IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)</i> for more information.
SF-424 - Application for Federal Assistance	Submission is required for all applicants by the application due date.	Required for all applications.

SF-424 Key Contact Form	Submission is required for all applicants by the application due date.	Required for all applications.
Protection of Human Subjects Assurance Identification / IRB Certification / Declaration of Exemption (Common Rule)	Submission of the required information and forms is due with the application package by the due date listed in the <i>Overview</i> and <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> . If the information is not available at the time of application, it must be submitted prior to the award of a grant.	Form is available at http:// www.hhs.gov/ ohrp/ assurances/ forms/index .html . General information about the HHS Protection of Human Subjects regulations can be obtained at http://www. hhs.gov/ ohrp/ . Applicants may also contact OHRP by email (ohrp@csophs .dhhs.gov) or by phone (240-453-6900).
SF-424A - Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs and SF-424B - Assurances - Non- Construction Programs	Submission is required for all applicants when applying for a non-construction project. Standard Forms must be used. Forms must be submitted by the application due date. By signing and submitting the SF-424B, applicants are making the appropriate certification of their compliance with all federal statutes relating to nondiscrimination.	Required for all applications when applying for a non-construction project.
SF-Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	Submission is required for all applicants by the application due date.	Required for all applications. In the SF-P/PSL, applicants must cite their primary location and up to 29 additional performance sites.
Certification Regarding Lobbying (Grants.gov Lobbying Form)	Submission required of all applicants with the application package. If it is not submitted with the application package, it must be submitted prior to the award of a grant.	Submission of the certification is required for all applicants.

Mandatory Grant Disclosure

All applicants and recipients are required to submit, in writing, to the awarding agency and to the HHS Office of the Inspector General (OIG), all information related to violations of federal criminal law involving fraud, bribery, or gratuity violations potentially affecting the federal award. (Mandatory Disclosures, 45 CFR § 75.113)

Disclosures must be sent in writing to:

The Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Grants Management, ATTN: Grants Management Specialist, 330 C Street, SW., Switzer Building, Corridor 3200, Washington, DC 20201

And to:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, ATTN: Mandatory Grant Disclosures, Intake Coordinator, 330 Independence Avenue, SW., Cohen Building, Room 5527, Washington, DC 20201

Fax: (202) 205-0604 (Include “Mandatory Grant Disclosures” in subject line) or

Email: MandatoryGranteeDisclosures@oig.hhs.gov

Non-Federal Reviewers

Since ACF will be using non-federal reviewers in the review process, applicants have the option of omitting from the application copies (not the original) specific salary rates or amounts for individuals specified in the application budget as well as Social Security Numbers, if otherwise required for individuals. The copies may include summary salary information. If applicants are submitting their application electronically, ACF will omit the same specific salary rate information from copies made for use during the review and selection process.

The Project Description

The Project Description Overview

General Expectations and Instructions

The Project Description provides the majority of information by which an application is evaluated and ranked in competition with other applications for financial assistance. It must address all activities for which federal funds are being requested and all application requirements as stated in this section. The Project Description must explain how the project will meet the purpose of the FOA, as described in *Section I. Program Description*. As a reminder, reviewers will be evaluating this section in accordance with *Section V.I. Criteria*.

The Project Description must be clear, concise, and complete. ACF is particularly interested in Project Descriptions that convey strategies for achieving intended performance. Project Descriptions are evaluated on the basis of substance and measurable outcomes, not length. Cross-referencing should be used rather than repetition. Supporting documents designated as

required must be included in the Appendix of the FOA.

Letter of Intent

Applicants are strongly encouraged to notify ACF of their intention to submit an application under this announcement. Please submit a letter of intent by the deadline date listed in *Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times*. The letter of intent should include the following information: number and title of this announcement; the name and address of the applicant organization; and the name, phone number, fax number and email address of a contact person.

Letter of intent information will be used to determine the number of expert reviewers needed to evaluate applications. **The letter of intent is optional.** Failure to submit a letter of intent **will not** impact eligibility to submit an application and **will not** disqualify an application from competitive review.

Letters of intent should be submitted via e-mail to ccdf.eval@icf.com or mailed to the following address:

OPRE Review Team: Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund Policies & Initiatives

c/o ICF International

9300 Lee Highway

Fairfax, VA 22031

Table of Contents

List the contents of the application including corresponding page numbers. The table of contents may be single spaced.

Project Summary

Provide a summary of the application project description. It must be clear, accurate, concise, and without cross-references to other parts of the application. The summary must include a brief description of the proposed grant project including the needs to be addressed, the proposed services, and the population group(s) to be served.

Please place the following at the top of the Project Summary:

- Project Title
- Applicant Name
- Address
- Contact Phone Numbers (Voice, Fax, Cell)
- Email Address
- Website Address, if applicable

The Project Summary must be single-spaced, Times New Roman 12-point font, and limited to one page in length. Additional pages will be removed and will not be reviewed.

For-Profits and Small Businesses

For-profit organizations (including small businesses) applying for funding must submit the following to provide proof of their legal status: Documentation establishing the power granted to the entity to enter into contractual relationships and/or accept awards (i.e. articles of incorporation, bylaws).

Additional Eligibility Documentation

Applicants must provide the additional, required documentation, or required credentials, to support eligibility for an award, as described in *Section III. Eligibility Information* of this announcement.

Evidence of Research as a Primary Organizational Activity.

Written evidence that research is a primary organizational activity of the research partner is required. Research partners are described in *Section I. Program Description, C. Program Goals and Expectations*. This evidence must include a history of the completion of high-quality research and/or evaluation work within the past 2 years. Also, submission of resumes that reflect staff that are experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable in advanced research and evaluation methods is required.

Letter of Approval from, or Proof of CCDF Lead Agency.

Applicants must submit either:

1. a letter showing approval of the application from, or
2. a letter of proof that the applicant is

from the CCDF lead agency that is part of the collaborative partnership. The documentation must show that the CCDF lead agency is responsible for setting relevant subsidy policies (i.e., lead agency in states, territories, tribes, or localities). One of the two letters described are required documentation and must be included in the application. Lack of required documentation will disqualify the applicant from review and from award. See *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

Approach

Outline a plan of action that describes the scope and detail of how the proposed project will be accomplished. Applicants must account for all functions or activities identified in the application.

Cite potential obstacles and challenges to accomplishing project goals and explain strategies that will be used to address these challenges.

Applicants are to submit an application for the activities to be performed in the planning grant (Phase I). The strongest applications for the planning grants will be those that demonstrate an

understanding of the two-phase process, present information on the activities to be completed during the planning grant (Phase I), and describe how the planning process will lead to the data and information needed to submit a competitive application for implementation funding (Phase II). Applicants must address all of the core activities to be completed during Phase I (e.g., working with research partners, developing a rigorous research plan), and explain how findings/results of those activities will lead to the development of a strong plan for Phase II. Applicants must describe how the activities of the planning phase can be utilized to create the best possible set of circumstances to implement a rigorous, policy-relevant evaluation.

Describe any design or technological innovations, reductions in cost or time, or extraordinary social and/or community involvement in the project. Provide a list of organizations, cooperating entities, consultants, or other key individuals that will work on the project, along with a short description of the nature of their effort or contribution. Applicants must include a complete list of references in the Appendices file of the application.

Project proposals must reserve effort for collaborative activities that will contribute to the knowledge base and capacity for child care policy research more broadly. In addition, projects must reserve effort for planning and coordination with consortium members.

A. Objectives and Significance

○ Applicants must:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the current state of knowledge relevant to the policy issues being studied and link the identified issues to the goals and research questions of the proposed project.
- Include hypotheses that demonstrate understanding of the critical policy issues and research needs of the partnering CCDF lead agency and the federal subsidy program, and if applicable, local stakeholders.
- Describe how the project will inform specific programmatic and/or policy decisions of the CCDF lead agency and may be applied to the policy-making in other states, territories, tribes, and/or localities.
- Outline and justify the objectives of the proposed research project and summarize how the expected outcomes will inform CCDF policy, specifically related to subsidy payment rates and co-payment policies.
- Explain how the proposed project will improve current knowledge of subsidy payment rates and co-payment policies, both for the partnership's CCDF lead agency, as well as for CCDF policy and OCC more broadly.
- Demonstrate the significance of their proposal in the context of the existing knowledge base and current research and policy fields.
- Demonstrate the contribution the proposed work would have on subsidy policy-making in other states, territories, tribes, and/or localities.
- Describe how the project will inform the understanding of the effectiveness of methods of setting subsidy payment rates and co-payment policies for increasing low-income families' access to care.
- Outline how proposed activities to be performed during the project period will lead to the development of a research plan, including describing activities that will support data, information, infrastructure, and/or coordination needed to

implement a policy-relevant evaluation.

