



Administration for Children and Families

Office of Child Care

National Early Care and Education Workforce Center

HHS-2022-ACF-OCC-TA-0002

Application Due Date: 11/07/2022

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Executive Summary**Notice:**

- **Applicants are strongly encouraged to read the entire notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) 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/how-apply-grant>.**

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is soliciting applications for a National Early Care and Education Workforce Center (the Center). The purpose of the funding opportunity is to fund a research and technical assistance center that will work to increase recruitment and retainment of a diverse, qualified, and effective workforce across all Early Care and Education (ECE) settings and programs through the provision of technical assistance (TA) at state and local levels and a program of rigorous research that builds the knowledge base and informs TA efforts. The Center will specifically focus on establishing and enhancing career advancement systems and strategies for ECE professionals to pursue credentials and degrees and identifying and encouraging sustainable strategies to increase compensation, provide adequate compensation, and improve workplace policies (wages, benefits, health, and well-being). While this funding opportunity is being released through the Office of Child Care (OCC), this opportunity is a collaborative effort between several offices (OCC, Office of Head Start (OHS), Office of Early Childhood Development (ECD), and ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE)).

SAM.gov System Alert | Entity Validation Delays:

Due to high demand, SAM.gov is experiencing a considerable delay in processing entity legal business name and address validation tickets. As needed, please start the process early to avoid interruptions in application submissions. You can find SAM resources related to this process here -

https://www.fsd.gov/gsafsd_sp?id=kb_article_view&sysparm_article=KB0058422&sys_kb_id=7bb8810ddba05990060d5425f3961912&spa=1.

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The Grants.gov system is being migrated to the cloud and will be unavailable to users for an

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Production System will go Offline Friday September 23, 2022 at 12:01 AM ET.

Production System will go Online Thursday September 29, 2022 at 11:59 PM ET.

If you are interested in this funding opportunity, you are strongly encouraged to download it and all associated attachments from Grants.gov as soon as possible so that they will be available to you during this period. For more information on what to expect, please refer to the following URL at <https://grantsgovprod.wordpress.com/2022/08/08/what-to-expect-during-the-grants-gov-cloud-migration-and-extended-downtime-for-september-2022/> for details.

I. Program Description

Statutory Authority

The Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, 42 U.S.C. 9857 et seq.; the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, 42 U.S.C. 9801 et seq.; the Every Student Succeeds Act, 42 U.S.C. 9831 note; and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Public Law 117-103)

Description

A. BACKGROUND

Early Care and Education (ECE) programs are programs that care for and educate young children from birth to age 5 across a variety of settings, including community-based centers, family child care, school-based centers, and other settings, and utilize a variety of funding sources including Head Start, the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), state-funded preschool, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), private pay, and other sources. The success of these programs depends on their ability to recruit and retain qualified and competent ECE professionals who have diverse backgrounds and reflect the array of cultures and languages of children and families in the communities where programs and providers are located. One of the great strengths of the current ECE workforce is its diversity. This workforce is overwhelmingly women with 40 percent being women of color and 27 percent speaking a language other than English at home.¹ These professionals work in a variety of different settings and programs, including privately and publicly funded child care, preschools, community-based centers, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, family child care, and school-based settings. Public funding for these ECE programs comes from a variety of sources, including Head Start grants, CCDF, Preschool Development Grants Birth to Five (PDG-B5), IDEA, and state- and local-funded preschool; each have their own set of standards and requirements. Within these settings, ECE professionals care for, educate, and support the growth and healthy development of children from a wide age range (from birth through kindergarten entry), with widely varying developmental needs (including children with developmental delays or disabilities), and from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Their work fills a critically important societal role—providing young children with high-quality, relationship-based ECE that has the potential to improve their long-term outcomes, as well as the social and economic well-being of families, and allowing families to work.² However, the ECE sector is currently facing a workforce crisis, with programs around the country unable to find qualified staff to fully open and/or retain the staff they have to ensure consistent, high-quality care and education.

Challenges with the recruitment and retention of qualified staff in ECE are not new. Historically, turnover rates averaged 30 percent annually (ranging from 10-45 percent depending on the setting) compared to 15 percent for elementary school teachers.³ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, with about 10 percent of the workforce having left the field entirely and the majority of Program Directors reporting it is more difficult to recruit and retain staff now than before the pandemic.⁴ These losses have profound impacts on ECE programs, staff, and the children and families served.⁵ ECE programs struggle to keep their doors open, to create high-quality learning environments, and to develop the strong teacher-child relationships necessary to support young children's development. As a result, families struggle to find high-quality care and early education.

Research is limited on the factors contributing to ECE workforce turnover, but many experts point to historically low, stagnant wages and poor benefits for ECE professionals as a key culprit. In 2019, ECE workers were paid an average wage of only \$11.65 per hour, which is about one-third the average wages for kindergarten or elementary school teachers.⁶ As a result, the ECE workforce as a whole experiences significantly higher rates of economic insecurity, poverty, and stress compared to their peers in similar fields.⁷ Additionally, there are considerable compensation disparities within the ECE workforce, depending on the setting, ages of children served, and worker's race, even when controlling for differences in qualifications. These disparities are particularly pronounced for Black ECE workers who receive an average hourly wage that is 78 cents less than their White colleagues.⁸

At the same time, there have been numerous calls for increased qualifications and improved career pathways for ECE professionals.⁹ Indeed, credentials and degrees help ensure ECE professionals have the foundational skills and competencies necessary to provide high-quality care and education and promote young children's development, and career pathways are necessary to prepare new entrants to the ECE field and promote ongoing development of the workforce. Yet there remains great variability in the qualifications of ECE professionals. A little less than half (48 percent across all types of settings) have demonstrated the critical competencies relevant to ECE by achieving a Child Development Associates (CDA) or similar state credential.¹⁰ Likewise, 36 percent of ECE professionals in center-based settings hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and nearly half (47 percent) hold no degree at all. Among professionals in home-based settings, only 16 percent hold bachelor's degrees or higher, while 68 percent hold no degree at all.¹¹ Similar to disparities related to ECE workers' compensation, the variability in qualifications within the ECE workforce has been found to relate to the setting, ages of children served, and worker's race. Thus, efforts to improve qualifications and develop career pathways for the workforce as a whole must account for this variation or risk losing existing staff and exacerbating the workforce crisis.

Efforts to improve the qualifications of the ECE workforce and build career pathways have been stymied by a number of factors. Across the ECE system, barriers in accessing or succeeding in degree or credentialing programs abound. Research and experts have cited numerous challenges, including the high cost of higher education¹² and limited means for paying off the resulting debt when staff investments of time, effort, and money to achieve higher credentials are not met with commensurate increases in pay and benefits. ECE professionals are also challenged by a lack of clarity about which credentialing programs or degrees are high-quality and will adequately

prepare them to work with young children; lack of time to participate in required coursework, as many ECE professionals already hold a full-time job in the field; lack of individualized supports (e.g., supports for challenging course material; supports for professionals that have a disability; supports for remedial learning; technology supports); and lack of cultural and linguistic diversity in coursework leaving ECE educators unprepared to support culturally and linguistic diverse learners. Additionally, the opportunity for degree attainment is not equitably available to all ECE professionals as these barriers tend to be greater and more numerous for ECE professionals with racially, linguistically, and/or economically diverse backgrounds. Across all professions, there are substantial gaps in college attendance and degree completion for people of color, women, and those for whom English is not a first language,¹³ and ECE is no exception.

Credentialing and degree programs hold promise for supporting the ECE workforce in meeting the high demands of the critically important job of caring for and educating young children, but the low compensation offered in return fails to reflect either the demands or importance of the work. Even when ECE educators invest in improving their qualifications, those improvements are not necessarily met with commensurate improvements in compensation. For example, while Head Start regulations have increased teachers' required qualifications over time (i.e., infant/toddler teachers must have a minimum of a CDA credential; preschool teachers must have at least an associate's degree and over 50 percent nationally must have a baccalaureate), meeting these requirements has not necessarily resulted in commensurately higher salaries. Head Start funding has not kept pace with the need to increase compensation for ECE educators and, in child care, constraints in the market limit the ability to implement salary increases. High-quality ECE is labor intensive, and costs are relatively high, in particular for infants and toddlers, and often exceed what many families in the United States can afford. Therefore, budget margins are slim for ECE businesses and leave little room to increase salaries for staff, even as the demands and credentials increase. Likewise, Head Start programs have struggled to continue to serve children and families with comprehensive services while also retaining qualified staff as funding levels fail to keep pace with operating costs and more families need services. This in part leads to staff leaving for higher-paying jobs and reductions in the quality, supply, and reliability of the care and education of young children.

A comprehensive approach to supporting ECE professionals requires establishing or enhancing career pathways to train, recruit, and retain qualified staff with attention to compensation and the great diversity of the workforce. This strategy is necessary to address the current crisis, but also the long-term challenges underpinned by chronically low wages that existed well before the COVID-19 public health emergency. In recent years, a number of innovative approaches have been developed and employed to attempt to address these issues and challenges to support career advancement and improved compensation for ECE professionals, such as apprenticeship programs, pay parity policies/initiatives, improving benefits through coordinating community-based programs, mentoring programs, and other strategies. There is a need to better understand these various strategies and their effectiveness and to bring to scale the strategies and systems that support career advancement and increased compensation for ECE professionals.

B. GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The Center will aim to improve the recruitment and retention of the ECE workforce by executing a program of rigorous research that builds the knowledge base and disseminates research to inform solutions, and by providing TA to support the implementation of research-based and sustainable policies and practices at state and local levels. In particular, the Center will aim to improve ECE workforce recruitment and retention through a focus on career advancement and improved compensation for ECE teachers, assistant teachers, aides, and other caregivers providing direct care and education in classrooms and family child care homes for infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children. Although challenges with compensation and career pathways exist for professionals and staff in a wide range of roles in ECE settings (e.g., directors, managers, coordinators, home visitors, coaches, support staff, staff serving school-aged children, etc.), the focus of this NOFO is primarily on the ECE workforce, professionals, and staff that provide direct care and education to young children, birth to age 5, in classrooms or family child care homes across Head Start, CCDF, state-funded preschool, IDEA, and other settings. This includes teachers, family child care providers, assistant teachers, and aides.

The Center's research and TA activities will work together to inform each other, build on and complement existing TA and research efforts, and support states and local communities (including Head Start grant recipients) in identifying and implementing sustainable systems, strategies, and policies that support the goals of (1) improving career advancement pathways for ECE professionals to pursue credentials and degrees, and building a pipeline for development of the ECE workforce as a whole; and (2) increasing compensation and improving workplace supports (e.g., benefits, health, well-being) in alignment with career advancement. Through the Center's work to support states and local communities to address ECE career advancement and address compensation, the Center will also aim to influence (a) the quality of ECE programs across programs and settings by ensuring that ECE professionals have the necessary skills and competencies to create engaging, developmentally appropriate environments and implement high-quality practices; (b) strategies and systems that build on and maintain the rich diversity of the ECE workforce; (c) equitable access for all young children and families to have qualified, competent ECE professionals across ECE settings and programs; and (d) advancing the role of ECE educator voice (including family child care providers) in research and policy.

