

**Strengthening the Direct Care Workforce: A Technical Assistance and Capacity Building  
Initiative  
Transcript  
May 17, 2022  
3:00 pm ET**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode until the question and answer session of today's call. At that time if you would like to ask a question, you may press star 1.

Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections, you may disconnect. At this time, I would now like to turn the meeting over to Carolyn Ryan. You may begin.

Caroline Ryan: Great. Thank you so much. And hello, everyone. Welcome to the informational conference call for Strengthening the Direct Care Workforce, A Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Funding Opportunity.

As Valerie introduced me, my name is Caroline Ryan. I work for the Administration for Community Living, and I am leading the direct care workforce initiative here at ACL.

Greg Link, the director of the Office of Supportive and Caregiver Services as well as Renee Carruthers and (Carla Kirksey) from the Office of Grants Management are on the line as well.

We are going to provide a background overview of the funding opportunity. We will review expectations. And then we are going to open up the call for questions and answers where folks on our team will be available to respond to your questions.

Just a couple of quick items. This meeting is being recorded and the recording will be posted with a transcript on grants.gov. Questions can also be sent either during the call or afterwards to an email address, dcw@acl.hhs.gov. It's the same email that's in the funding opportunity announcement.

So to get us started, I just wanted to share some background and provide an overview of the funding opportunity. Older adults and people with disabilities of all ages face a number of barriers to live independently in the community, in settings of their choice and to participate fully in community life.

Direct care workers often play a critical role in supporting independent living, providing key services and support for individuals to lead self-determined lives. This workforce includes people identified by a range of different job titles, including personal care attendants, home health aides, job coaches, direct support professionals, residential workers and others who provide similar support.

While titles, required skills and responsibilities differ, all direct care workers should have access to quality jobs with adequate training and support, compensation, voice in their working environment and opportunity for growth through a career ladder or lattice and broad recognition of their value in the long-term support system.

The current shortage of workers and frequent turnover not only compromises the ability of older adults and people with disabilities to live in the community, but it can also compromise their health and safety.

ACL seeks to address the direct care workforce crisis by establishing a new National Technical Assistance Center Initiative to catalyze change at the systems level.

We will address the insufficient supply of trained direct care workers, promote promising practice at all levels of the service system and improve data collection to enable a full understanding of the workforce issue. ACL will fund one five year cooperative agreement to create and maintain a National Technical Assistance Center to expand and strengthen the direct care workforce.

When fully operational, ACL envisions this Technical Assistance Center will become a central hub for state, private and federal entities involved in the hiring, retention and workforce development associated with the delivery of home and community-based services to access a curated array of model policies, best practices, training materials, technical assistance and learning collaboratives.

In developing your proposals, applicants should describe the approaches you will employ to help realize ACL visions. The goal of this initiative is to strengthen the direct care workforce to better meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities and their families and family caregivers.

ACL recognizes that while many areas of overlap exist between older adults and people with disabilities and their families and family caregivers, there are unique considerations and opportunities posed by each that applicants should consider and address in their applications.

Applicants should consider the cross-disability and aging population focus brought by ACL in this initiative and propose activities accordingly.

Now, I'm going to turn the call over to Greg Link to review expectations and requirements. Greg?

Greg Link: Thanks, Caroline. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Greg Link and I'm the director of the Office of Supportive and Caregiver Services at the Administration for Community Living.

My office resides within the Administration on Aging Component of ACL and I help co-lead this initiative at ACL alongside Caroline Ryan.

Hopefully prior to getting on this informational call, those of you who are interested in applying to this funding opportunity have had a chance to look over the Notice of Funding Opportunity. It's rather extensive. We understand that. And it contains a lot of details.

And my job over the next few minutes is just to point out some of those key details and make sure that applicants are aware of some very specific things that ACL is looking for and that we want you to be aware of so that you can submit the best possible application for consideration.

So if you have the funding opportunity announcement open either maybe you've printed it out as hard copy or you have it open on your computer, it may help to follow along with me as I walk through certain parts of this.

I want to point out the fact that this is - ACL will fund only one award off of this funding opportunity announcement. So one grantee will be awarded the project off of this funding opportunity announcement. And it is a five-year cooperative agreement to create and maintain this National Technical Assistance Center to focus on expanding and strengthening the direct care workforce.

A cooperative agreement is a grant. But a cooperative agreement with a federal agency implies that throughout the life of the project, there is going to

be substantial involvement by the program officer at ACL with the grantee and their key partners.

Cooperative agreements generally involve a lot of back and forth between the grantee and the funder, which in this case is ACL. And ACL staff are there to provide extensive technical assistance and guidance to the grantee and their partners throughout the life of the project.

In the body of the funding opportunity announcement, we lay out in pretty great detail the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement. And so it's important to be aware of those terms and conditions when you're applying for this grant because the terms and conditions of the cooperative agreement will be incorporated by reference in the notice of award to the successful grantee.