B. Research Design and Methodology

○ Applicants must:

- Describe the technical approach for addressing the key issues and achieving the project objectives and research questions laid out in the Objectives and Significance section.
- Articulate the link between the research questions, design, key constructs, methods, analyses, and expected outcomes. It may be helpful to include diagrams or tables that portray the interrelationships among the proposed research issues, questions, variables, and data elements.
- Describe the research design and methods that will be used to address the research questions, and explain how the methods address the objectives and research questions. Projects can use quantitative and/or qualitative methods. Research designs must be rigorous as defined by the ACF Evaluation Policy described in *Section I. Program Description*. Applicants must discuss the strengths and limitations of each aspect of the design including any technical or logistical challenges that may arise, and propose solutions for them.
- Describe how the proposed research design will address the specific research questions of this grant program (described in *Section I. Program Description, C. Program Goals and Expectations*), as well as how variables map onto the research questions and an approach to measuring access to child care along the five access dimensions.
- Address factors that might influence the CCDF lead agency's ability to implement the policies successfully and a plan for addressing these challenges.
- Demonstrate consideration of the cultural, linguistic and ethical issues that may arise.
- Describe how activities would contribute to the field's capacity to rigorously study child care subsidy policies and practices, such as documentation of research protocols, strategies to disseminate data and methods innovations, plans for archiving data.
- Demonstrate willingness to collaborate with the consortium of grantees to identify and coordinate common data collection protocols, measures, tools, research design and methodologies, and analyses, as well as develop research products and resources for the field at large.
- Present a plan for flexibility in the research approach making improvements over the course of the planning period.
- Describe expected preliminary results within the project period of the planning grant. This includes refining the logic model, research design, and protocols, and identifying, developing and integrating common measures and methods with consortium members. This may also include assessment of existing data sources and systems, preliminary analysis of existing data, finalizing data agreements or data management systems, and consultations with key stakeholders/partners. Descriptions of results should align with the proposed activities described in the

research approach.

- Applicant's discussion of the proposed research design must include a logic model, conceptual framework, or theory of change that:
 - Details the relations between the variables of interest and expected outcomes. Include theoretical justifications and empirical evidence.
 - Describes the component or components of the child care subsidy policies and practices that are hypothesized to lead to anticipated changes in subsidized families' access to quality care. A more complete model or framework could include further details, such as the sample representing the target population, key moderators, and the specific measures used for the outcomes.

C. Research Partnership

- Applicants must discuss the composition, stage, and goals of their research partnership. Specifically, applicants must:
 - Describe all organizations that will form the project team (i.e., at a minimum, representatives of a state, territory, tribal, or local CCDF lead agency and an entity with demonstrated research capacity), and provide evidence that each partner is committed to the partnership (e.g., formal letters of specific commitment or support from each partner).
 - Describe the stage of the partnership (i.e., a new partnership or a mature one), and explain how the partnership's maturity will affect the type of work proposed under the grant, the roles of the partners, and the expectations for the results of the project including both the research produced and the future of the partnership. Partnerships at any stage are acceptable, but it is important to show that the partnership is prepared to complete the work under Phase I.
 - Describe how the partnering organizations decided to propose a project and how they collaboratively identified the research questions and designed the project.
 - Describe how the partners, including the CCDF lead agency and research partner, will be involved in all phases of the project (e.g., consulting in targeted goals, design of project).
 - Outline how the project team will effectively collaborate and communicate about the project with research partners and CCDF lead agencies, as well as project stakeholders and target audiences at key points throughout the project.
 - Describe any (existing or planned) partnerships, subawards or data agreements and outline a plan for collaboration among all research and policy stakeholders.
 - Include a description of past or current partnerships among project team members, if applicable, that demonstrate the ability to carry out collaborative research.
 - Discuss the partnership's review and decision-making process (e.g., how it will determine research directions and plans and will review and approve publications/presentations of project developments).
 - Discuss how the proposed project will improve the CCDF lead agency's capacity

to participate in and use research to inform CCDF policies.

D. Management Plan

- Applicants must provide a management plan that describes a sound and feasible plan of action for how the proposed project will be carried out among all members of the partnership. This section must:
 - Demonstrate the roles, responsibilities, and relationships among the partners.
 - Describe, in detail, how the project will be structured and managed, how the timeliness of activities will be ensured, how quality control will be maintained, and how costs will be controlled. This is especially important for projects involving multiple institutions carrying out different tasks that must be coordinated and/or integrated.
 - Describe how the project will be managed by the grantee to ensure that members of the partnership operate as a cohesive team and that the goals of the project are carried out efficiently and cost-effectively.
 - Detail how the policy implementation and outcomes of interest for the lead agency and specific policy context will be appropriately measured within the timeframe of the grant.
 - Describe all subcontracts, subawards, and other formal relationships within the partnership. Partners who will provide access to data or records must provide a letter stipulating the terms of their agreement with the project team.
 - Discuss the partnership's agreement and strategy for sharing and housing data. This should include the main sources of data that will be shared, where the data will be housed, how the data will be managed, who will develop the documentation necessary for their use, and the availability of the data to partners and other interested parties.
 - Includes a timeline with target start and end dates for major project milestones/activities and products demonstrating how the proposed project objectives will be completed within the project period.
 - Discuss potential problems or challenges to accomplishing the project's objectives, including factors that may affect the quality of the research or its outcomes, may undermine the ability of partners to collaborate effectively, and may hinder the sharing, review, and dissemination of information. This should include a description of how problems and challenges will be discussed and handled by participating partnership organizations.

E. Organizational Capacity (for details, see *Section IV.2. The Project Description, Organizational Capacity*)

F. Staff Roles and Qualifications

- Applicants must demonstrate that the project team has the experience to manage a

research project of comparable size, scope, and complexity, as well as the expertise to carry out the proposed project on time, within budget, and with a high degree of quality. More specifically, applicants must:

- Describe experience of the project leadership, including the Principal Investigator, in managing research projects of comparable size, scope, and complexity as the proposed project.
- Provide evidence that the Principal Investigator and key personnel (i.e., collaborators, consultants, advisors) have knowledge and expertise in CCDF, subsidy policy, public assistance programs, and other areas addressed by the proposed research.
- Describe the expertise of the project leadership in conducting research with low-income families and agencies administering subsidy or other public assistance programs.
- Identify all proposed consultants or advisors, document their expertise, and describe their roles and responsibilities or how their services will be utilized. Include letters of commitment or intent, if possible.
- Identify staff responsible for managing all key project activities, including management of the budget, and describe their roles and responsibilities, their professional and/or technical qualifications to execute proposed activities, the proportion of time they will be committed to the project in relation to their other duties, the period of time they will be employed, and whether their continued employment will be dependent solely on the funds to be awarded under this announcement. This includes describing personnel responsible for managing the budget and federal funds.
- Provide evidence that the proposed project leadership has experience building and sustaining research partnerships and collaborating in the development, implementation and dissemination of research.
- Demonstrates that proposed staffing levels are adequate to carry out all project activities on time, within budget, and with a high level of quality and attention over the course of the research project.
- If proposing to use subaward(s), explain how the prime recipient plans to maintain a substantive role in the project.

G. Subawards (optional)

If applicable, applicants must state their intention to subaward and describe how they plan to meet the requirements and expectations outlined in *Section I. Program Description, Subawards*. Applicants must describe their plan to monitor all subrecipients in accordance with 45 CFR Section 75.352.

Project Timeline and Milestones

Provide quantitative monthly or quarterly projections (for the entire project period) of the accomplishments to be achieved for each function or activity, in such terms as the number of people to be served and the number of activities accomplished. Data may be organized and

presented as project tasks and subtasks with their corresponding timelines during the project period. When accomplishments cannot be quantified by activity or function, list them in chronological order to show the schedule of accomplishments and their target dates.

Organizational Capacity

Provide the following information on the applicant organization and, if applicable, on any cooperating partners:

- Organizational charts;
- Resumes;
- Curricula Vitae (CV);
- Biographical Sketches (short narrative description);
- Evidence that the applicant organization, and any partnering organizations, have relevant experience and expertise with administration, development, implementation, management, and evaluation of programs similar to that offered under this announcement;
- Evidence that each participating organization, including partners, contractors and/or subrecipients, possess the organizational capability to fulfill their role(s) and function(s) effectively.