The following reflects ACF's priorities that the Center is expected to address through its research and/or TA efforts:

- Building a sustainable pipeline and supporting career advancement for the ECE workforce across all settings, including:
 - Participating in ECE credentialing and/or degree programs with consideration for the diversity of the workforce and variation in existing credential/degree status and related requirements across settings;
 - Removing barriers to career advancement and credential/degree attainment through financial, academic, and workplace supports and other flexibilities for ECE professionals seeking credentials and degrees;
 - Improving the quality, alignment, and articulation of professional development, training, and post-secondary coursework (i.e., including credentialing and degree programs in 2- and 4-year Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs)) to build the competencies and meet the needs of ECE professionals; and

- Promoting end-user design and the role of ECE educators voice in building and the continuous quality improvement of career pathways and career advancement systems, strategies, and policies.
- Promoting sustainable increases in compensation (e.g., pay and benefits) for the ECE workforce across all settings, including:
 - Promoting compensation increases that are commensurate with advances in credentialing or degrees;
 - Ensuring compensation and workforce policies (e.g., wage ladders, benefits, health, well-being) are comparable across ECE settings and to professionals with the same credentials and experience working in elementary grades; and
 - Promoting the role of ECE educators in formulating compensation and workforce policies, building systems, and implementing strategies.
- Promoting equity in career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies, including:
 - Building on and maintaining the rich racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the ECE workforce; reflecting the diversity of the children and families they serve; and incorporating diverse ECE educator voices into the policy making and research process;
 - Reducing existing racial, linguistic, and cultural disparities, as well as disparities among staff with similar credentials and experience serving children of different ages or in different settings; and
 - Ensuring young children and their families served across settings have equitable access to qualified, competent ECE professionals.

The Center will prioritize addressing these issues for ECE programs or state systems supported by ACF funding, including Head Start, CCDF, and PDG-B5. However, programs and settings within the ECE system supported by other funding streams (e.g., state-funded preschool, IDEA) may also benefit from the Center's work due to the integrated nature of the ECE system.

C. OUTCOMES AND ACTIVITIES

In order to meet the intended purpose and address the goals and priorities articulated in *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*, the Center will engage in the following three key activity areas: (1) leadership, coordination, and partnership (~5-10 percent of the Center's overall effort); (2) TA (~50-55 percent of the Center's overall effort); and (3) research and knowledge development (~30-35 percent of the Center's overall effort). Additionally, the Center will engage in supplemental activities (~5-10 percent of the Center's overall effort) described under *E. Additional Responsibilities*. The proportion of effort dedicated to each activity area may vary slightly by year. For example, in year 1, the Center may require slightly more than 5-10 percent effort for Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership and slightly less than 50-55 percent for TA and/or 30-35 percent for Research/Knowledge Development.

(1) While the proportion may vary slightly over the 5 years of the cooperative agreement, the Center is encouraged to dedicate approximately 5-10 percent of the Center's overall effort to activities in the area of Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership. These activities shall serve to

establish the Center as a leader in the field on ECE workforce career advancement and compensation and engage key stakeholders, experts, and organizations to inform, coordinate, and disseminate the Center's work. Specifically, the leadership, coordination, and partnership activities should increase the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the Center's work; ensure the Center's contributions are value added to ongoing related work by other entities; and develop a network of partners that can help sustain the Center's work when federal funding ends. These activities shall include:

- Developing partnerships to ensure alignment of efforts and collaboration with ACF staff and leadership, as well as other federally funded ECE TA Centers that include a focus on the workforce and assess, coordinate, and disseminate relevant products developed and TA provided across federally funded Centers to most effectively support the ECE workforce and the children and families in their care.
- Developing partnerships with professional associations and other entities that work with IHEs and philanthropic, research, and other ECE organizations focused on strengthening career pathways and workforce compensation, such as 2- and 4-year IHEs, to leverage existing and future related work and ensure the Center's work is value added and disseminated across the ECE system.
- Establishing a Technical Work Group (TWG), made up of experts and stakeholders from outside of the recipient's funded institution(s), with technical assistance, research, programmatic, policy, and lived-experience expertise (e.g., representatives from ECE providers and/or families) in ACF's priority areas (see *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*). This TWG will provide input and feedback to inform priorities and refine plans for Center activities as well as assist with dissemination of the Center's work. The TWG will be regarded as a resource for the Center, supporting the Center in defining the state of the field, identifying forward-looking questions, issues, concerns, and gaps in the knowledge base, TA, and research. Efforts should be made in selecting this group to ensure representation from a broad range of organizations and perspectives (such as including academic, research, policy, professional, 2- and 4-year IHEs, and other associations of practitioners, TA, or program organizations). The Center should convene and engage this group purposefully to help realize ACF's goals for the Center and to expand the reach of the Center's activities. To enable deeper discussions on selected topics and connections among experts and stakeholders, it is expected that the entire TWG will meet at least once each year and subgroups of the TWG may meet more frequently.
- Supporting the development of ECE leaders by creating and/or funding a fellowship program to support emerging ECE policy leaders and emerging ECE research scholars. The emerging ECE policy leaders and emerging ECE research scholars fellowship program should focus on a diverse cadre of ECE leaders/scholars who represent various culture and language backgrounds, through fellowships with the Center, IHEs, research institutions, state or federal government, ECE professional organizations, or policy organizations. The Center is encouraged to fund approximately two emerging ECE policy leaders each year who are early career ECE professionals with expertise (including expertise through lived experience) and interest in supporting and strengthening the ECE workforce. Emerging policy leaders may come from research, policy, TA, program

administration, or early educator training programs and will already be working in, or will be placed in, an organization that helps them gain the experience and expertise to further their career. Emerging policy leaders will participate in leadership building activities facilitated by the Center and with Center staff will develop and implement an individualized leadership development plan. Additionally, as part of the Center's efforts to build research capacity in the field (described under activity (3)), the Center is expected to create and/or fund a fellowship program to support the development of emerging ECE research scholars (i.e., doctoral candidates, postdoctoral fellows, graduate research assistants). The emerging ECE research scholars fellowship program should aim to expand the pool of researchers with the knowledge and capacity to investigate applied, relevant questions related to the career advancement and compensation of the ECE workforce by providing training, mentoring, and applied research opportunities within and outside the Center's institution(s). The Center is encouraged to fund approximately two emerging ECE research scholars each year.

- Ensuring that the Center's research and TA activities are coordinated. Research conducted by the Center should inform TA, and lessons learned from TA should inform the research activities. The Center's Research to Practice Lead (see *Section I. Program Description, D. Structure*) will be responsible for ensuring that the Center's research and analyses are translated into actionable information that can be used by the Center's TA staff and other partners and stakeholders to inform and improve practice in program supported by ACF funding, including through support and collaboration among the Center's research and TA staff.

(2) While the proportion may vary slightly over the 5 years of the cooperative agreement, the Center is encouraged to dedicate approximately 50-55 percent of the Center's overall effort to activities in the area of TA. The primary targets for the Center's TA are (a) state ECE personnel and teams, including representatives from state agencies, administering federally and state-funded ECE programs and (b) local ECE program leaders, staff, and teams, including representatives from across ECE mixed delivery (including programs supported by ACF funding and in various settings such as Head Start; family child care; and community-, center- and school-based). The TA activities shall be centered on a strategy that accounts for the unique needs of the ECE workforce; shall seek to retain a diverse ECE sector; and shall aim to improve the quality, capacity, and sustainability of systems, strategies, and policies implemented by states and local programs to promote career advancement and improve compensation of ECE professionals across ECE programs and systems by:

- Providing universal TA to the ECE field through promoting and frequently updating a central ECE Workforce Hub; hosting timely and relevant webinars, national and regional conferences or meetings (in coordination with other TA Centers, as applicable); and developing, disseminating, and supporting the use of new products and resources responsive to the needs of the field. This shall include:
 - Conducting a landscape analysis of existing tools, resources, partners, and TA focused on supporting career advancement and compensation of the ECE workforce to identify existing gaps in capacity and resources and the needs of states and local programs (including Head Start grant recipients) and ECE educators. The analysis (as well as the research activities described below under

(3) and with input from the Integrated Project Team and TWG) shall inform the development of the Center's Universal TA Plan, to be updated annually.

- Creating a central, online, public-facing, and free ECE Workforce Hub that compiles and shares tools, resources, and TA available to support career advancement and compensation of the ECE workforce. The Hub must build on or link to other similar efforts including those funded by ACF and including the resources compiled on the [ECD Workforce Rapid Response Center](#). To ensure there is not duplication with other ACF-funded websites, the Hub needs to leverage what is already in existence while creating a user-friendly platform for accessing tools and resources. The Hub should include materials states and local programs can use for ECE workforce recruitment campaigns to encourage new entrants to the profession.
- Developing or updating tools and resources based on the landscape analysis described above and the identified gaps and findings from the research activities (described below under (3)) that are responsive to the workforce needs of the field such as:
 - innovative career advancement strategies and partnerships (including apprenticeships, alternative pathways, or scholarships to attend IHE and community college programs and/or professional development);
 - strategies and models for developing articulation agreements or Memorandum of Understanding to support portability across IHE programs and credentials;
 - effective strategies and practices that promote and maintain equity and diversity in the ECE workforce; incorporate ECE educators' participation in policymaking, systems building, and strategy implementation; and reduce racial, linguistic, and economic barriers to higher education;
 - creating and implementing local and statewide ECE compensation initiatives aligned with career ladders;
 - tools and materials to support positive professional environments with constructive growth opportunities along career ladders that lead to increased compensation;
 - effective materials for state and local ECE workforce recruitment campaigns to encourage new entrants to the profession; and
 - aligning ECE workforce core knowledge and competency standards that will enhance professionalism of the ECE field and support career advancement of ECE professionals across ECE programs and systems (build on existing standards such as Head Start and professional standards).
- Providing and facilitating peer-to-peer targeted TA (such as through Learning Communities, Communities of Practice, Continuous Quality Improvement Practicum, or other facilitated peer learning opportunity) for both state and local audiences on challenging ECE workforce career advancement and compensation issues such as:
 - How to develop partnerships with IHEs, including 4-year institutions and community colleges to strengthen capacity and effectiveness.

- How to implement and/or sustain innovative strategies, such as apprenticeships, scholarships, and alternative pathways, to support ECE workforce development (e.g., high school CDA programs).
- How to ensure equity and diversity of the ECE workforce across the mixed delivery system, including reducing racial, linguistic, and economic barriers in access to, and success in, higher education.
- How to improve compensation and/or sustain improvements in compensation for ECE professionals working across the mixed delivery system, especially in the context of increased qualifications.
- How to utilize multiple funding streams to improve compensation at the local program level.
- How to develop and measure progress on ECE workforce core knowledge and competencies standards and align competencies with career ladders and compensation scales.
- How to incorporate ECE educators into the policymaking, systems building, and strategy implementation process.