The estimated award ceiling for this grant is \$1.3 million per year for five years. This is a five-year project. And we anticipate, like I said, an award ceiling of approximately \$1.3 million per year. The award will never exceed 1.3 million per year.

And it could be less in out years, in the second and third year of the grant, depending on the availability of federal funds. So \$1.3 million is the anticipated award ceiling. Subsequent years will be based on the availability of federal funds.

This is a full and open competition. So we lay out very clearly the eligible applicants that could potentially apply for this funding opportunity. They include domestic, public and private nonprofit entities. And these can include state and local government entities, Indian Tribal organizations, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, hospitals and institutions of higher education.

We have stated in the funding opportunity that priority will be given to national public and national private nonprofit agencies, national organizations and national Indian Tribal organizations.

It is ACL's expectation that the grantee who receives this award will focus on a national level all of the activities that they undertake. This funding opportunity is not intended to fund a grantee to focus on a particular state or community or locality. The work is to be national in scope.

Additionally only one application per agency will be accepted for this funding opportunity announcement. And applicants in your applications must show that you've demonstrated the experience and a proven track record in promoting improvements in the direct care workforce with respect to the needs of people with disabilities and older adults as well as demonstrated experience in partnering with key national stakeholders that are involved in the direct care workforce for these target populations.

The funding opportunity announcement lays out in pretty great detail the types of stakeholder relationships that ACL would anticipate that the successful grantee would have in this project.

I want to point out something very, very key as you consider submitting your applications. And so those are the four key priority areas that we are looking for grantees to focus on. And those begin at the very bottom of page 7 of the funding opportunity announcement in a section called key features. We're looking for grantees to address the general knowledge gap that exists with respect to our national understanding and addressing of the direct care workforce crisis.

We are also looking for extensive information dissemination and direct technical assistance to a range of sectors that we outlined very clearly at the bottom of page 8.

We also anticipate that there will be a robust Web site component to this initiative and a Web site that ACL creates and operates and maintains and that the grantee works cooperatively with ACL to populate with materials and resources developed and curated as a part of this program. The details for ACL's Web site expectations are laid out in detail on page 9.

We are also looking for extensive support for cross-system collaborations, which we elaborate on page 9. At the very, very bottom of page 9 we also note some important funding restrictions, things that these funds cannot be used for, which include funds for construction and rehab of buildings, basic research, medical care, income, maintenance or equipment purchases unless such equipment is demonstrated to be necessary to carry out activities that are fundable under the two funding sources that are going into this program, which are funds from Title IV of the Older Americans Act and the Rehab Act and the Developmental Disabilities Act.

We also provide provisions at the top of page 9 for grantees to be able to - for the successful grantee to be able to make sub-awards or subcontracts. And the grantee is expected to adhere to all parts of 45 CFR Part 75 in making or in monitoring sub-awards. And the requirements are very clearly detailed in a hyperlink to 45 CFR Part 75.

At the top of page 10, we lay out the types of partnerships and stakeholder collaborations that we anticipate the successful grantee will be working with. We also talk about the importance of having an advisory or steering

committee really work with the grantee to shape and guide the project throughout the life of the project.

On page 11 going on to page 12, we talk about the critical components of project evaluation. Applicants should propose robust third-party evaluations for their project and should look towards project sustainability. We anticipate funding this project for five years.

Grantees should be looking from day one at how the efforts of this project will be maintained and continue beyond the scope of federal funding at the end of five years.

At the bottom of page 12, we talk about some basic award information which is, as I had said before, the estimated award ceiling of \$1.3 million for a five-year project.

At the top of page 13, going on to page 14, we lay out the cooperative agreement terms and conditions. Please familiarize yourself with them and make sure that you understand them. And please, during our Q&A period later on, you are welcome to ask any questions that you have.

It is important to note also on page 15 that there is no cost sharing or matching requirement for this particular funding opportunity. So that is good to know that you do not have to - we have waived the match requirements for this particular funding opportunity.

Now at the bottom of page 15, I want folks to pay particular attention to the responsiveness and screening criteria that every application received by ACL will undergo.

First of all the first screening that any application we receive will go through is a responsiveness criteria. And we are looking for three key elements in this responsiveness criteria. And these responsiveness criteria will be reviewed by Caroline and myself. Every application will be looked over for these three key points.

First of all, and most importantly, is that applicants must have a demonstrated history of working at the national level. As I had said earlier, we are looking for a project that is national in scope, not necessarily state focused or local focused. So we will be looking for applicants that have a documented history of working at the national level.

Second there must be included in your application an MOU from one of the following, a minority entity and an Indian tribe to carry out activities under programs authorized under Titles II, III, VI and VII of the Rehab Act because we are using - some of the funding going into this project will draw on Rehab Act funds and one of the requirements for those funds is that there is that MOU between the grantee and the minority entities and Indian Tribes to carry out these activities. So please be sure that you include that.