○ Applicants must:

- Demonstrate that each partner has the organizational capacity and resources to successfully carry out the project on time, within budget, and to a high standard of quality, including the capacity to resolve a wide variety of technical and management problems that may occur.
- Include organizational plans for the project, including a description of the organizational structure and linkages among project partners, and the respective roles and resources contributed by each partner organization.
- If known at the time of application submission, the applicant must disclose their intent to enter into subaward arrangements in their application. For each proposed subaward, the applicant must include a description of the work to be performed by the subrecipient(s), explain why the participation of the subrecipient is necessary, and why the applicant cannot achieve the objectives without the subrecipient(s)' participation.
- Demonstrate each partner organization's ability to efficiently carry out its assigned roles and functions for a project with the proposed project's size, complexity, and scope, including evidence of successful management of federal funds. This section includes additional information on documentation that may be used to demonstrate organizational capacity.
- Describe how the proposed partners are appropriate and significantly committed to the project's research goals. This includes demonstrating that all partners have sufficient fiscal commitment and organizational support.

Additionally, if known at the time of application submission, the applicant must disclose their intent to enter into subaward arrangements in their application. For each proposed subaward, the

applicant must include a description of the work to be performed by the subrecipient(s). If applicable, the applicant must include resumes of key personnel among subawardees.

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities

Grantees are required to ensure proper oversight in accordance with 45 CFR Part 75 Subpart D. These regulations set forth the following standards for effective oversight:

- Financial and Program Management
- Property (if applicable by program legislation)
- Procurement
- Performance and Financial Monitoring and Reporting
- Subrecipient Monitoring and Management
- Record Retention and Access
- Remedies for Noncompliance

Describe the framework (e.g. governance, policies and procedures, risk management, systems) in place to ensure proper oversight of federal funds and activities in accordance with 45 CFR Part 75 Subpart D. The description must include: system(s) for record-keeping and financial management; procedures to identify and mitigate risks and issues (e.g., audit findings, continuous program performance assessment findings, program monitoring); and those key staff that will be responsible for maintaining oversight of program activities staff, and, if applicable, partner(s) and/or subrecipient(s).

Logic Model

Applicants must submit a logic model for designing and managing their project. A logic model is a diagram that presents the conceptual framework for a proposed project and explains the links among program elements. Logic models must target the identified objectives and goals of the grant program. While there are many versions of logic models, for the purposes of this announcement, the logic model may include connections between the following items:

- Inputs (e.g., additional resources, organizational profile, collaborative partner(s), key staff, budget);
- Target population (e.g., the individuals to be served, identified needs);
- Activities, Mechanisms, Processes (e.g., evidence-based practices, best practices, approach, key intervention and evaluation components, continuous quality improvement efforts);
- Outputs (i.e., the immediate and direct results of program activities);
- Outcomes (i.e., the expected short and long-term results the project is designed to achieve, typically described as changes in people or systems), and
- Goals of the project (e.g., overarching objectives, reasons for proposing the project).

Protection of Sensitive and/or Confidential Information

Provide a description of how protected personally identifiable information and other

information that is considered sensitive, consistent with applicable federal, state, local and tribal laws regarding privacy and obligations of confidentiality, will be collected and safeguarded. The applicant must provide the methods and/or systems that will be used to ensure that confidential and/or sensitive information is properly handled and if applicable, address the process for subrecipient(s) and/or contractors. Also, provide a plan for the disposition of such information at the end of the project period.

Third-Party Agreements

Third-party agreements include Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and Letters of Commitment. Letters of Commitment and MOUs must both clearly describe the roles and responsibilities for project activities and the support and/or resources that the third-party (i.e., subrecipient, contractor, or other cooperating entity) is committing. The Letters of Commitment and MOUs must be signed by the person in the third-party organization with the authority to make such commitments on behalf of their organization. General letters of support are **not** considered to be third-party agreements.

Applicants must provide Letters of Commitment or MOUs between recipients and third-parties (i.e., subrecipients, contractors, or other cooperating entities). In addition to clearly describing the roles and responsibilities for project activities and support and/or resources that the third-party is committing, these agreements must detail work schedules and estimated remuneration with an understanding that a finalized agreement will be negotiated once the successful applicant is awarded the grant.

Collaboration/consortia applicants must provide letters of commitment or MOUs identifying the primary applicant and all collaborators that are responsible for project activities.

Letters of Support

Provide statements from community, public, and/or commercial leaders that support the project proposed for funding. All submissions must be included in the application package. At minimum, each letter of support must identify the individual writing the letter, the organization they represent, the date, and reason(s) for supporting the project.

The Project Budget and Budget Justification

All applicants are required to submit a project budget and budget justification with their application. The project budget is entered on the Budget Information Standard Form, either SF-424A or SF-424C. Applicants are encouraged to review the form instructions in addition to the guidance in this section. The budget justification consists of a budget narrative and a line-item budget detail that includes detailed calculations for "object class categories" identified on the Budget Information Standard Form. Applicants must indicate the method they are selecting for their indirect cost rate. See Indirect Charges for further information.

Project budget calculations must include estimation methods, quantities, unit costs, and other similar quantitative detail sufficient for the calculation to be duplicated. If matching cost sharing is a requirement, applicants must include a detailed listing of any funding sources identified in Block 18 of the SF-424 (Application for Federal Assistance). See the table in *Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications* listing the appropriate budget forms to use in

this application.

Special Note: *The Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2021 and Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, (Division H, Title II, Sec. 202), limits the salary amount that may be awarded and charged to ACF grants and cooperative agreements. Award funds issued under this announcement may not be used to pay the salary of an individual at a rate in excess of Executive Level II. The Executive Level II salary of the "Rates of Pay for the Executive Schedule" is \$199,300. This amount reflects an individual's base salary exclusive of fringe benefits and any income that an individual may be permitted to earn outside of the duties of the applicant organization. This salary limitation also applies to subawards and subcontracts under an ACF grant or cooperative agreement.*

Provide a budget using the SF-424A and/or the SF-424C, as applicable, for the entire project period that is being fully funded (the budget period and the project period are the same). Provide a budget justification, which includes a budget narrative and a line-item detail, for the full project period. The budget narrative should describe how the categorical costs are derived. Discuss the necessity, reasonableness, and allocation of the proposed costs.

- The budget must reflect the entire 18-month grant period; there is only one budget period for the length of the grant.
- The budget must include itemized expenses for the project and a detailed narrative budget justification that explains all of the calculations.
- The budget must include funds to collaborate with the consortium of grantees to develop common data collection protocols, measures, and tools, and coordinate research designs, methodologies, and analyses.
- The budget and budget justification must include support for key project personnel to participate in CCEEPRC, the consortium kick-off meeting, and the grantee meeting.
- For applicants proposing to use subaward(s), if the total amount budgeted for subawards exceeds 50 percent of total direct costs for the budget period, the applicant must provide a justification for subawarding the portion of the project and must explain how the prime recipient plans to maintain a substantive role in the project. Applicants must explain why the participation of the subrecipient is necessary, and why the applicant cannot achieve the objectives without the subrecipient(s)' participation.

General

Use the following guidelines for preparing the project budget and budget justification. The budget justification includes a budget narrative and a line-item detail. Applications should only include allowable costs in accordance with 45 CFR Part 75 Subpart E.

Personnel

Description: Costs of employee salaries and wages. See 45 CFR § 75.430 for more information on allowable personnel costs. Do not include the personnel costs of consultants, contractors and subrecipients under this category.

Justification: For each position, provide: the name of the individual (if known), their title; time commitment to the project in months; time commitment to the project as a percentage or full-time equivalent; annual salary; grant salary; wage rates; etc. Identify the project director or principal investigator, if known at the time of application.

Fringe Benefits

Description: Costs of employee fringe benefits are allowances and services provided by employers to their employees in addition to regular salaries and wages. For more information on Fringe Benefits please refer to 45 CFR § 75.431. Do not include the fringe benefits of consultants, contractors, and subrecipients.

Typically, fringe benefit amounts are determined by applying a calculated rate for a particular class of employee (full-time or part-time) to the salary and wages requested. Fringe rates are often specified in the approved indirect cost rate agreement. Fringe benefits may be treated as a direct cost or indirect cost in accordance with the applicant's accounting practices. Only fringe benefits as a direct cost should be entered under this category.

Justification: Provide a breakdown of the amounts and percentages that comprise fringe benefit costs such as health insurance, Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes, retirement, taxes, etc.

Travel

Description: Costs of project-related travel (i.e., transportation, lodging, subsistence) by employees of the applicant organization who are in travel status on official business. Travel by non-employees such as consultants, contractors or subrecipients should be included under the Contractual line item. Local travel for employees in non-travel status should be listed on the Other line. Travel costs should be developed in accordance with the applicant's travel policies and 45 CFR § 75.474.