Applicants will propose the number, topics, and participants of Learning Communities or Communities of Practice offered each year, but final decisions will be determined in collaboration with the Federal Project Officers (FPOs) and based on the needs of and input from the field. Targeted TA opportunities must be available for teams or individuals across ECE programs and settings. At the state level, opportunities must be available for (at a minimum) the CCDF lead agency, Head Start Collaboration Office, and the agency leading the PDG-B5 grant (if applicable). At the local level, opportunities must be available for programs across the mixed delivery system and at minimum those funded by Head Start and CCDF.

- Providing intensive TA to several states and local communities a year (including local communities embedded within the states receiving intensive TA) to implement effective and sustainable career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies for the ECE workforce. Entities participating in the intensive TA must pull together a team that includes agencies or programs that administer key ECE programs in the state or local community. State teams must include agencies that administer ECE programs or federal grants (such as CCDF, IDEA Part B 619 and Part C, PDG-B5, state-funded preschool); Head Start Collaboration Office; state professional development or TA organizations; IHEs, including both 4- and 2-year colleges; tribal entities; and/or other partners. Local teams must include representatives of the local mixed delivery system including those who work directly with children and represent the diversity of the ECE sector (including in center-based child care, family child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, and school-based programs), IHEs, high school technical programs, career and technical education programs, credentialing programs, professional development providers that serve the local community, tribal entities, and/or other relevant partners.
 - The Center will help the intensive TA state and local teams develop a comprehensive plan to implement effective and sustainable career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies for the ECE workforce and identify priority areas to receive customized TA. The framework and self-

assessment tool developed under Research and Knowledge Development activities will be the starting point for developing these plans.

- The Center (with input from federal staff) will develop Request for Proposals (RFP) and review process for state and local teams to apply for this intensive TA opportunity. Applicants should propose an approach for RFPs and review that will ensure state and local intensive TA teams represent the diversity of states and local communities and that the number of states and local communities participating will be balanced (e.g., each year the number of states and localities participating should be the same). Additionally, applicants should maximize the number of states and localities that participate in intensive TA over the course of the project.
- One goal of this intensive TA activity is to develop and evaluate various state and local models for effective ECE career advancement and improved compensation. Therefore, state and local participants may be asked to participate in Center- and/or other ACF-sponsored evaluations.

***As described in *Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership activities* above, all TA activities must build on and complement other related ACF-funded TA. An Integrated Project Team (see *Section I. Program Description, D. Structure* below) made up of both Center and federal staff will meet regularly to review and refine the Center's TA activities. A TWG (described under activity (1)) will meet annually to provide input on the Center's TA activities.

(3) While the proportion may vary slightly over the five years of the cooperative agreement, the Center is encouraged to dedicate approximately 30-35 percent of the Center's overall effort to activities in the area of Research and Knowledge Development. These activities shall aim to inform TA efforts (described under activity (2)), as well as state and local policy and practice, by improving ACF's understanding of the state of the ECE workforce with regard to career pathways and compensation; barriers and opportunities to career advancement and improved compensation; quality, implementation, and effectiveness of career advancement/compensation strategies and systems; and other key knowledge gaps, through:

- Conducting an environmental scan and analysis to assess the state of the knowledge base and practices in the field; identify existing strategies and systems to support career advancement and improve compensation; and build understanding of the strengths, gaps, and opportunities for new research and knowledge development. The scan should include stakeholder engagement to understand the knowledge, perspectives, and research/information needs of states, local programs, provider organizations, IHEs, and other groups. The Center's program of research should build on this effort and the existing literature, research efforts, and knowledge from the field.
- Developing a framework (or frameworks) based on lessons from the environmental scan/analysis, existing literature, and knowledge from the field that articulates the components of effective ECE career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies that strengthen the ECE workforce; and develop a self-assessment tool (or tools) for states and local communities to use to identify areas for improvement. The framework(s) and self-assessment(s) should build on similar existing and effective tools and resources utilized in the field and should be used by the Center to guide TA efforts (described under activity (2)).

- Advancing research by planning, initiating, and maintaining a focused, rigorous research program that builds on the framework and existing research base to address key research questions directly relevant to the needs and interests of ACF and the ECE field, such as:
 - The varied experiences, strengths, and needs of the ECE workforce regarding career advancement and compensation;
 - Promising approaches to promoting career advancement and improvements in compensation; and
 - Barriers, implementation challenges, and other issues or factors shaping the quality, effectiveness, or equity of approaches to supporting career advancement and improved compensation.

The program of research must also include evaluating the strategies/models implemented in intensive TA efforts (described under activity (2) above) and conducting analyses of existing data sources (in particular, data archived for secondary analysis from ACF-funded research such as the National Survey of Early Care and Education). It should reflect an applied research agenda including multi-disciplinary and multi-method approaches, such as quantitative and qualitative methods, primary data collection, secondary analyses, research syntheses, pilot or feasibility studies, measurement development, program evaluations, or other approaches best suited to address the research questions and priorities described under *B. Goals and Priorities* earlier in this section.

All research activities must adhere to the principles of rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics outlined in the [ACF Evaluation Policy](#). Additionally, ACF values research and evaluation activities that are grounded in an understanding of the important role that public policies, institutional practices, structural racism, and other societal norms/systemic factors play in shaping and influencing the phenomena of interest. ACF expects the Center to incorporate an equity lens in its program of research.

An Integrated Project Team (see *D. Structure* below) made up of both Center and federal staff will meet regularly to review and refine the Center's research activities. A TWG (described under activity (1)) will meet annually to provide input on the Center's research activities.

- Building research capacity by developing capacity in the scientific community to conduct research that is relevant to ACF program and policy goals for the ECE workforce as well as research that is valid and culturally anchored in the experiences of a diverse ECE workforce. Specifically, the Center shall provide intellectual leadership in the national research community, establish links with the broad range of scholars external to the Centers' institution(s), develop tools and resources, and provide consultation or professional development to support the field in conducting valid and relevant research related to career advancement and compensation of the ECE workforce.
- Communicating and disseminating research by developing and maintaining an innovative communication system to share research and information with key stakeholders and the broader field, including integrating new learning from research conducted by the Center and across relevant OPRE-funded projects in the Center's approach to TA and TA

resources. The Center will aim to increase the use of research, data, and evidence in planning, decision-making, and implementation of approaches to supporting career advancement and compensation for the ECE Workforce. The communication system will be integrated with universal TA activities (described in activity (2)) and shall target a wide audience (including researchers, federal/state policymakers, local programs, and TA providers) using a range of engaging strategies (such as accessible/plain language written, visual, or audio products; hosting events, webinars, podcasts, workshops, or symposia; presentations or listening sessions at conferences and practice-focused gatherings; meetings with stakeholders and community members). The communication plan should be clearly linked to the priorities identified under *B. Goals and Priorities*.

Note: Any written publications that describe the project or program or that result from activities supported under this cooperative agreement (e.g., brochures, websites, reports, print materials, electronic announcements, press releases, listservs, publicly available written answers, presentations, testimonies) must include the disclaimer required by the Stevens Amendment. For more information on the Stevens Amendment and the required disclaimer statement please refer to the ACF [Administrative and National Policy Requirements](#) webpage. Please see *Section II. Federal Award Information* for information about how the Center's resources and activities must be proportionately dedicated to reflect the eligible activities under each of the three funding streams supporting the Center.

D. STRUCTURE

The Center's organizational structure will include the following key elements: Center Co-Directors; Center team and partners; Research-to-Practice Lead (RtP Lead); and an Integrated Project Team (IPT).

1. Center Co-Directors. The Center will be led by Co-Directors, one who primarily leads the TA activities and one who primarily leads the Research activities; together the Co-Directors will co-lead the Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership activities. The Co-Directors' expertise, knowledge, and skills will inform all Center activities and will contribute directly to the collaborative efforts involved. Through the Co-Directors' leadership, the Center will meet the project objectives of improving ECE career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies at state and local levels for the ECE workforce. The Co-Directors will not only be responsible for the successful completion of the Center's collaboration and partnership, TA, and research/knowledge development activities, but will also be responsible for establishing and maintaining coherence in goals and objectives across the Center's activities and collaboration across the various structural elements and participants in the Center's activities. The Co-Directors must be established leaders with expertise in the needs of the ECE workforce, ACF priority areas (see *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*), and ECE programs and policies (Head Start, CCDF, ECE state systems); and have the necessary training, education, degree(s), qualifications, experience, and other qualities to fulfill their roles, lead the project, and meet the goals of the Center.
 - For the Co-Director for Research, this must include, but is not limited to, a clear record of leadership in the academic arena related to ECE Workforce, including recognition by, membership in, and/or service in professional organizations; evidence

of education and training in research design, methods, and analysis appropriate to the requirements of the NOFO; a demonstrated record of conducting high-quality research related to ECE Workforce, including scholarly publications in peer-reviewed journals; a demonstrated record of conducting research to inform policy or practice related to ECE Workforce, such as through dissemination to diverse audiences and collaboration with programmatic/policy audiences; and a demonstrated record of leading diverse research activities and teams, including mentorship of graduate students. Although there is no absolute requirement that the Co-Director for Research hold a specific degree, the characteristics, training, and experience described here are typical of doctoral-level professionals.

- For the Co-Director for TA, this must include, but is not limited to, a clear record of leadership in the ECE field, including recognition by, membership in, and/or service in professional organizations; expertise in ECE workforce policy and practice across settings and programs at the state and local level; a demonstrated record of providing high-quality and effective TA in ECE that is informed by research, policy, and practice; a demonstrated record of experience with leading successful TA projects that utilize implementation science, adult learning techniques, and focus on ECE workforce issues; and a demonstrated record of leading large complex projects, activities, and teams.

Any gaps in the Co-Directors' expertise or skills should be addressed through additional Center leadership and staff, subcontracts with other institutions and organization, and/or partnerships with other scholars and professionals. The Co-Directors must commit appropriate time and effort to the Center to ensure ongoing management and oversight and high-quality results and products. The recipient should inform the FPOs regarding any significant changes in availability throughout the project period. Changing either of the Center's Co-Directors during the project period would constitute a major revision of the approved project and would require prior approval by ACF.

2. Center Team and Partners. The Center's team and partners (including personnel serving as project managers, coordinators, writers, editors, data collectors, analysts, TA providers, experts to implement communities of practice and intensive TA, facilitators, programmers, technical support, logistics support, administrative staff, subcontracted support) are all critical to the success of the Center's activities. Team members' and partners' expertise, training, education, degree(s), qualifications, experience, and other qualities must be aligned with and sufficient to fulfill their assigned roles, execute assigned tasks/activities, and achieve high-quality results and products. They must also have sufficient time and effort committed to the Center to fulfill their assigned roles and achieve high-quality results and products. Gaps in the Co-Directors' expertise may be addressed by identified strengths in the Center's teams and/or partners. Recipients are encouraged to seek out, and partner with, organizations, research institutions, and experts throughout the course of the project, given the depth and breadth of activities to be carried out. At any time during the grant project period, the management structure must ensure that all Center hiring is flexible and expeditious, and completed within 45 days of any identified staff vacancy. Changes in key center staff and partners (e.g., senior research and TA staff, project manager, task leads, or other partners) during the project period would constitute a major revision of the approved project and would require prior approval by ACF.

3. RtP Lead. A key component of the work of the Center is utilizing research and data to inform TA, policy, and practice decisions in a timely manner. The RtP Lead will be responsible for ensuring that the Center's (and other relevant) research and analyses are translated into actionable information that can be used by the Center's TA staff, other target audiences, and the broader ECE field. The RtP Lead will coordinate across the Center's research and TA activities and support collaboration among team members. As such, the RtP Lead must have the necessary training, education, degree(s), qualifications, experience, and other qualities to fulfill this role. This must include, but is not limited to, expertise and experience translating research findings into high-quality, meaningful, and useful products, tools, and services for a wide range of audiences, as well as subject matter expertise relevant to the ACF priority areas (see *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*) and ECE programs and policies (Head Start, CCDF, ECE state systems). Finally, the RtP Lead must have sufficient time and level of effort committed to the Center to fulfill their role.

4. IPT. The IPT will consist of the Center's Co-Directors, other selected key Center personnel, the co-FPOs from OPRE and ECD, other representatives of ACF (as determined by the FPOs), and liaisons to other ECE TA Centers and/or ACF-funded research projects. This IPT will meet regularly to discuss the Center's plans, activities, and progress, with a focus on ACF's goals for the Center. The Center Co-Directors and team will be responsible for day-to-day operations and decisions. The IPT's responsibilities will include the following:

- Provide input on the Center's planned activities with an eye towards the Center's short- and long-term goals;
- Identify supplemental activities to address emerging ECE workforce issues and concerns;
- Identify and support opportunities for dissemination of the Center's work;
- Identify opportunities for the Center to consult with policymakers, programs, and other key stakeholders;
- Facilitate communication and collaboration with other related federally funded projects; and
- Provide problem-solving feedback regarding the Center's work.

The IPT will meet via videoconference or in person, as needed, to support clarity and consistency in the Center's mission and activities.

E. ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

In support of the overarching program objectives and activities (see *Section I. Program Description* for details), the Center will be responsible for the following additional tasks:

1. Supplemental Activities. The Center shall conduct supplemental/ad hoc activities as needed to respond to pressing TA, research, or policy needs that fall within the scope of the Center's work. While the proportion may vary slightly over the 5 years of the cooperative agreement, the Center is encouraged to dedicate approximately 5-10 percent of its overall effort to support supplemental TA and/or research/knowledge development activities. These activities will be identified during the grant period as they

arise, and the Center will work through a consultative process with federal staff (i.e., the IPT) to identify, design, refine, and carryout these supplemental activities. Supplemental activities must be approved by the FPOs to ensure activities fall within the scope of the Center's work. Examples of potential supplemental activities include:

- Developing a toolkit or TA resource on a specific topic of interest to ACF;
 - Conducting data analyses or developing a research brief to address specific questions of interest to ACF;
 - Developing survey items or instruments for inclusion in research examining the ECE workforce;
 - Hosting convenings or webinars around ACF priority topics on the ECE workforce.
2. Attending Meetings and Conferences. The Center shall attend and/or participate in meetings and conferences to support TA and research/knowledge development activities. Conferences and other meetings are important opportunities for the Center to connect with partners and stakeholders; share information and support learning; provide TA or professional development; build the Center's capacity; and disseminate and communicate with a range of audiences. Key Center personnel will be expected to attend and participate in at least three ACF-sponsored meetings or conferences each year of the project. The Center may also identify or facilitate other meetings, conferences, or opportunities to meet with ACF and/or other stakeholders during the grant period. The Center's proposed budget must reflect funds to cover all costs associated with attendance or participation in all meetings or conferences proposed in the application, including funds to support at least two staff to attend at least three ACF-sponsored meetings or conferences each year of the project.

Subawards

The recipient under this cooperative agreement 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 NOFO, *Section III. I. Eligible Applicants*. Additionally, all subrecipient(s) must obtain 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 SAM to verify that the subrecipient(s) is/are not debarred, suspended, or ineligible.

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

Pre-Application Webinar

ACF will conduct a pre-application webinar on Wednesday, September 21, 2022 from 12:00-1:00pm, ET. The webinar can be accessed from the ACF website at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/initiatives/strategy-resources-address-early-care-and-education-ece-workforce-shortage>. The goal of the webinar is to walk interested parties through the NOFO and highlight key sections and priorities. Pre-application webinar materials may be accessed on the ACF website at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/initiatives/strategy-resources-address-early-care-and-education-ece-workforce-shortage>.

Joining and participating in the webinar is voluntary. Only the information provided in this NOFO will be presented. No question-and-answer portion will be conducted during the session. **Participants will remain anonymous.** Opting not to participate in the webinar will not affect eligibility, application scoring, or the selection process. Applicants unable to attend can access the recording and transcript on the ACF website after the webinar has concluded.

Definition of Terms

Early Care and Education (ECE) Programs: Programs that care for and educate young children from birth to age five across a variety of settings including community-based centers, family child care, school based centers, etc. and utilizing a variety of funding sources including Head Start, CCDF, state funded preschool, IDEA, private pay, and other sources.

Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce: The focus of this NOFO is primarily on the ECE workforce, professionals, and staff that provide direct care and education to young children, birth to age five, in classrooms or family child care homes across Head Start, CCDF, state funded preschool, and IDEA settings. This includes teachers, caregivers, assistant teachers, and aides.

TA: For this NOFO, technical assistance broadly refers to the transfer or exchange of knowledge, expertise, and skills between people, organizations, and communities where the focus is on building the participants skills and capacity to implement effective and sustainable systems, strategies and practices.

Footnotes

¹ Bipartisan Policy Center (2021). Characteristics of the Child Care Workforce. Retrieved from <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/download/?file=/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/C.-8-Characteristics-of-the-Child-Care-Workforce.pdf>

² Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children, youth through age 8*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press.

³ Totenhagen, C. J., Hawkins, S. A., Casper, D. M., Bosch, L. A., Hawkey, K. R., & Borden, L. M. (2016). Retaining early childhood education workers: A review of the empirical literature. *Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 30(4), 585-599.

⁴ RAPID-EC (2021). Child Care Shortages Weigh Heavily on Parents and Providers. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e7cf2f62c45da32f3c6065e/t/61a51257cb3aea5591b7aedd/1638208087990/child-care-shortages-nov2021.pdf>; Bureau of Labor Statistics, current employment statistics downloaded April 2022 from <https://data.bls.gov/>.

⁵ Whitebook, M. & Sakai, L. (2004). *By a Thread: How Child Care Centers Hold On to Teachers, How Teachers Build Lasting Careers*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for

Employment Research.

⁶ McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., Whitebook, M., & Olson, K.L. (2021). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2020. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/workforce-index-2020/>

⁷ Whitebook, M., McLean, C., Austin, L.J.E., & Edwards, B. (2018). Early Childhood Workforce Index – 2018. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

⁸ McLean et al., 2021

⁹ See for example, Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015.

¹⁰ National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) Project Team (2021). *Characteristics and Experiences of the 2019 Center-based ECE Workforce*. Presentation at the National Workforce Registry Alliance Meeting.

¹¹ NSECE Project Team (2013). *Number and Characteristics of Early Care and Education (ECE) Teachers and Caregivers: Initial Findings from the NSECE*. OPRE Report #2013-38, Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

¹² Costs vary by program. Estimates by Tuition Tracker (a tool from the Hechinger Report) suggest 1 year of full-time enrollment in an ECE high education program can range from \$6,200 to \$18,200 per year just for tuition.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Office of the Under Secretary, Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education, Washington, D.C., 2016.

II. Federal Award Information

Funding Instrument Type:

CA (Cooperative Agreement)

Estimated Total Funding:

\$6,000,000

Expected Number of Awards:

1

Award Ceiling:

\$6,000,000

Per Budget Period

Award Floor:

\$6,000,000

Per Budget Period

Average Projected Award Amount:

\$6,000,000

Per Budget Period

Anticipated Project Start Date:

12/30/2022

Length of Project Periods:

60-month project period with five 12-month budget periods

Additional Information on Project Periods and Explanation of 'Other'

Additional Information on Awards:

Awards made under this funding opportunity 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 funding under this funding opportunity. 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.** For more information on these requirements, see *Section III.2. Cost Sharing or Matching*.

Multiple Funding Streams

Consistent with statutory authority, the Center's resources and activities should be dedicated proportionately to reflect the purposes of the three funding streams supporting the Center. The recipient of the cooperative agreement will be required to demonstrate that each of the funding streams was used exclusively to meet the distinct purposes of each appropriation. For example, if any Center staff work on cross-cutting issues, their time will need to be tracked to reflect time spent on each particular appropriation.

Funds for this project are authorized separately as follows:

- *Head Start*

Funds associated with Head Start contribute \$2 million per budget period, or about 33.3 percent, of the Center's total funds. Section 648 of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 9843) authorizes HHS to support TA and develop resources for Head Start and Early Head Start agencies to address requirements of the Head Start Program Performance Standards and respond to current Head Start grant recipient monitoring data. Section 649 of the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 9844) authorizes HHS to carry out research, demonstration, and evaluation activities focused on Head Start's and Early Head Start's continued quality improvements and effectiveness.

- *Child Care*

Funds associated with the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) contribute \$2 million per budget period, or about 33.3 percent, of the Center's total funds. Sections 658G(e) and 658I(a)(3) of the CCDBG Act of 2014 (42 U.S.C. 9858e(e) and 9858g(a)(3)) authorizes HHS to support project coordination and targeted technical assistance to state

CCDF Lead Agencies and their state-designated networks or the development of a resource for CCDF Lead Agencies. Section 658O(a)(5) of the CCDBG Act of 2014 (42 U.S.C. 9858m(a)(5)) authorizes HHS to conduct research, demonstrations, and evaluations focused on increasing access to child care services and improving the safety and quality of child care services.

- *PDG-B5*

Funds associated with the Preschool Development Grants – Birth to Five (PDG-B5) contribute \$2 million per budget period, or about 33.3 percent, of the Center’s total funds. The Every Student Succeeds Act (42 U.S.C. 9831 note) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022 (Public Law 117-103) authorize HHS to provide technical assistance and conduct evaluation related to the PDG-B5 grants.

ACF will provide funding as specified on the Financial Assistance Award for each budget period of this project activity, subject to the availability of funds. ACF will accept applications from the recipient for continued annual funding under this agreement beyond the 12-month budget period but within the approved project period on a noncompetitive basis, subject to availability of funds, satisfactory progress of the recipient, and a determination that continued funding would be in the best interest of the Government. ACF will determine satisfactory progress for continuation of the federal award by assessing the recipient's semi-annual Performance Progress Report.