Justification: For each trip show: the total number of travelers; travel destination; duration of trip; per diem; mileage allowances, if privately owned vehicles will be used to travel out of town; and other transportation costs and subsistence allowances. If appropriate for this project, travel costs for key project staff to attend ACF-sponsored workshops/conferences/grantee orientations should be detailed in the budget justification.

Equipment

Description: "Equipment" means an article of nonexpendable, tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost that equals or exceeds the lesser of: (a) the capitalization level established by the organization for the financial statement purposes, or (b) \$5,000. (Note: Acquisition cost means the net invoice unit price of an item of equipment, including the cost of any modifications, attachments, accessories, or auxiliary apparatus necessary to make it usable for the purpose for which it is acquired. Ancillary charges, such as taxes, duty, protective in-transit insurance, freight, and installation, shall be included in, or excluded from, acquisition cost in accordance with the organization's regular written accounting practices.) See 45 CFR § 75.439 for more information.

Justification: For each type of equipment requested provide: a description of the equipment; the cost per unit; the number of units; the total cost; and a plan for use on the project; as well as use and/or disposition of the equipment after the project ends.

Supplies

Description: Costs of all tangible personal property, other than included under the Equipment category. This includes office and other consumable supplies with a per-unit cost of less than \$5,000. See 45 CFR § 75.453 for more information.

Justification: Specify general categories of supplies and their costs. Show computations and provide other information that supports the amount requested.

Contractual

Description: Cost of all contracts and subawards except for those that belong under other categories such as equipment, supplies, construction, etc. Include third-party evaluation contracts, if applicable, and contract or subawards with secondary recipient organizations (with budget detail), including delegate agencies and specific project(s) and/or businesses to be financed by the applicant. Costs related to individual consultants should be listed on the Other line. Recipients are required to use 45 CFR §§ 75.326-.340 procurement procedures, and subawards are subject to the requirements at 45 CFR §§ 75.351-.353.

Justification: Demonstrate that all procurement transactions will be conducted in a manner to provide, to the maximum extent practical, open, and free competition. Applicants must justify any anticipated procurement action that is expected to be awarded without competition and exceeds the simplified acquisition threshold stated in 48 CFR Subpart 2.1. Recipients may be required to make pre-award review and procurement documents, such as requests for proposals or invitations for bids, independent cost estimates, etc., available to ACF.

Indicate whether the proposed agreement qualified as a subaward or contract in accordance with 45 CFR § 75.351. Provide the name of the contractor/subrecipient (if known), a description of anticipated services, a justification for why they are necessary, a breakdown of estimated costs, and an explanation of the selection process. In addition, for subawards, the applicant must provide a detailed budget and budget narrative for each subaward, by entity name, along with the same justifications referred to in these budget and budget justification instructions.

Other

Description: Enter the total of all other costs. Such costs, where applicable and appropriate, may include, but are not limited to: consultant costs, local travel, insurance, food (when allowable), medical and dental costs (non-personnel), professional service costs (including audit charges), space and equipment rentals, printing and publications, computer use, training costs (such as tuition and stipends), staff development costs, and administrative costs. Please note costs must be allowable per 45 CFR Part 75 Subpart E.

Justification: Provide a breakdown of costs, computations, a narrative description, and a justification for each cost under this category.

Indirect Charges

Description: Total amount of indirect costs. This category has one of two methods that an applicant can select. An applicant may only select one.

1. The applicant currently has an indirect cost rate approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) or another cognizant federal agency.

Justification: An applicant must enclose a copy of the current approved rate agreement. If the applicant is requesting a rate that is less than what is allowed under the program, the authorized representative of the applicant organization must submit a signed acknowledgement that the applicant is accepting a lower rate than allowed. Choosing to charge a lower rate will not be considered during the objective review or award selection process.

2. Per 45 CFR § 75.414(f) Indirect (F&A) costs, "any non-Federal entity [i.e., applicant] that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate, ... may elect to charge a *de minimis* rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. As described in Section 75.403, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as the non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time."

Justification: This method only applies to applicants that have never received an approved negotiated indirect cost rate from HHS or another cognizant federal agency. Applicants awaiting approval of their indirect cost proposal may request the 10 percent *de minimis* rate. When the applicant chooses this method, costs included in the indirect cost pool must not be charged as direct costs to the grant.

Commitment of Non-Federal Resources

Description: Amounts of non-federal resources that will be used to support the project as identified in Block 18 of the SF-424. This line should be used to indicate required and/or voluntary committed cost sharing or matching, if applicable.

For all federal awards, any shared costs or matching funds and all contributions, including cash and third-party in-kind contributions, must be accepted as part of the recipient's cost sharing or matching when such contributions meet all of the criteria listed in 45 CFR § 75.306.

For awards that require matching or cost sharing by statute, recipients will be held accountable for projected commitments of non-federal resources (at or above the statutory requirement) in their application budgets and budget justifications by budget period, or by project period for fully funded awards. **A recipient's failure to provide the statutorily required matching or cost sharing amount (and any voluntary committed amount in excess) may result in the disallowance of federal funds. Recipients will be required to report these funds in the Federal Financial Reports.**

For awards that do not require matching or cost sharing by statute, recipients are not expected to provide cost sharing or matching. However, recipients are allowed to voluntarily propose a commitment of non-federal resources. If an applicant decides to voluntarily contribute non-federal resources towards project costs and the costs are accepted by ACF, the non-federal resources will be included in the approved project budget. The applicant will be held accountable for all proposed non-federal resources as shown in the Notice of Award (NOA). **A recipient's failure to meet the voluntary amount of non-federal resources that was accepted by ACF as part of the approved project costs and that was identified in the approved budget in the NOA, may result in the disallowance of federal funds. Recipients will be required to report these funds in the Federal Financial Reports.**

Justification: If an applicant is relying on cost share or match from a third-party, then a firm commitment of these resources (letter(s) or other documentation) is required to be submitted with the application. Detailed budget information must be provided for every funding source identified in Item 18. "Estimated Funding (\$)" on the SF-424.

Applicants are required to fully identify and document in their applications the specific costs or contributions they propose in order to meet a matching requirement. Applicants are also required to provide documentation in their applications on the sources of funding or contribution(s). In-kind contributions must be accompanied by a justification of how the stated valuation was determined. Matching or cost sharing must be documented by budget period (or by project period for fully funded awards).

Applications that lack the required supporting documentation will not be disqualified from competitive review; however, it may impact an application's scoring under the evaluation criteria in *Section V.I. Criteria* of this announcement.

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 is estimated to average 60 hours per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. The Project Description information collection is approved under OMB control number 0970-0139, which expires 02/28/2022. 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.

Application Submission Options

Electronic Submission via www.Grants.gov

This section provides the application submission and receipt instructions for ACF program applications. Please read the following instructions carefully and completely.

Electronic Delivery

ACF is participating in the Grants.gov initiative to provide the grant community with a single site

to find and apply for grant funding opportunities. ACF applicants are required to submit their applications online through Grants.gov.

How to Register and Apply through Grants.gov

Read the following instructions about registering to apply for ACF funds. Applicants should read the registration instructions carefully and prepare the information requested before beginning the registration process. Reviewing and assembling the required information before beginning the registration process will alleviate last-minute searches for required information.

The registration process can take up to four weeks to complete. Therefore, registration should be done in sufficient time to ensure it does not impact your ability to meet required application submission deadlines.

Organization applicants can find complete instructions here:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>

Obtain a DUNS Number: All entities applying for funding, including renewal funding, must have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number from Dun & Bradstreet (D&B). Applicants must enter the DUNS number in the data entry field labeled "Organizations DUNS" on the SF-424 form.

For more detailed instructions for obtaining a DUNS number, refer to:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-1-obtain-duns-number.html>

Register with SAM: In addition to having a DUNS number, organizations applying online through Grants.gov must register with the System for Award Management (SAM). All organizations must register with SAM in order to apply online. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov.

For more detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration/step-2-register-with-sam.html>

Create a Grants.gov Account: The next step in the registration process is to create an account with Grants.gov. Applicants must know their organization's DUNS number to complete this process. Completing this process automatically triggers an email request for applicant roles to the organization's E-Business Point of Contact (EBiz POC) for review. The EBiz POC is a representative from your organization who is the contact listed for SAM. To apply for grants on behalf of your organization, you will need the AOR role.

For more detailed instructions about creating a profile on Grants.gov, refer to:

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration.html>

Authorize Grants.gov Roles: After creating an account on Grants.gov, the EBiz POC receives an email notifying them of your registration and request for roles. The EBiz POC

will then log in to Grants.gov and authorize the appropriate roles, which may include the AOR role, thereby giving you permission to complete and submit applications on behalf of your organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been approved as an AOR.