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

ACF is utilizing a cooperative agreement that requires substantial involvement of ACF in the project after award. At a minimum, ACF will:

- Facilitate communication and cooperation with other relevant ACF-funded TA and research efforts and with representatives of other federal agencies funding related efforts in order to promote intra-agency and inter-agency coordination and collaboration;
- Participate with other federal staff in the IPT to provide input, information, assistance, and feedback to the Center reflecting ACF’s programmatic, research, and TA goals and to remain informed about project activities and progress;
- Provide consultation and feedback regarding the Center’s proposed plans for leadership, coordination, and partnership; TA; and research and knowledge development, including any revisions made to the plans during the project period;
- Provide consultation and feedback regarding the development, design, and execution of the Center’s activities and products to ensure that they are filling needs and are relevant and translatable to the policy and practice communities;
- Review and approve drafts of all products and materials that are developed with resources made available under this cooperative agreement;
- Review curriculum vitas/resumes for and approve any changes in key Center personnel during the project period; and

- Provide consultation and feedback to ensure that the Center's resources and activities are dedicated proportionately to reflect the purposes of the funding streams supporting the Center.

NOTE: Consistent with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, (44 U.S.C. 3501-3521), under this NOFO, if an information collection is determined to be covered by the law, ACF will not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to the collection of information, unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number.

III. Eligibility Information

III.1. Eligible Applicants

City or township governments
 Independent school districts
 Special district governments
 State governments
 Public and state controlled IHEs
 Non-profits having a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than IHEs
 Small businesses
 County governments
 Non-profits that do not have a 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, other than IHEs
 Native American tribal governments (Federally recognized)
 Private IHEs
 Native American tribal organizations (other than Federally recognized tribal governments)
 For-profit organizations other than small businesses

Additional Information on Eligibility

Eligible applicants may apply on their own or as the lead applicant for a consortium. A consortium is a project carried out by a lead applicant and one or more other organizations that are separate legal entities. Under a consortium agreement, the lead applicant must perform a substantive role in the conduct of the planned project or program activity and will not merely serve as a conduit of funds to another party or parties. The relationship between the recipient and the collaborating organizations is considered a subaward relationship. For more information, please see *Section I. Program Description, Subawards*.

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

Faith-based and community organizations that meet the eligibility requirements are eligible to receive awards under this funding opportunity. 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 45 CFR Part 87 and 42 U.S.C. 2000bb *et seq.*, ACF will not, in the selection of recipients, discriminate against an organization on the basis of the organization's religious character, affiliation, or exercise.

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 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 funding under this funding opportunity.

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 funding under this funding opportunity. 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.

Required Electronic Application Submission

ACF requires electronic submission of applications at 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 funding under this funding**

opportunity.

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](#)."

Missing the Application Deadline (Late Applications)

The deadline for electronic application submission is 11:59 pm ET on the due date listed in the *Overview* and in *Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times*. Electronic applications submitted to Grants.gov after 11:59 pm ET on the due date, as indicated by a dated and time-stamped email from Grants.gov, will be disqualified from competitive review and funding under this funding opportunity. That is, applications submitted to Grants.gov, on or after 12:00 am ET on the day after the due date will be disqualified from competitive review and funding under this funding opportunity.

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

Each time an application is submitted via 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 pm ET on the due date listed in the *Overview* and in *Section IV.4. Submission Dates and Times*. Paper applications received after 4:30 pm ET on the due date will be disqualified from competitive review and funding under this funding opportunity. **Paper applications received from applicants that have not received approval of an exemption from required electronic submission will be disqualified from competitive review and funding under this funding opportunity.**

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 NOFO.

IV. Application and Submission Information

IV.1. Address to Request Application Package

Kimberly
Burgess Simms
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Early Childhood Development

330 C Street SW, 4th Floor
Washington
DC
20201
206-615-2248
EarlyChildhoodDevelopment@acf.hhs.gov

Application Packages

Electronic Application Submission:

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

Applications in Paper Format:

For applicants that have received an exemption to submit applications in paper format, Standard Forms (SFs), assurances, and certifications are available in the "Select Grant Opportunity Package" available in the NOFO's Grants.gov Synopsis under the Package tab at 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 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 Grants.gov is required to upload only two electronic files, excluding SFs and Office of Management and Budget (OMB)-approved forms. No more than two files will be accepted for the review, and additional files will be removed. SFs and OMB-approved forms will not be considered additional files.

FOR ALL APPLICATIONS:

Authorized Organization 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 NOFO Formatting, Font, and Page Limitation Requirements

Applications that fail to adhere to ACF's NOFO 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 and 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 NOFO 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. Other, 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 SFs 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 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 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:

Applicants must limit their entire application (including both the project narrative file and appendices file) to 150 pages.

Applicants are strongly advised to use headings and subheadings that correspond to the required information, found in *Section IV.2. The Project Description and Budget and Budget Justification*; the evaluation criteria, found in *Section V.1. Criteria*; and required proposal

sections.

A. **Application File One.** Applicants must number the pages of File One beginning with the Table of Contents. File One must include a project description with the following:

1. Table of Contents
2. Project Summary
3. Approach: Sections must be carefully labeled to ease reviewers' identification of information relevant to the review criteria. It is strongly encouraged that the approach be organized according to the sections presented in the list below. Additional headers and subheaders may also be used to organize the content of each section.
 - Objectives and Priorities
 - Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership Plan
 - Technical Assistance Plan
 - Research and Knowledge Development Plan
 - Organizational Capacity, Staffing and Management Plan
4. Budget and Budget Justification
5. References

B. **Application File Two.** Applicants may only have one appendix file which must include, but is not limited to, the following items:

1. Evidence of research and/or technical assistance as primary organizational activity
2. Resumes and/or curriculum vitas
3. Project Timeline and Milestones
4. Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities
5. Plan for Protection of Sensitive and/or Confidential Information
6. Proof of Non-Profit Status (if applicable)
7. Proof of For-Profit Status (if applicable)
8. Small business certification (if applicable)
9. Evidence of Accreditation (if applicable)

ELECTRONIC APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants are required to submit their applications electronically unless they have 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 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 SFs and OMB-approved Forms

SFs and OMB-approved forms 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 SFs, OMB-approved forms, and required assurances and certifications.

Naming Application Submission Files

Carefully observe the file naming conventions required by Grants.gov. Limit file names to 50 characters (characters and spaces). Please also see

<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/submitting-utf-8-special-characters.html>.

Use only file formats supported by ACF

Applicants must 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 PDFs 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 for 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 NOFO, or multiple applications under separate NOFOs, each application submission must be packaged separately. The package(s) must be clearly labeled with the NOFO title and Funding Opportunity Number.

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

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 an award under this funding opportunity must submit the listed SFs, assurances, and certifications with the application. All required SFs, assurances, and certifications are available in the Application Package posted for this NOFO at Grants.gov.

Forms/Assurances/Certifications	Submission Requirement	Notes/Description
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@HHS.gov) or by phone (240-453-6900).
SF-424 - Application for Federal Assistance	Submission is required for all applicants by the application due date.	Required for all applications.
Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM) registration.	Required of all applicants. Applicants must have a UEI and maintain an active SAM registration throughout the application and project award period. Obtain a UEI and SAM registration at: http://www.sam.gov .	See <i>Section IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM)</i> for more information.

Forms/Assurances/Certifications	Submission Requirement	Notes/Description
SF-424 Key Contact Form	Submission is required for all applicants by the application due date.	Required for all applications.
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.
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. SFs 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.

Additional Required Assurances and Certifications

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: grantdisclosures@oig.hhs.gov

The Project Description

The Project Description Overview

General Expectations and Instructions

The Project Description provides the 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 NOFO, as described in *Section I. Program Description*. As a reminder, reviewers will be evaluating this section in accordance with *Section V.1. 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 application.

Letter of Intent

Applicants are strongly encouraged to notify ACF of their intention to submit an application under this funding opportunity. 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 funding opportunity; 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.

Please submit your letter of intent to EarlyChildhoodDevelopment@acf.hhs.gov.

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.

Legal Status of Applicant Entity

Applicants must provide the following documentation:

Non-Profit Organizations

Proof of Non-Profit Status Options:

Option 1: 501(c)(3) and non-501(c)(3) non-profit organizations are eligible

Non-profit organizations applying for funding are required to submit proof of their non-profit status. Proof of non-profit status is any one of the following:

- A reference to the applicant organization's listing in the IRS's most recent list of tax-exempt organizations described in the IRS Code.
- A copy of a currently valid IRS tax-exemption certificate.
- A statement from a state taxing body, state attorney general, or other appropriate state official certifying that the applicant organization has non-profit status and that none of the net earnings accrue to any private shareholders or individuals.
- A certified copy of the organization's certificate of incorporation or similar document that clearly establishes non-profit status.
- Any of the items in the subparagraphs immediately above for a state or national parent organization and a statement signed by the parent organization that the applicant organization is a local non-profit affiliate.

Unless directed otherwise, applicants must include proof of non-profit status in the *Appendices* file of the application submission.

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).

Small Businesses

Small businesses must submit a certification signed by the chief executive officer or designee that states that the entity qualifies as a small business under 13 CFR §§ 121.101- 121.201.

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.

1. Objectives and Priorities

Applicants must propose TA and research priorities related to ACF's priority topics and the grant program purpose, goals, and outcomes discussed in *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*, which will form the basis of the Center's proposed activities across the three key program areas: (1) leadership, coordination, and partnership; (2) TA; and (3) research and knowledge development.

Applicants must present a brief analysis of the state of the field and knowledge base related to the Center's proposed TA and research priorities, justifying the proposed course of Center activities. The analysis must demonstrate the applicant's grasp of the state of the field and the implications for ACF's priority topics regarding the ECE workforce, including opportunities to leverage and build on existing publicly funded TA and research efforts. The analysis must discuss critical gaps in knowledge, policy, systems, and practices and the research and TA activities the applicant would prioritize to address those gaps. The applicant must demonstrate the importance of the proposed project's research and TA priorities and objectives to the field; describe rigorous, appropriate, and effective approaches to meet the purpose, goals and objectives (including incorporating ECE educators' voice and the perspectives of those with lived experience); and convincingly demonstrate that the project and approaches will build on existing efforts and significantly enhance the knowledge base, systems, policies, and practices that benefit the ECE workforce across programs and settings.

Applicants must describe how each of the three key program activities (leadership, coordination, and partnership; TA; and research and knowledge development) will be a priority for the Center, and how the recipient will develop and realize a project that appropriately balances the Center's core infrastructure and administrative responsibilities with each of these three key program activities, as well as connects the three program activities to one another, ACF's priorities, and the intended project outcomes. Applicants must use a conceptual framework and/or a logic model in communicating how the activities of the proposed project fit together, to develop project activities, and to articulate how the proposed project will achieve its intended outcomes, describing any goals, activities, outputs, underlying concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs or theories, as well as the presumed relationships or linkages among these variables and any empirical support for this framework.

2. Plan for Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership

Applicants must propose a detailed plan for how they intend to implement the Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership activities described under *Section I. Program Description, C. Outcomes and Activities*. Applicants must propose a detailed plan for how they will provide

leadership and develop key partnerships to advance the work of the Center and ensure that Center activities leverage other ECE workforce initiatives, research, and TA, and minimizes duplication, including how the team will work to create smooth and seamless operations internally and externally. The detailed plan must include proposals for how the Center will develop partnerships with (a) other federally funded ECE TA Centers that include a focus on the workforce and (b) professional associations and philanthropic, research or other national ECE organizations focused on career advancement and workforce compensation. Applicants must also identify which TA and other partners they plan to engage and/or develop partnerships with. Applicants must also propose a detailed plan for meaningfully engaging stakeholders and experts from outside of the recipient's funded institution(s) with technical assistance, research, programmatic, and lived-experience expertise in ACF's priority areas (see *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*) by establishing a TWG.

Applicants must propose a detailed plan for how they will support emerging ECE policy leaders and emerging ECE research scholars through a fellowship program. Applicants must describe how the fellowship program will select and support a diverse cadre of emerging ECE policy leaders and emerging ECE research scholars (as described under *Section I. Program Description, C. Outcomes and Activities*).

3. Plan for Technical Assistance

Applicants must propose a detailed plan for how they will provide universal, targeted, and intensive TA to state and local entities on supporting and strengthening the ECE workforce through improved and sustainable career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies (including on the ACF priority topics described in *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*) that account for the unique needs of the ECE workforce and will retain a diverse ECE sector, as described under *Section I. Program Description, C. Outcomes and Activities*. The plan must provide a clear description of how the applicant will collaborate and coordinate with existing relevant ACF-funded TA broadly and specific to universal, targeted and intensive TA, including how TA activities will build on and complement existing ACF-funded TA and be informed by and inform the Center's research activities.

The plan for universal TA must include a description of an approach to conducting landscape analyses of relevant existing tools, resources, partners, and how the analyses will be used to identify gaps. The plan must also include a description of the technical capabilities that ensure: (a) the ECE Workforce Hub is a user-friendly site that connects users to existing and new resources, tools, and TA; (b) the ability to host large national webinars and/or virtual national and regional meetings (with 4000+ participants); and (c) the ability to develop, update, and disseminate meaningful products and resources that add value to the field, including multi-media products and resources.

Applicants must describe how the Center will offer peer-to-peer targeted TA opportunities for both state and local audiences including any proposed virtual platforms with technical capabilities the applicant intends to use. Applicants must propose the number, topics, and participants for peer-to-peer learning communities offered each year. They must also describe how opportunities for state teams working on implementing relevant components of PDG-B5 activities or strategic plans will be included; and how opportunities will be identified and made

available for teams or individuals at the state and local level that represent programs and settings across the mixed delivery system.

Applicants must also propose a detailed plan for how they will provide intensive TA to a maximum number of states and local communities a year to implement effective and sustainable career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies for the ECE workforce. Applicants must describe how at least one local community from one intensive TA state will be identified to participate annually. Applicants must propose an approach for how local and state entities would apply for the intensive TA opportunity, including a description of the state and local teams that would participate. Applicants must also propose a fair process for reviewing and selecting intensive TA participants. Applicants must describe how the Center will help the intensive TA state and local teams develop and implement a comprehensive plan to improve and sustain career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies for the ECE workforce and identify priority areas to receive customized TA.

Finally, applicants must propose a system or processes for ensuring all TA activities build on and complement other related ACF funded TA and for ongoing quality assurance and improvement to ensure the Center's TA activities, products, and services are high-quality, useful, and relevant.

4. Plan for Research and Knowledge Development

Applicants must propose a detailed plan for how they will advance research related to ECE workforce career advancement and compensation, build the research capacity in this area, and communicate and disseminate research including detailed plans for conducting specific research activities described in *Section I. Program Description, C. Outcomes and Activities*. Applicants must discuss how research and knowledge development activities will inform and be informed by TA efforts and state and local policies and practices.

Applicants must propose activities that advance research by describing a detailed research plan outlining the major research priorities to be investigated (including on the ACF priority topics described in *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*) and including specific examples of activities to address these. Applicants must include a discussion of an approach to conducting an environmental scan/analysis and developing a framework/self-assessment tool; conducting original research and evaluating the strategies/models implemented in intensive TA (described under *Section I. Program Description, C. Outcomes and Activities*); conducting analyses of existing data sources (particularly OPRE-funded datasets); and utilizing these and other research activities to inform the Center's TA efforts, as well as the ECE field in general. Applicants must include detailed and clear descriptions of the specific objectives and methodologies, as appropriate, for each proposed activity and how the research activities will be conceived and carried out with input from relevant stakeholders and partners, including the IPT and TWG. Applicants must discuss the appropriateness of the approaches proposed, including how the approaches are culturally rigorous, as well as methodological considerations.

Applicants must also propose a long-term research planning process and quality assurance and improvement plan for all Center research activities throughout the full project period, including involvement of the IPT, TWG, and any other key stakeholders or partners. The applicant must

include a discussion of how activities may evolve over time, such as whether the plan may reflect more developmental, but still substantial, activities in the 1st year (i.e., identifying gaps in the field, reviews and secondary analyses, piloting, team development, establishing formal partnerships, refining activities and schedule), while the plan for later years may reflect more substantial research activities such as data collection and data analysis.

Applicants must propose a detailed plan to build research capacity in the scientific community to conduct research that is relevant to ACF program and policy goals for the ECE workforce as well as research that is valid and culturally anchored in the experiences of a diverse ECE workforce. The proposed plan must include a discussion of an approach to developing resources for the field (e.g., tools, resources, and approaches for the research field at large).

Applicants must propose how they plan to communicate and disseminate research by developing and maintaining an innovative communication system to share research and information with key stakeholders and the broader field, including integrating new learning from research conducted by the Center and across OPRE-funded projects in the Center's TA approaches and resources (including in the approach to universal TA). Applicants must propose specific products or communications (interim, long-term) resulting from all research activities, as well as intended audience(s) for each and any specific channels proposed for dissemination, to support the goals of the Center. In addition to identifying potential products, applicants must include a detailed plan that describes a process for identifying and developing a range of products and communication strategies to effectively reach and inform a range of audiences, including the research community, federal and state policymakers, program administrators, and any partners or communities engaged in the course of research.

The proposal must include details regarding Center resources that will address dissemination (e.g., logistics and technical support, quality-control, and management). In developing a plan, applicants are encouraged to consult OPRE resources addressing dissemination of human services research, and particularly the report titled *The Value-Added Research Dissemination Framework* (available on ACF's website at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/opre-research-dissemination-project-2010-2012>).

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).
- 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 funding opportunity.
- Evidence that each participating organization, including partners, contractors and/or subrecipients, possess the organizational capability to fulfill their role(s) and function(s) effectively.

Staffing and Management Plan

Applicants must propose a detailed staffing and management plan that includes a detailed discussion of:

1. Roles and expected contributions of all proposed personnel;
2. How the proposed Center Co-Directors, Center team and partners, and Research-to-Practice Lead have the necessary time committed to the Center (relative to other non-Center-related time commitments), substantive expertise (including related to the needs of the ECE workforce, ACF priority areas, and ECE programs and policies), training, education, degree(s), qualifications, experience, and other qualities (including as evidenced in their curriculum vitas or resumes) to fulfill their roles, achieve high-quality results/products, meet the requirements outlined under *Section I. Program Description, D. Structure*, and work together to accomplish the project's goals;
3. The Center personnel who will serve in management roles, their specific responsibilities, and how their experience and expertise aligns with their role (including as evidenced in their curriculum vitas or resumes);
4. How the proposed organizations have the experience, infrastructure, technical capabilities, systems, and other organizational supports needed to successfully support Center personnel, carry out the organization's role on the project, and successfully execute the required activities (including written evidence showing that research is a primary organizational activity for the proposed Co-Director for Research's organization, and written evidence that TA is a primary organizational activity for the proposed Co-Director for TA's organization, such as evidence of a history of the development, execution, and management of relevant, high-quality research/TA projects of similar size and scope within the past 5 years);
5. How any necessary partnerships or arrangements proposed between the applicant organization and other entities will be established (if not already) and maintained, including roles and responsibilities and the processes for the arrangements to be formalized or finalized; and
6. How the overall management plan and organizational framework will support the successful attainment of the Center's goals and objectives.

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 the applicant organization or any of its proposed partners are public, state-controlled, and/or private institutions of higher education, evidence of accreditation by one of the regional accrediting commissions recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council of Post-Secondary Accreditation must be included in the application.

Additionally, applicants must propose a plan and process for how they will work in consultation with ACF to identify and execute the supplemental activities to be responsive to emerging TA, research, and/or policy needs of ACF or the broader field and that fall within the scope of the Center's work (see description provided under *Section I. Program Description, E. Additional Responsibilities*). Applicants must also identify specific meetings or conferences they will attend and/or participate in and describe how their attendance/participation will support the Center's activities, goals, and priorities.

Plan for Oversight of Federal Award Funds and Activities

Recipients 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).

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.

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 SF, 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 cost sharing or matching 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, 2022 and Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022, (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 funding opportunity may not be used to pay the salary of an individual at a rate in excess of Executive Level II. For the Executive Level II salary, please see "Executive & Senior Level Employee Pay Tables" under <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>. The salary limitation reflects an individual's base salary exclusive of fringe benefits, indirect costs 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 SF-424C, as applicable, for each year of the proposed project.

Provide a budget justification, which includes a budget narrative and a line-item detail, for each year of the proposed project. The budget narrative should describe how the categorical costs are derived. Discuss the necessity, reasonableness, and allocation of the proposed costs.

The proposed budget and budget justification (i.e., narrative) for the Center must reflect the full project period that is proposed by the applicant. This section must discuss how the budget for the full project period supports the proposed activities and must be sufficiently detailed to

demonstrate support for the specific activities proposed.

Budget Development by Funding Source: The cooperative agreement awarded under this NOFO is made up of multiple funding sources; therefore, applicants must provide additional detail in their budget and budget justifications that proportionately reflects the percentages and types of costs and activities by funding source. A description of the multiple funding sources is shown in *Section II. Federal Award Information, Additional Information on Awards*.

In the SF-424A, applicants must show the amounts estimated under each Object Class Category, by funding source, under each of the columns.

Section A – Budget Summary:

Column (a) Grant Program, Function, or Activity: List the program associated with the funding source, e.g.,

1. Head Start
2. Child Care
3. PDG-B5

Column (b) Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number: List the CFDA Numbers that appear in the Overview section of this NOFO.

Section B – Budget Categories:

Object Class Categories: Use multiple columns to provide cost detail for each Object Class Category by funding source.

The following are the percentages of budget represented by each funding source under the grant award:

Head Start = 33.3 percent or \$2 million per budget period

Child Care = 33.3 percent or \$2 million per budget period

PDG-B5 = 33.3 percent or \$2 million per budget period

Applicants must provide a narrative of how they will track and maintain internal controls for the three funding streams in the budget justification. The budget justification must also include the appropriateness of the level and distribution of funds to the successful completion of the project goals, activities, and additional responsibilities (as they are described in the project narrative) over the full project period.

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 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/recipient 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 § 2.101(b). 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 qualifies 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 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.1. Criteria* of this funding opportunity.

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 03/31/2025. 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 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 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.

Organizations must have an active System for Award (SAM) registration which provides a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), and Grants.gov account to apply for grants.

Creating a Grants.gov account can be completed online in minutes, but SAM registration may take several weeks. Therefore, an organization's registration should be done in sufficient time to ensure it does not impact the entities ability to meet required application submission deadlines.