For more detailed instructions about creating a profile on Grants.gov, refer to:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration/authorize-roles.html>

Track Role Status: To track your role request, refer to:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration/track-role-status.html>

When applications are submitted through Grants.gov, the name of the organization's AOR that submitted the application is inserted into the signature line of the application, serving as the electronic signature. The EBiz POC must authorize individuals who are able to make legally binding commitment on behalf of the organization as an AOR; this step is often missed and it is crucial for valid and timely submissions.

How to Submit an Application to ACF via Grants.gov

Grants.gov applicants can apply online using Workspace. Workspace is a shared, online environment where members of a grant team may simultaneously access and edit different webforms within an application. For each FOA, you can create individual instances of a workspace.

The following is an overview of applying via Grants.gov. For access to complete instructions on how to apply for opportunities, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html>

Create a Workspace: Creating a workspace allows you to complete an application online and route it through your organization for review before submitting.

Complete a Workspace: Add participants to the workspace, complete all the required forms, and check for errors before submission.

Adobe Reader: If you decide not to apply by filling out webforms you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace so that they will appear similar to other Standard or ACF forms. The individual PDF forms can be downloaded and saved to your local device storage, network drive(s), or external drive(s), then accessed through Adobe Reader.

NOTE: Visit the Adobe Software Compatibility page on Grants.gov to download the appropriate version of the software at:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/adobe-software-compatibility.html>

Mandatory Fields in Forms: In the forms, you will note fields marked with an asterisk and a different background color. These fields are mandatory fields that must be completed to successfully submit your application.

Complete SF-424 Fields First: The forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant name, address, and DUNS number. To trigger this feature, an applicant must complete the SF-424 information first. Once it is completed, the information will transfer to the other forms.

Submit a Workspace: An application may be submitted through workspace by clicking the Sign and Submit button on the Manage Workspace page, under the Forms tab. Grants.gov recommends submitting your application **at least 24-48 hours prior to the close date** to provide you with time to correct any potential technical issues that may disrupt the application submission.

Track a Workspace: After successfully submitting a workspace package, a Grants.gov Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) is automatically assigned to the package. The number will be listed on the Confirmation page that is generated after submission.

For additional training resources, including video tutorials, refer to:
<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/applicant-training.html>

Grants.gov provides applicants 24/7 support via the toll-free number 1-800-518-4726 and email at support@grants.gov. For questions related to the specific grant opportunity, contact the number listed in the application package of the grant you are applying for.

If you are experiencing difficulties with your submission, it is best to call the Grants.gov Support Center and get a ticket number. The Support Center ticket number will assist ACF with tracking your issue and understanding background information on the issue.

Timely Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

All applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., ET, on the due date established for each program. Proof of timely submission is automatically recorded by Grants.gov. An electronic date/time stamp is generated within the system when the application is successfully received by Grants.gov. The applicant AOR will receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a tracking number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) from Grants.gov with the successful transmission of their application. Applicant AORs will also receive the official date/stamp and Grants.gov Tracking number in an email serving as proof of their timely submission.

When ACF successfully retrieves the application from Grants.gov, and acknowledges the download of submission, Grants.gov will provide an electronic acknowledgment of receipt of the application to the email address of the applicant with the AOR role. Again, proof of timely submission shall be the official date and time that Grants.gov receives your application. Applications received by Grants.gov after the established due date for the program will be considered late and will not be considered for funding by ACF.

Applicants with slow internet, such as dial-up connections, should be aware that transmission can take some time before Grants.gov receives your application. Again, Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received transmission in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role. The Grants.gov Support Center reports that some applicants end the transmission because they think that nothing is occurring during the transmission process. Please

be patient and give the system time to process the application.

Issues with Federal Systems

For any systems issues experienced with Grants.gov or SAM.gov, please refer to ACF's "Policy for Applicants Experiencing Federal Systems Issues" document for complete guidance at www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/systems_issue_policy_final_0.pdf.

Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission

To request an exemption from required electronic submission please refer to ACF's "Policy for Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission" document for complete guidance at:

www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/acf_policy_for_requesting_an_exemption_from_required_electronic_0.pdf

Paper Format Application Submission

An exemption is required for the submission of paper applications. See the preceding section on "*Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission.*"

Applicants with exemptions that submit their applications in paper format, by mail or delivery, must submit one original and two copies of the complete application with all attachments. The original and each of the two copies must include all required forms, certifications, assurances, and appendices, be signed by the AOR, and be unbound. The original copy of the application must have original signature(s). See *Section IV.7.* of this announcement for address information for paper format application submissions. Applications submitted in paper format must be received by 4:30 p.m., ET, on the due date.

Applicants may refer to *Section VIII. Other Information* for a checklist of application requirements that may be used in developing and organizing application materials. Details concerning acknowledgment of received applications are available in *Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times* in this announcement.

IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

All applicants must have a DUNS Number (<http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>) and an active registration with the System for Award Management (SAM.gov/SAM, <https://www.sam.gov>).

Obtaining a DUNS Number may take 1 to 2 days.

All applicants are required to maintain an active SAM registration until the application process is complete. If a grant is awarded, registration at SAM must be active throughout the life of the award.

Plan ahead. Allow at least 10 business days after you submit your registration for it to become active in SAM and at least an additional 24 hours before that registration

information is available in other government systems, i.e. Grants.gov.

This action should allow you time to resolve any issues that may arise. Failure to comply with these requirements may result in your inability to submit your application through Grants.gov or prevent the award of a grant. Applicants should maintain documentation (with dates) of their efforts to register for, or renew a registration, at SAM. User Guides are available under the “Help” tab at <https://www.sam.gov>.

HHS requires all entities that plan to apply for, and ultimately receive, federal grant funds from any HHS Agency, or receive subawards directly from recipients of those grant funds to:

- Be registered in the SAM prior to submitting an application or plan;
- Maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active award or an application or plan under consideration by an OPDIV; and
- Provide its active DUNS number in each application or plan it submits to the OPDIV.

ACF is prohibited from making an award until an applicant has complied with these requirements. At the time an award is ready to be made, if the intended recipient has not complied with these requirements, ACF:

- May determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive an award; and
- May use that determination as a basis for making an award to another applicant.

IV.4. Submission Dates and Times

Due Date for Letter of Intent

Due Date for Letter of Intent: **06/25/2021**

Due Date for Applications: **07/20/2021**

Explanation of Due Dates

The due date for receipt of applications is listed in the *Overview* section and in this section. See *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

Electronic Applications

The deadline for submission of electronic applications via www.Grants.gov is 11:59 p.m., ET, on the due date. Electronic applications submitted at 12:00 a.m., ET, on the day after the due date will be considered late and will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.

Applicants are required to submit their applications electronically via www.Grants.gov unless they received an exemption through the process described in *Section IV.2. Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission*.

ACF does not accommodate transmission of applications by email or facsimile.

Instructions for electronic submission via www.Grants.gov are available at: www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html.

Applications submitted to www.Grants.gov at any time during the open application period prior to the due date and time that fail the Grants.gov validation check will not be received at ACF. These applications will not be acknowledged.

Mailed Paper Format Applications

The deadline for receipt of mailed, paper applications is 4:30 p.m., ET, on the due date. Mailed paper applications received after the due date and deadline time will be considered late and will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.

Paper format application submissions will be disqualified if the applicant organization has not received an exemption through the process described in *Section IV.2. Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission*.

Hand-Delivered Paper Format Applications

Applications that are hand-delivered by applicants, applicant couriers, by overnight/express mail couriers, or other representatives of the applicant must be received on, or before, the due date listed in the *Overview* and in this section. These applications must be delivered between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., ET, Monday through Friday (excluding federal holidays). Applications should be delivered to the address provided in *Section IV.7. Other Submission Requirements*.

Hand-delivered paper applications received after the due date and deadline time will be considered late and will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement.

Hand-delivered paper format application submissions will be disqualified if the applicant organization has not received an exemption through the process described in *Section IV.2. Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission*.

No appeals will be considered for applications classified as late under the following circumstances:

- Applications submitted electronically via www.Grants.gov are considered late when they are dated and time-stamped after the deadline of 11:59 p.m., ET, on the due date.
- Paper format applications received by mail or hand-delivery after 4:30 p.m., ET, on the due date will be classified as late and will be disqualified.
- Paper format applications received from applicant organizations that were not approved for an exemption from required electronic application submission under the process described in *Section IV.2. Request an Exemption from Required Electronic Submission* will be disqualified.

Emergency Extensions

ACF may extend an application due date when circumstances make it impossible for an applicant to submit their applications on time. Only events such as documented natural disasters (floods, hurricanes, tornados, etc.), or a verifiable widespread disruption of electrical service, or mail service, will be considered. The determination to extend or waive the due date, and/or receipt time, requirements in an emergency situation rests with the Grants Management Officer listed as the Office of Grants Management Contact in *Section VII. HHS Awarding Agency Contact(s)*.