Organization applicants can find complete instructions

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

Register with SAM: All organizations (entities) applying online through Grants.gov must register with SAM. Failure to register with SAM will prevent your organization from applying through Grants.gov. SAM registration must be renewed annually. For detailed instructions for registering with SAM, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html>

Create a Grants.gov Account: The next step in the registration process is to create an account with Grants.gov. Follow the on-screen instructions provided on the registration page.

Add a Profile to a Grants.gov Account: A profile in Grants.gov corresponds to a single applicant organization the user represents (i.e., an applicant). If you work for or consult with multiple organizations, you can have a profile for each organization under one Grants.gov account. In such cases, you may log in to one Grants.gov account to access all your grant profiles. To add an organizational profile to your Grants.gov account, enter the UEI for the organization in the UEI field. For detailed instructions about creating a profile on Grants.gov, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/registration/add-profile.html>

EBiz POC Authorized Profile Roles: After you register with Grants.gov and create an Organization Applicant Profile, the applicant's request for Grants.gov roles and access is sent to the EBiz POC. The EBiz POC is then expected to 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 the organization. You will be able to submit your application online any time after you have been assigned the AOR role. For 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 commitments on behalf of the organization as a user with the AOR role; this step is often missed and 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 NOFO, you can create individual instances of a workspace.

For an overview of applying on Grants.gov using Workspaces, refer to: <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/workspace-overview.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 to work on the application together, complete all the required forms online or by downloading PDF versions, and check for errors before submission. The Workspace progress bar will display the state of your application process as you apply. As you apply using Workspace, you may click the blue question mark icon near the upper-right corner of each page to access context-sensitive help.

Adobe Reader: If you decide not to apply by filling out webforms you can download individual PDF forms in Workspace. 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: These forms are designed to fill in common required fields across other forms, such as the applicant name, address, and SAM UEI. 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 application, a Grants.gov Tracking Number (GRANTXXXXXXXX) is automatically assigned to the application. The number will be listed on the Confirmation page that is generated after submission. Using the tracking number, access the Track My Application page under the Applicants tab or the Details tab in the submitted workspace.

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 funding 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 and understanding background information on the issue.

Timely Receipt Requirements and Proof of Timely Submission

All applications must be received by 11:59 pm 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 acknowledgment 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 connections should be aware that transmission can take some time before Grants.gov receives your application. Therefore, applicants should allow enough time to prepare and submit the application before the package closing date.

Grants.gov will provide either an error or a successfully received submission message in the form of an email sent to the applicant with the AOR role.

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.

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.

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. Other Submission Requirements* of this funding opportunity for address information for paper format application submissions. Applications submitted in paper format must be received by 4:30 pm 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 funding opportunity.

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

All applicants must have a UEI and an active registration with SAM (<https://www.sam.gov>) prior to applying to a funding opportunity.

All applicants are required to maintain an active SAM registration until the application process is complete. If a grant is awarded, the SAM registration must be active throughout the life of the award. Your SAM registration must be renewed every 365 days to keep it active.

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 request a UEI, register for, or renew a registration, at SAM.

Please see the "Help" tab at <https://sam.gov/content/help> for more information and assistance with this process.

HHS requires all entities that plan to apply for, and ultimately receive, federal grant funds from any HHS Agency to:

- Be registered in 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;
- Provide its UEI in each application or plan it submits to the OPDIV; and

- Ensure any proposed subrecipient(s) have obtained and provided to the recipient their UEI(s) prior to making any subawards (**Note:** Subrecipients are not required to complete full SAM registration.).

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

Number of Days from Publication 14

09/26/2022

Due Dates for Applications

Due Date for Applications 11/07/2022

11/07/2022

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 Grants.gov is 11:59 pm ET on the due date. Electronic applications submitted at 12:00 am ET on the day after the due date will be considered late and will be disqualified from competitive review and funding under this funding opportunity.

Applicants are required to submit their applications electronically via 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 Grants.gov are available at:

www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html.

Applications submitted to 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 pm 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 funding under this funding opportunity.

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

Hand-delivered applications 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 am ET and 4:30 pm 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 funding under this funding opportunity.

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 Grants.gov are considered late when they are dated and time-stamped after the deadline of 11:59 pm ET on the due date.
- Paper format applications received by mail or hand-delivery after 4:30 pm 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 of Received Application

Acknowledgement from Grants.gov

Applicants will receive an initial email upon submission of their application to 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 the 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 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 covered under Executive Order (E.O.) 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs," and 45 CFR Part 100, "Intergovernmental Review of Department of Health and Human Services Programs and Activities." Under the Executive Order, States may design their own processes for reviewing and commenting on proposed Federal assistance under covered programs.

Applicants should go to the following URL for the official list of the jurisdictions that have elected to participate in E.O. 12372 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf>.

Applicants from participating jurisdictions should contact their SPOC, as soon as possible, to alert them of their prospective applications and to receive instructions on their jurisdiction's procedures. Applicants must submit all required application materials to the SPOC and indicate the date of submission on the SF-424 at item 19.

Under 45 CFR § 100.8(a)(2), a SPOC has 60 days from the application due date to comment on proposed new awards.

SPOC comments may be submitted directly to ACF at: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Grants Management, 330 C St. SW, 3rd Floor, Washington, DC 20201.

Entities that meet the eligibility requirements of this funding opportunity are still eligible to apply for a grant even if a State, Territory or Commonwealth, etc., does not have a SPOC or has chosen not to participate in the process. Applicants from non-participating jurisdictions need take no action with regard to E.O. 12372. Applications from Federally-recognized Indian Tribal governments are not subject 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)

Pre-award costs are not allowable.

Construction is not an allowable activity or expenditure under this award.

Purchase of real property is not an allowable activity or expenditure under this award.

IV.7. Other Submission Requirements

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

Submission by Mail

Jill
Saletta
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Grants Management
330 C Street SW
Washington
DC
20201

Hand Delivery

Same as Above

Electronic Submission

See *Section IV.2.* for application requirements and for guidance when submitting applications electronically via 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 notice of funding opportunity and relevant statutes and regulations, reviewers must 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 must 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 must evaluate

and score an application based on the documents that are presented in the application and must 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. The Project Description* of this funding opportunity.

Objectives and Priorities

Maximum Points: 10

To evaluate Objectives and Priorities, reviewers will consider the applicant's ability to design and implement a project that meets the goals and priorities of ACF for this funding opportunity (as described in *Section I. Program Description, B. Goals and Priorities*). In reaching their conclusion, reviewers will consider:

1. The extent to which the proposal is clearly written, concise, well-organized, and provides appropriate details.
2. The extent to which the brief analysis of the state of the field:
 - a. Demonstrates the applicant's firm grasp of the state of the field related to the ECE workforce and ACF's priority topics (see *Section I. Program Description*) including the significance of past and existing research, TA, policy and practice efforts in this area; the relevant ECE programmatic and policy context (including those related to Head Start, CCDF, and ECE state systems); and emerging trends.
 - b. Identifies critical gaps in knowledge, policy, systems, and practices as they relate to ACF's priority topics and opportunities to build on existing publicly funded TA and research efforts.
3. The extent to which the Center's proposed objectives and priorities:
 - a. Build on the analysis of the state of the field; past and existing research, TA, policy and practice; the relevant context; emerging trends; and any critical gaps identified with a coherent plan for research and TA;
 - b. Address the topics that reflect ACF priority areas discussed in *Section I. Program Description* of this funding opportunity, with clear relevance to the needs and interests in the field to better understand, identify, and implement effective ECE workforce career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and policies;
 - c. Reflect an understanding of the rich diversity of the ECE workforce (i.e., racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity within and across geographic locations, programs, and settings) and ensure the Center's research and TA activities are conducted through that lens; and
 - d. Add general value to the field.
4. The extent to which the Center's conceptual framework and/or logic model is clear, concise, organized, and provides appropriate detail to understand how the proposed activities of the Center fit together to achieve the intended outcomes. The application

must clearly demonstrate an understanding of the dual purpose of the Center (research and TA) while proposing how the research and TA activities will be connected in a coherent manner.

Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership Plan

Maximum Points: 10

To evaluate the Leadership, Coordination, and Partnership Plan, reviewers will consider the applicant's ability to design and implement a plan that effectively establishes the Center as a leader in the field on ECE workforce career advancement and compensation and engages key stakeholders, experts, and organizations in a way that increases the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the Center's work; ensures the Center's contributions are value added to ongoing related work by other entities; and develops a network of partners that can help sustain the Center's work when federal funding ends. In reaching their conclusion, reviewers will consider the program requirements described in *Section I.*, the application requirements described in *Section IV.2.*, and the extent to which the applicant proposes a detailed and feasible plan on how they will provide leadership and develop key partnerships to advance the work of the Center and ensure that Center activities leverage other ECE workforce initiatives and minimize duplication, including a high-quality approach to:

1. How the center will develop partnerships with (1) other federally funded ECE TA Centers that include a focus on the workforce and (2) professional associations, philanthropic, research, or other national ECE organizations focused on career advancement and workforce compensation, including demonstrating a strong understanding of which TA and other partners will be important to engage.
2. How the Center will assess and coordinate the development and dissemination of ECE workforce-related products and services developed by federally funded ECE TA Centers.
3. How the Center will ensure the TWG informs the work of the Center and help to promote and disseminate the Center's work, including proposed membership. The members of TWG must represent key stakeholders and experts with TA, research, policy, programmatic and lived-experience expertise in ACF's priority topics.
4. How the Center will build ECE leadership and research capacity through an emerging ECE policy leaders fellowship program and an emerging ECE research scholars fellowship program.

Technical Assistance Plan

Maximum Points: 30

To evaluate the TA Plan, reviewers will consider the applicant's ability to design and implement TA that will account for the unique needs of the ECE workforce, retain the diversity of the ECE sector, and improve the quality, capacity, and sustainability of systems, strategies, and policies implemented by states and local programs to promote career advancement and improve compensation of ECE professionals across ECE programs and systems. In reaching their conclusion, reviewers will consider the program requirements described in *Section I.*, the application requirements described in *Section IV.2.*, and:

1. The extent to which the application reflects a detailed, feasible, and high-quality approach to universal TA that ensures the availability of a central online, public-facing, user-friendly, frequently updated, and free ECE Workforce Hub that compiles and shares effective tools, resources, and TA products based on periodic landscape analyses; the development and dissemination of new TA tools, resources, and products based on the needs of the ECE field and gaps in existing available resources; and the effective

execution of the approach by demonstrating the necessary technical capabilities such as hosting webinars with 4000+ participants and developing multi-media products and resources.