Acknowledgement from www.Grants.gov

Applicants will receive an initial email upon submission of their application to www.Grants.gov. This email will provide a **Grants.gov Tracking Number**. Applicants should refer to this tracking number in all communication with Grants.gov. The email will also provide a **date and time stamp**, which serves as the official record of application's submission. Receipt of this email does not indicate that the application is accepted or that it has passed the validation check.

Applicants will also receive an email acknowledging that the received application is in the **Grants.gov validation process**, after which a third email is sent with the information that the submitted application package has passed, or failed, the series of checks and validations. Applications that are submitted on time that fail the validation check will not be transmitted to ACF and will not be acknowledged by ACF.

Acknowledgement from ACF of an electronic application's submission:

Applicants will be sent additional email(s) from ACF acknowledging that the application has been retrieved from www.Grants.gov by ACF. Receipt of these emails is not an indication that the application is accepted for competition.

Acknowledgement from ACF of receipt of a paper format application:

ACF will not provide acknowledgement of receipt of hard copy application packages submitted via mail or courier services.

IV.5. Intergovernmental Review

This program is not subject to Executive Order (E.O.) 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs," or 45 CFR Part 100, "Intergovernmental Review of Department of Health and Human Services Programs and Activities." No action is required of applicants under this announcement with regard to E.O. 12372.

IV.6. Funding Restrictions

Costs of organized fund raising, including financial campaigns, endowment drives, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions are unallowable. Fund raising costs for the purposes of meeting the Federal program objectives are

allowable with prior written approval from the Federal awarding agency. (45 CFR §75.442)

Proposal costs are the costs of preparing bids, proposals, or applications on potential Federal and non-Federal awards or projects, including the development of data necessary to support the non-Federal entity's bids or proposals. Proposal costs of the current accounting period of both successful and unsuccessful bids and proposals normally should be treated as indirect (F&A) costs and allocated currently to all activities of the non-Federal entity. No proposal costs of past accounting periods will be allocable to the current period. (45 CFR §75.460)

IV.7. Other Submission Requirements

Submit paper applications to one of the following addresses. Also see *ACF Policy on Requesting an Exemption from Required Electronic Application Submission* at www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/howto#chapter-6.

Submission By Mail

OPRE Review Team: Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
Policies and Initiatives
c/o ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

Hand Delivery

OPRE Review Team: Coordinated Evaluations of Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
Policies and Initiatives
c/o ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031

Electronic Submission

See *Section IV.2.* for application requirements and for guidance when submitting applications electronically via www.Grants.gov.

For all submissions, see *Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times*.

V. Application Review Information

V.1. Criteria

Please note: With the exception of the funding opportunity announcement and relevant statutes and regulations, reviewers will not access, or review, any materials that are not part of the application documents. This includes information accessible on websites via hyperlinks that are referenced, or embedded, in the application. Though an application may include web links, or embedded hyperlinks, reviewers will not review this information as it is not considered to be

part of the application documents. Nor will the information on websites be taken into consideration in scoring of evaluation criteria presented in this section. Reviewers will evaluate and score an application based on the documents that are presented in the application and **will not** refer to, or access, external links during the objective review.

Applications competing for financial assistance will be reviewed and evaluated using the criteria described in this section. The corresponding point values indicate the relative importance placed on each review criterion. Points will be allocated based on the extent to which the application proposal addresses each of the criteria listed. Applicants should address these criteria in their application materials, particularly in the project description and budget justification, as they are the basis upon which competing applications will be judged during the objective review. The required elements of the project description and budget justification may be found in *Section IV.2* of this announcement.

Objectives and Significance

Maximum Points:15

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The applicant demonstrates a strong understanding of the current state of knowledge in the field relevant to the policies being studied and clearly links the identified issues with the goals and research questions of the proposed project.
2. The applicant's hypotheses clearly demonstrate a solid understanding of the critical policy issues and research needs of the partnering CCDF lead agency and, if applicable, local stakeholders.
3. The applicant demonstrates how the project will inform future specific programmatic and/or policy decisions of the CCDF lead agency related to subsidy payment rates and co-payment policies.
4. The applicant demonstrates how the project will inform the federal CCDF program and/or OCC policies and initiatives, and subsidy policy-making in other states, territories, tribes, and/or localities.
5. The proposed project will contribute to understanding the effectiveness of different methods of setting subsidy reimbursement rates and co-payment policies for increasing low-income families' access to high-quality child care.
6. (*This sub-criteria is worth a maximum of 5 points.*) The proposed activities to be performed during the project period will lead to the development of a more rigorous research plan. The applicant clearly describes activities that will support data, information, infrastructure, and/or coordination needed to implement a policy-relevant evaluation.

Research Design and Methodology

Maximum Points:30

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The applicant clearly outlines the technical approach for addressing the key issues and achieving the project objectives and research questions as described in *Section IV.1. The Project Description, Objectives and Significance*.
2. The applicant adequately links the research questions, research design, key constructs, methods, analyses, and expected outcomes.

3. The applicant clearly describes expected preliminary results that will strengthen evaluation capacity within the project period of the planning grant. This may include refining the logic model, research design and protocols, assessment of existing data sources and systems, preliminary analysis of existing data, finalizing data agreements or data management systems, consultations with key stakeholders/partners, etc., but should align with the proposed activities described in the research approach.
4. The applicant's proposed approach employs technically sound, rigorous, and appropriate design, methods, and procedures and thoroughly outlines how the proposed approach will meet the project's research objectives and address the research questions. The activities proposed for the project period will clearly contribute to the development of a more rigorous evaluation plan.
5. The applicant addresses factors that might influence the CCDF lead agency's ability to implement the policies successfully and a plan for addressing these challenges.
6. The applicant includes a plan to produce information and preliminary results that clearly informs and/or complements the broader research objectives and that is practical, feasible, and appropriate to be completed within the project period.
7. The application describes activities that would contribute to field's capacity to evaluate child care subsidy policies and practices, such as documenting research protocols, disseminating data and methods innovations, and archiving data.
8. The proposed research design includes adequate and comprehensive measurement and procedures to address the specific research questions of this grant program (described in *Section I. Program Description, C. Program Goals and Expectations*). The applicant describes how variables map onto the research questions and an approach to measuring access to child care along the five access dimensions.
9. The applicant demonstrates sensitivity to relevant cultural, linguistic, and ethical issues, including in proposed research design and methods.
10. The applicant demonstrates flexibility to make improvements in the research design over the course of the planning period.
11. The application includes a detailed logic model, conceptual framework, or theory of change that clearly outlines relations between the variables of interest and expected outcomes and sufficiently describes the component or components of the child care subsidy policies and practices that are hypothesized to lead to anticipated changes in subsidized families' access to quality care.
12. (*This sub-criteria is worth a maximum of 5 points.*) The applicant demonstrates a willingness to collaborate with the consortium of grantees to support shared learning and triangulation of findings about subsidy evaluation and policy across grantees, including activities such as identifying common data elements, measures, tools and protocols, research design and methodologies, and analyses, as well as research products and resources for the field at large.

Research Partnership

Maximum Points: 15

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The project team clearly includes a state, territory, tribal, or local CCDF lead agency. The application demonstrates the partnering lead agency's commitment to the project and their role in the project. This includes evidence that the partnering agency is

responsible for determining policies related to payment rate setting and/or co-payment structures.

2. The project team clearly includes an entity with demonstrated research capacity. The application demonstrates that the partnering organization has a history of research as a primary activity and capacity to design and implement rigorous research.
3. The applicant clearly identifies all the participating members and organizations that form the project team and provides evidence of each partner's commitment to the project. This could include a memorandum of understanding, a description of all subcontracts or other formal relationships, letters of specific commitment or support, and/or data-sharing agreements.
4. The applicant describes the stage of the research partnership and explains how the partnership's maturity affects the work proposed, the roles of the partners, and the expectations for the results of the project.
5. The application demonstrates that all the partners worked collaboratively to develop the application and the proposed research project.
6. The applicant demonstrates how the partners, including the CCDF lead agency and research partner, will be involved in all phases of the project (e.g., consulting in targeted goals, design of project).
7. The applicant clearly outlines how the project team will effectively collaborate and communicate at key points throughout the project. This includes research partners, CCDF lead agencies, and project stakeholders, and clearly describes processes for review and decision-making about research plans and communicating project developments.
8. The applicant provides evidence of sufficient partnership development among research and policy stakeholders to meet the need for active collaboration and dialogue throughout all phases of the project.
9. The applicant demonstrates how the proposed project will improve the CCDF lead agency's capacity to participate in and use research to inform state, territory, tribal, and/or local CCDF policies.