2. The extent to which the application reflects a detailed, feasible, and high-quality approach to targeted TA that reflects peer-to-peer learning opportunities on challenging ECE workforce career advancement and compensation issues; is responsive and relevant to the specific needs of state and local participants from across ECE programs and settings in the mixed delivery system; appropriately balances the number of opportunities, topics addressed, and state/local teams participating each year; and effectively utilizes the IPT and other key stakeholders in ongoing planning and decision-making for targeted TA offerings.
3. The extent to which the application reflects a detailed, feasible, and high-quality approach to intensive TA that maximizes the number of states and local communities a year receiving effective, innovative, and responsive TA from the Center; reflects a fair and effective process for selecting states and/or local communities to participate in intensive TA, including ensuring some local communities within intensive TA states participate each year and balancing the number of participating states and local communities each year; ensures participating teams reflect the key ECE agencies and programs across the mixed delivery system in the state or local community; and promotes the implementation of effective and sustainable systems, strategies, or policies that meet the needs of states and/or local communities for improved career advancement and compensation systems, strategies, and/or policies.
4. The extent to which the application reflects a detailed, feasible, and high-quality system or process for ongoing quality assurance and improvement to inform the improvement of the Center's TA activities, products, and services and results in high-quality, useful, and relevant activities, products, and services.

Research and Knowledge Development Plan

Maximum Points: 25

To evaluate the Research and Knowledge Development Plan, reviewers will consider the applicant's ability to design and implement research, evaluation, and knowledge building activities that will effectively improve ACF's and the broader ECE field's understanding of the state of the ECE workforce with regard to career pathways and compensation; barriers and opportunities to career advancement and improved compensation; quality, implementation, and effectiveness of career advancement/compensation strategies and systems; and other key knowledge gaps and that will effectively inform state and local policy, practice, and TA efforts. In reaching their conclusion, reviewers will consider the program requirements described in *Section I*, the application requirements described in *Section IV.2.*, and:

1. The extent to which the applicant proposes a detailed and feasible plan to advance research related to ECE workforce career pathways and compensation, outlining the major research themes to be investigated, and including the following:
 - a. A coherent, high-quality, and feasible research plan addressing critical gaps in knowledge, policy, systems, and practices related to the Center's stated objectives and priorities (including ACF's research priorities as described in *Section I. Program Description*) with specific research activities planned to address each priority.

- b. Proposed research activities that are detailed, clear, and specific; utilizing the highest quality, rigorous and/or innovative methods; appropriate to the research questions to be addressed and the population to be studied; grounded in relevant policies, practices, populations, context, and experiences; adhere to the principles of rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics; and reflect an equity lens.
 - c. A high-quality, feasible approach to research activities that include but are not limited to conducting an environmental scan/analysis of the knowledge base and existing practices in the field and developing a framework/self-assessment tool; conducting original research and evaluating the strategies/models implemented in intensive TA (described under *Section I. Program Description, C. Outcomes and Activities*); conducting analyses of existing data sources (particularly OPRE-funded datasets); and utilizing these and other research activities to inform the Center's TA efforts, as well as the ECE field in general.
 - d. A clear, high-quality process for long-term research/evaluation planning and a plan for ongoing quality assurance and improvement of all research activities conducted by the Center, including a discussion of how research activities will be developed and improved with input from relevant stakeholders and partners (including the IPT and TWG) and how research activities will inform and be informed by TA activities as well as the broader ECE field.
- 2. The extent to which the applicant proposes a detailed and feasible plan to build capacity in the field to conduct research that is relevant to ACF programs and policy goals for the ECE workforce and research that is valid and anchored in the experiences of a diverse ECE workforce, including a high-quality plan for developing research resources for the field to support the study of the ECE workforce.
- 3. The extent to which the applicant proposes a clear, high-quality, and feasible plan for developing and maintaining a robust dissemination and communication system and specific, high-quality products or communications that will be employed throughout the 5-year project period to effectively reach a range of key target audiences and:
 - a. Align with proposed research activities.
 - b. Have strong links to the project goals and objectives (including ACF's priorities).
 - c. Integrate new learning from research conducted by the Center and across OPRE-funded projects in the Center's TA work (including in the approach to universal TA) and in products or strategies targeting the broader ECE field.
 - d. Target a range of potential audiences, including the research community, federal and state policymakers, program administrators, and other partners or stakeholders via a range of types of dissemination and communication products or strategies.

Organizational Capacity, Staffing and Management Plan

Maximum Points: 15

To evaluate Organizational Capacity, Staffing and Management Plan, reviewers will consider the applicant's ability to design and implement staffing and management structures that effectively facilitate the successful execution of project activities and achievement of goals and priorities. In reaching their conclusion, reviewers will consider the program requirements described in *Section I.*, the application requirements described in *Section IV.2.*, and:

1. Staff plan – The extent to which the Center’s proposed staffing plan, curriculum vitas, resumes, and other documentation demonstrate:
 - a. Time commitment –The Co-Directors, key team members and partners, and the RtP Lead have reasonable and adequate time commitments to the Center (relative to other non-Center-related time commitments) to fulfill their assigned roles, achieve high-quality results/products, meet the requirements outlined under *Section I. Program Description, D. Structure*, and work together to accomplish the Center’s goals.
 - b. Expertise –The Co-Directors, team members/partners, and the RtP Lead hold the expertise, knowledge, and skills necessary to fulfill their assigned roles, achieve high-quality results/products, and work together to accomplish the Center’s goals, including having the appropriate training, education, degree(s), qualifications, and meeting the requirements outlined under *Section I. Program Description, D. Structure*.
 - c. Experience – The extent to which the applicant demonstrates (through curriculum vitas, resumes, or other documents) how the Co-Directors, team members/partners, and the RtP Lead have prior experience successfully conceptualizing and carrying out activities similar in size and scope to those proposed in the application, including the Center Co-Directors' prior experience or capacity to successfully managing projects and teams of similar size and scope and involving significant collaboration with other experts and stakeholders.
2. Management Plan – The extent to which the applicant presents a proposed organizational framework and management plan that supports the multiple dimensions of the work of the Center over the 5-year period, including:
 - a. Clear, ambitious, and achievable project timelines and milestones.
 - b. Detailed and high-quality proposed management plan, including a rationale for how the management plan will support the successful attainment of the Center’s goals and objectives.
 - c. Effective management team/personnel with the necessary experience and expertise to fulfill their roles and successfully manage the project, staff, and partners.
 - d. Strong approach to establishing and maintaining partnerships that appropriately leverage the strengths of partnership organizations to achieve the goals of the project.
 - e. Strong evidence of organizational experience and capability across participating organizations (including partners and/or subcontractors) to effectively fulfill their roles, including evidence of relevant experience and expertise with the development, implementation, and management of projects similar in size and scope through inclusion of documents of research and/or TA as primary organizational activities and other evidence.
3. Supplemental activities – The extent to which the applicant provides evidence of an effective plan and sufficient capacity and flexibility to respond to emerging needs from

the field and ACF and to propose, develop, and execute supplemental/ad hoc activities that fall within the Center's scope of work and respond to those needs.

Budget and Budget Justification

Maximum Points: 10

To evaluate Budget and Budget Justification, reviewers will consider the extent to which the applicant's proposed project costs are reasonable, sufficient, appropriately allocated, and justified to successfully execute project activities and achieve project goals and priorities in the necessary timeframe. In reaching their conclusion, reviewers will consider the appropriateness of proposed costs for program requirements described in *Section I.*, the application requirements described in *Section IV.2.*, and the extent to which the budget and budget justification demonstrate the following:

1. Adequate support in the budget for the specific activities proposed for the 5-year project period.
2. Appropriateness of the level and distribution of funds to meet ACF's expectations about the balance in leadership, collaboration, and partnership; TA; and research and knowledge development goals over the full project period.
3. The availability, potential availability, or prospects for other funds (from the host organization, universities, foundations, states, other federal agencies, etc.) and how those funds would be used.
4. The applicant's SF-424A shows the amounts estimated under each Object Class Category, by funding source, under each of the columns.
5. An explanation of which column of the SF-424A corresponds to each funding stream, and an explanation of which activities are funded by each funding stream(s).
6. How the applicant will track and maintain internal controls for the three funding streams.

V.2. Review and Selection Process

No grant award will be made under this funding opportunity on the basis of an incomplete application. No grant award will be made to an applicant that does not have a UEI and an active SAM registration. See *Section IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) 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 NOFO.

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 funding

opportunity. 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. If identified in *Section I. Program Description*, ACF reserves the right to consider preferences to fund organizations serving emerging, unserved, or under-served populations, including those populations located in pockets of poverty. In addition, 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 may refuse funding for projects with what it regards as unreasonably high start-up costs for facilities or equipment, or for projects with unreasonably high operating costs.

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](#).

Non-Federal Reviewers Reference

Please refer to *Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications* of this funding opportunity 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 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 email or by GrantSolutions, 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.

Recipients 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 recipient's employees who are working on the Federal award are not fluent in English, the recipient 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 funding opportunity 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 2 CFR § 200.340.

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 NoA. The HHS GPS is available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/discretionary-post-award-requirements#book_content_0.

Equal Treatment of Faith-Based Organizations

A faith-based organization that participates in this program will retain its independence from the federal 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)), 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 that receives direct financial assistance from HHS may not engage in any explicitly religious activities (including activities that involve overt religious content such as worship, religious instruction, or proselytization) as part of the programs or services funded with direct financial assistance from the HHS awarding agency. Such an organization, whether faith-based or not, also shall not, in providing services funded by HHS, 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, as provided in 45 CFR § 87.3(d).

VI.3. Reporting

Performance Progress Reports:

Semi-Annually

Reporting Requirements

Recipients under this funding opportunity 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 funding opportunity are as follows:

Financial Reports:

Semi-Annually

The recipient will be required to track and report funds and activities for Head Start, CCDBG, and PDG-B5 separately on their SF-425 (in the comments) and on their Performance Progress Reports. The recipient must assign costs only to those activities allowable under each of the funding sources authorization or appropriation.

VII. HHS Award Agency Contact(s)

Program Office Contact

Kimberly
Burgess Simms
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Early Childhood Development
330 C Street SW, 4th Floor
Washington
DC
20201
206-615-2248
EarlyChildhoodDevelopment@acf.hhs.gov

Office of Grants Management Contact

Jill
Saletta
US Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Grants Management
330 C Street SW
Washington
DC
20201
202-401-9357
jill.saletta@acf.hhs.gov

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 Forecasts and NOFOs www.grants.gov/.
ACF "How To Apply For A Grant" <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/how-apply-grant>.
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.
Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) <http://www.ecfr.gov/>.
United States Code (U.S.C.) <http://uscode.house.gov/>.

ECD Strategy Resources to Address the Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce Shortage www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/initiatives/strategy-resources-address-early-care-and-education-ece-workforce-shortage

Application Checklist

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

What to Submit	Where Found	When to Submit
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 NOFO'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-424 - Application for Federal Assistance	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . This form is available in the NOFO'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> .
Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM) registration.	Referenced in <i>Section IV.3. Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and System for Award Management (SAM)</i> in the funding opportunity. To obtain a UEI and SAM registration, go to http://www.sam.gov .	A UEI and registration at SAM.gov are required for all applicants. Active registration at SAM must be maintained throughout the application and project award period.
SF-424 Key Contact Form	Referenced in <i>Section IV.2. Required Forms, Assurances, and Certifications</i> . This form is available in the NOFO'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> .

What to Submit	Where Found	When to Submit
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 NOFO's forms package at www.Grants.gov .	Submission is due with the application package or 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 NOFO'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>
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 NOFO'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>
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>