Management Plan

Maximum Points:10

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The applicant presents a comprehensive and sound management plan that will ensure coordination of activities among all members of the partnership to efficiently accomplish the goals of the proposed project. This includes clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and functional relationships among the different partners, and, if applicable, the subawardees expected to contribute (e.g., consultants, advisors, steering or management committees, technical workgroups, and/or coordinating bodies.)
2. The applicant details the management structure and procedures that will be used to keep the project on track, to ensure high quality of work, and to manage costs.
3. Relevant aspects of subsidy policy implementation and outcomes of interest for the CCDF lead agency and the specific policy context are appropriately measured within the timeframe of the grant.
4. The applicant clearly describes the partnership's agreement and strategy for sharing and housing project data. This includes discussing how data will be managed and the

availability of these data to partners or other parties.

5. The applicant includes a detailed and reasonable project timeline with feasible target completion dates for major milestones and products. The timeline demonstrates that the proposed research objectives will be completed within the project period.
6. The applicant includes adequate discussion of potential problems or challenges to accomplishing the project's objectives, including factors that may affect the quality of the research or its outcomes, may undermine the ability of partners to collaborate effectively, and may hinder the sharing, review, and communication of information. The applicant describes a reasonable plan for how partners will make decisions and address problems and challenges.

Organizational Capacity

Maximum Points:5

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The applicant clearly demonstrates that each partner has the capacity and resources to successfully carry out the project on time, within budget, and to a high standard of quality. This includes demonstrating that partners have the capacity to resolve a wide variety of technical and management problems that may occur in the course of the proposed project.
2. The application includes organizational plans for the project, such as a clear description of the organizational structure and linkages among project partners, and the respective roles and resources contributed by each partner organization.
3. The applicant sufficiently demonstrates each partner organization's experience and ability to carry out assigned roles and functions for the project. If the applicant proposes to use subaward(s), the applicant explains why the participation of the subrecipient is necessary, and why the applicant cannot achieve the objectives without the subrecipient(s)' participation.
4. The applicant demonstrates that partner organizations can effectively and efficiently complete a project with the proposed project's size, complexity and scope. This includes evidence of successful management of federal funds.
5. The application thoroughly describes how the proposed project partners are appropriate and significantly committed to the project's research goals. This includes demonstrating that all partners have sufficient fiscal commitment and organizational support.

Staff Roles and Qualifications

Maximum Points:15

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The applicant clearly demonstrates that the Principal Investigator has sufficient experience to manage a research project of comparable size, scope, and complexity.
2. The applicant demonstrates how the Principal Investigator and key personnel (i.e., collaborators, consultants, advisors) have expertise in CCDF, subsidy policy, public assistance programs, and other policy areas addressed by the proposed research. Evidence of expertise includes relevant professional experience, training, and published work on related research or similar projects.
3. The application demonstrates that the Principal Investigator and key personnel have sufficient experience and expertise conducting research with low-income families and

agencies administering subsidy or other public assistance programs.

4. The application sufficiently identifies and describes all proposed consultants or advisors and their qualifications for assigned roles or responsibilities.
5. The applicant clearly identifies staff responsible for managing all key project activities and describes their roles and responsibilities, their professional and/or technical qualifications to execute proposed activities, the proportion of time they will be committed to the project in relation to their other duties, the period of time they will be employed, and whether their continued employment will be dependent solely on the funds to be awarded under this announcement. This includes describing personnel responsible for managing the budget and federal funds.
6. The applicant clearly communicates how the project leadership has experience building and sustaining research partnerships and collaborating in the development, implementation and dissemination of policy research.
7. The applicant provides sufficient evidence that the Principal Investigator or key personnel (i.e., Project Directors, CCDF lead agency representatives) have experience in the management of federal funds.
8. The applicant demonstrates that proposed staffing levels are adequate to carry out all project activities on time, within budget, and with a high level of quality and attention over the course of the research project.
9. If the applicant proposes to use subaward(s), the applicant explains how the prime recipient plans to maintain a substantive role in the project.

Budget and Budget Justification

Maximum Points:10

In this section, reviewers will consider the extent to which:

1. The applicant includes a detailed budget with the itemized expenses and a narrative justification that clearly explains all of the calculations comprising the amount requested.
2. The budget clearly supports the entire 18-month project period and proposed costs are fully justified and reasonable to complete the proposed research objectives within this period, including, but not limited to, research activities, management, and dissemination/communication activities.
3. The applicant has budgeted funds to collaborate with the consortium of grantees to develop common data collection protocols, measures, and tools, coordinate research designs, methodologies, and analyses.
4. The budget and budget justification includes sufficient support for key project personnel (i.e., Principal Investigator(s), Project Directors, lead agency representatives) to participate in CCEEPRC and the grantee meetings, which are typically held in Washington, DC (but may be held virtually), as well as the kick-off meeting.
5. If the applicant proposes to use subaward(s) and the total amount budgeted for subrecipients exceeds 50 percent of total direct costs for the project, applicant provides a clear justification for allocating the portion of the project.

V.2. Review and Selection Process

No grant award will be made under this announcement on the basis of an incomplete application. No grant award will be made to an applicant or subrecipient that does not have a DUNS number (<http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>) and an active registration at SAM (www.sam.gov). See *Section IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)*.

Initial ACF Screening

Each application will be screened to determine whether it meets any of the disqualification factors described in *Section III.3. Other, Application Disqualification Factors*.

Disqualified applications are considered to be “non-responsive” and are excluded from the competitive review process. Applicants will be notified of a disqualification determination by email or by USPS postal mail within 30 federal business days from the closing date of this FOA.

Objective Review and Results

Applications competing for financial assistance will be reviewed and evaluated by objective review panels using only the criteria described in *Section V.1. Criteria* of this announcement. Each panel is composed of experts with knowledge and experience in the area under review. Generally, review panels include three reviewers and one chairperson.

Results of the competitive objective review are taken into consideration by ACF in the selection of projects for funding; however, objective review scores and rankings are not binding. Scores and rankings are only one element used in the award decision-making process. ACF reserves the right to evaluate applications in the larger context of the overall portfolio by considering geographic distribution of federal funds (e.g., ensuring coverage of states, counties, or service areas) in its pre-award decisions.

ACF may elect not to fund applicants with management or financial problems that would indicate an inability to successfully complete the proposed project. In addition, ACF may elect to not allow a prime recipient to subaward if there is any indication that they are unable to properly monitor and manage subrecipients.

Applications may be funded in whole or in part. Successful applicants may be funded at an amount lower than that requested.

ACF reserves the right to consider preferences to fund organizations serving emerging, unserved, or underserved populations, including those populations located in pockets of poverty. ACF will also consider the geographic distribution of federal funds in its award decisions.

The competitive review will be conducted by a panel of federal and non-federal expert reviewers knowledgeable in the areas of child care subsidy policy, human services research, and evaluation. Any federal reviewers on the panel will be chosen for their technical expertise in the area of child care policy and will be from outside of OPRE. Application review panels will assign a score to each application and identify its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the

evaluation criteria.

It is unlikely that multiple applications with the same CCDF lead agency or research institution will be funded if there are applications from different lead agencies or organizations that qualify for support.

OPRE will conduct an administrative review of the applications and results of the competitive review panels and will make recommendations for funding to the Director of OPRE, taking into account the goals of the grants as listed in *Section I. Program Description*. The Assistant Secretary for ACF is responsible for the final selection.

On the basis of the review of an application, ACF will: (a) approve the application for funding, or (b) disapprove the application.

Applications may be funded in whole or in part depending on: (1) the ranked order of applicants resulting from the competitive review; (2) staff review and consultations; (3) the availability of funding; and (4) the best interests of the federal government.

ACF reserves the right not to fund applications from agencies or organizations who were previously grantees and did not meet or struggled to meet the requirements of their grant.

Federal Awarding Agency Review of Risk Posed by Applicants

ACF is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS), www.fapiis.gov/, before making any award in excess of the simplified acquisition threshold over the period of performance. An applicant may review and comment on any information about itself that a federal awarding agency has previously entered into FAPIIS. ACF will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to other information in FAPIIS, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in [45 CFR § 75.205\(a\)\(2\)](#) [Federal Awarding Agency Review of Risk Posed by Applicants](#).

Please refer to *Section IV.2.* of this announcement for information on non-federal reviewers in the review process.

Approved but Unfunded Applications

Applications recommended for approval in the objective review process, but not selected for award, may receive funding if additional funds become available in the current Fiscal Year. For those applications determined as “approved but unfunded,” notice will be given of the determination by email.

V.3. Anticipated Announcement and Federal Award Dates

Announcement of awards and the disposition of applications will be provided to applicants at a later date. ACF staff cannot respond to requests for information regarding funding decisions prior to the official applicant notification.

VI. Federal Award Administration Information

VI.1. Federal Award Notices

Successful applicants will be notified through the issuance of a Notice of Award (NoA) that sets forth the amount of funds granted, the terms and conditions of the grant, the effective date of the grant, the budget period for which initial support will be given, the non-federal share to be provided (if applicable), and the total project period for which support is contemplated. The NoA will be signed by the Grants Officer and transmitted via postal mail, email, or by GrantSolutions.gov or the Head Start Enterprise System (HSES), whichever is relevant. Following the finalization of funding decisions, organizations whose applications will not be funded will be notified by letter signed by the cognizant Program Office head. Any other correspondence that announces to a Principal Investigator, or a Project Director, that an application was selected is not an authorization to begin performance.

Information on allowable pre-award costs and the time period under which they may be incurred is available in *Section IV.6. Funding Restrictions*, if applicable. Project costs that are incurred prior to the receipt of the NoA are at the recipient's risk.

Grantees may translate the Federal award and other documents into another language. In the event of inconsistency between any terms and conditions of the Federal award and any translation into another language, the English language meaning will control. Where a significant portion of the grantee's employees who are working on the Federal award are not fluent in English, the grantee must provide the Federal award in English and in the language(s) with which employees are more familiar.

VI.2. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Awards issued under this announcement are subject to 45 CFR Part 75 - Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for HHS Awards currently in effect or implemented during the period of award, other Department regulations and policies in effect at the time of award, and applicable statutory provisions. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) is available at www.ecfr.gov. Unless otherwise noted in this section, administrative and national policy requirements that are applicable to discretionary grants are available at: www.acf.hhs.gov/administrative-and-national-policy-requirements.

An application funded with the release of federal funds through a grant award does not constitute, or imply, compliance with federal regulations. Funded organizations are responsible for ensuring that their activities comply with all applicable federal regulations.

Please review all HHS regulatory provisions for Termination at [45 CFR § 75.372](http://www.ecfr.gov/45cfr75.372).

HHS Grants Policy Statement

The HHS Grants Policy Statement (HHS GPS) is the Department of Health and Human

Services' single policy guide for discretionary grants and cooperative agreements. ACF grant awards are subject to the requirements of the HHS GPS, which covers basic grants processes, standard terms and conditions, and points of contact, as well as important agency-specific requirements. The general terms and conditions in the HHS GPS will apply as indicated unless there are statutory, regulatory, or award-specific requirements to the contrary that are specified in the Notice of Award (NOA). The HHS GPS is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/discretionary-post-award-requirements#chapter-1>.

Equal Treatment for Faith-Based Organizations

The grantee must comply with 45 CFR § Part 87 “Equal Treatment For Faith-Based Organizations,” including the requirement that all faith-based or religious organizations are eligible, on the same basis as any other organization, to participate in this and any program for which they are otherwise eligible. Thus, when selecting service providers or subrecipients, it may not discriminate for or against any organization on the basis of the organization's religious character or affiliation as indicated in 45 CFR § 87.3(a).

A faith-based organization that participates in this program will retain its independence from the Government and may continue to carry out its mission consistent with religious freedom, nondiscrimination, and conscience protections in Federal law, including the Free Speech and Free Exercise Clauses of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (42 U.S.C. 2000bb et seq.), the Coats-Snowe Amendment (42 U.S.C. 238n), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e–1(a) and 2000e–2(e)), the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. 12113(d)(2), section 1553 of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (42 U.S.C. 18113), the Weldon Amendment (e.g., Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, Public Law 116–94, 133 Stat. 2534, 2607, div. A, sec. 507(d) (Dec. 20, 2019)), or any related or similar Federal laws or regulations. Religious accommodations may also be sought under many of these religious freedom and conscience protection laws.

Consistent with 45 CFR 87.3 (b), a faith-based organization may not use direct financial assistance from the Department to engage in any explicitly religious activities (including activities that involve overt religious content such as worship, religious instruction, or proselytization). Consistent with 45 CFR 87.3 (d), Such an organization also may not, in providing services funded by the Department, discriminate against a program beneficiary or prospective program beneficiary on the basis of religion, a religious belief, a refusal to hold a religious belief, or a refusal to attend or participate in a religious practice.

VI.3. Reporting

Performance Progress Semi-Annually
Reports:

Recipients under this FOA will be required to submit performance progress and financial reports periodically throughout the project period. Information on reporting requirements is

available on the ACF website at www.acf.hhs.gov/discretionary-post-award-requirements#chapter-2.

For planning purposes, the frequency of required reporting for awards made under this announcement are as follows:

Financial Reports: Semi-Annually

VII. HHS Awarding Agency Contact(s)

Program Office Contact

Ann Rivera
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Division of Child and Family Development
c/o ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031-6050
Phone: (887) 350-5913
Fax: (703) 934-3740
Email: ccdf.eval@icf.com

Office of Grants Management Contact

Bridget Shea Westfall
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Grants Management
c/o ICF International
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031-6050
Phone: (877) 350-5913
Fax: (703) 934-3740
Email: ccdf.eval@icf.com

Federal Relay Service:

Hearing-impaired and speech-impaired callers may contact the Federal Relay Service (FedRelay) at www.gsa.gov/fedrelay.

VIII. Other Information

Reference Websites

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) www.hhs.gov/.

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) www.acf.hhs.gov/.

ACF Funding Opportunities Forecast www.grants.gov/.

ACF Funding Opportunity Announcements ami.grantsolutions.gov/.

ACF "How To Apply For A Grant" <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/howto>.

ACF Property Guidance <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/real-property-and-tangible-personal-property>

Grants.gov Accessibility Information [www.grants.gov/ web/grants/accessibility-compliance.html](http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/accessibility-compliance.html).

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) <http://www.ecfr.gov/>.

United States Code (U.S.C.) <http://uscode.house.gov/>.

Application Checklist

Applicants may use this checklist as a guide when preparing an application package.

What to Submit	Where Found	When to Submit
Letter of Intent	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Project Description</i> .	Submission is due by the Letter of Intent due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4</i> .
Unique Entity Identifier (DUNS) and Systems for Award Management (SAM) registration.	Referenced in <i>Section IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)</i> in the announcement. To obtain a DUNS number (Unique Entity Identifier), go to http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform . To register at SAM, go to http	A DUNS number (Unique Entity Identifier) and registration at SAM.gov are required for all applicants. Active registration at SAM must be maintained throughout the application and project award period.

	://www.sam.gov .	
SF-424 - Application for Federal Assistance	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . This form is available in the FOA's forms package at www.Grants.gov in the Mandatory section.	Submission is due by the application due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
Mandatory Grant Disclosure	Requirement, submission instructions, and mailing addresses are found in the "Mandatory Grant Disclosure" in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances and Certifications</i> .	If applicable, concurrent submission to the Administration for Children and Families and to the Office of the Inspector General is required.
Certification Regarding Lobbying (Grants.gov Lobbying Form)	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . This form is available in the FOA's forms package at www.Grants.gov .	Submission is due with the application package or prior to the award of a grant.
The Project Description	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. The Project Description</i> .	Submission is due by the application due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
SF-Project/Performance Site Location(s) (SF-P/PSL)	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . This form is available in the FOA's forms package at www.Grants.gov .	Submission is due by the application due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
The Project Budget and Budget Justification	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. The Project Budget and Budget Justification</i> .	Submission is required in addition to submission of SF-424A and / or SF-424C. Submission is required with the

		application package by the due date in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
Project Summary	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. The Project Description</i> . The Project Summary is limited to one single-spaced page.	Submission is due by the application due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
Table of Contents	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. The Project Description</i> .	Submit with the application by the due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
SF-424 Key Contact Form	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . This form is available in the FOA's forms package at www.Grants.gov .	Submission is due with the application by the application due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .
Protection of Human Subjects Assurance Identification / IRB Certification / Declaration of Exemption (Common Rule)	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . See http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/assurances/forms/index.html for additional information. This form is available in the FOA's forms package at www.Grants.gov	Submission of the required information and forms is due with the application package by the due date listed in the <i>Overview</i> and <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> . If the information is not available at the time of application, it must be submitted prior to the award of a grant.
SF-424A - Budget Information - Non-Construction Programs and SF-424B - Assurances - Non-Construction Programs	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . These forms are available in the FOA's forms package at www.Grants.gov in the Mandatory section. They are required for applications that include only non-construction activities.	Submission is due by the application due date found in the <i>Overview</i> and in <i>Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times</i> .