The third responsiveness criteria is the commitment of at least a full time project director with recognized and demonstrated expertise in the field of direct care workforce and associated issues. We expect that applicants would be able to have a full-time - for a project of this scope, the equivalent of a full-time project director.

In addition we will also be screening the applications to make sure that they adhere to formatting requirements as well. And those are laid out in the funding opportunity as well.

Another key piece of information that you all should be aware of is the application review criteria. And those begin on page - let's see here page - hold on just a second. I'm scrolling through. On the bottom of page 22, we lay out - every application will be scored on a scale of 0 to 100.

Each application is reviewed against five broad subcategories, project relevance and current need, program approach or how you are going to approach the project, budget, project impact and then the organizational capacity. And under each of those sections beginning at the top of page 23, we lay out the exact criteria by which a panel of independent third-party reviewers will review each application.

I always encourage prospective applicants when you're preparing an application for submission in response to a funding opportunity that once you have a completed application, sit down with these review criteria and make sure that you can meet and answer yes to each one of these questions that has formed the review criteria.

If you can do that and answer yes to every question, you can be reasonably certain that your application is complete and addresses all of the areas that ACL is looking for in this particular project. Answering yes to every question, of course, does not guarantee that you will receive funding. And the funding determinations are made based on the results of this independent third-party review.

It's also critically important that when you're submitting your applications that when you're preparing your budget and budget narrative that you include sufficient detail in the budget narrative so that the application reviewers have a very good understanding of how you intend to allocate the resources across the different budget categories.

And the budget narrative should tie very, very closely to the project work plan. There should be a single comprehensive budget narrative covering all five years of the project cumulatively as well as a single budget narrative for each of the five years of the project.

So you're looking at a total of six budget narrative documents for the single application. The work plan likewise should be a work plan covering all five years of your project and the work plan should provide enough detail to enable the application reviewers to understand the anticipated tasks and outcomes as well as the time frame for completing each of the tasks in response to this funding opportunity announcement.

So I can't stress enough the importance of really understanding and getting to be familiar with the application review criteria. This will be a tremendously helpful tool to you as you prepare your applications and get them ready to submit.

So Caroline, I'm going to turn it over to you to talk about application and submission information.

Caroline Ryan: Okay. Thank you so much, Greg. So in terms of the application and submission information, which can be found on page 18, applicants are requested but not required to submit a letter of intent to apply for this funding opportunity. The focus and purpose of the letter is really to allow our staff to estimate the number of independent reviewers that are needed and to avoid potential conflicts of interest in the review.

You can send the letter of intent to the email address in the funding opportunity announcement, [dcw@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:dcw@acl.hhs.gov). And it is due on May 31.

The application is due on June 28 and we strongly encourage you to submit your application through grants.gov a minimum of 3 to 5 days prior to the application closing date. This helps avoid any issues when submitting your application. Grants.gov can take up to 48 hours to notify you of a successful submission.

The anticipated start date of this grant is September 1, 2022. And I think with that this concludes our overview of the funding opportunity announcement.

We're now going to shift and open the floor for questions and answers. So I'm going to ask Valerie, our operator, to open the line for our Q&A section of this call. And Greg I'm going to turn the call back over to you.

Coordinator: If you would like to ask a question, please press star 1 and record your name clearly when prompted. To withdraw your question, you may press star 2. One moment please for our first question.

Caroline Ryan: And Greg, I think while we're waiting for our first question perhaps we can start with some of the questions that were submitted to the Director Care Workforce mailbox?

Greg Link: Sure. Sure. Absolutely. So one question that came in, and this may answer something for several of you, the first question is, is the award total of \$1.3 million over the full five-year period or is the award \$1.3 million for each year, totaling \$6.5 million over the full five-year period? And the answer is the latter, it's \$1.3 million per year for five years.

The second question was - and this is a good one, and I sort of alluded to this earlier. Does the requirement of a full-time director have to be one person at

1.0 FTEs or can it be split in a co-director roll across initiative partners, given the cross-sector nature and the collaborative nature of this project?

And the answer is that the project director position could be split across a couple of positions, you know, multiple positions, if that's how the application and the partnership shapes up.

In the past I've managed projects of this scope where we've had co-project directors from two different organizations that were equal partners to the grant. That is certainly fine. But our expectation is that there is the equivalent of one full FTE to oversee the work of this project.

Are there questions, Valerie? Anybody queued up?

Coordinator: Yes. Our first question comes from (Issa Williams). Your line is open.

(Issa Williams): Thank you, Valerie. I would like to know if you can elaborate a little more on the MOU between the grantee and the Indian Tribe or minority entity. And is it - can you share a little bit more about the scope of what that MOU would need to look like? And then is it an Indian Tribe and a minority entity or one or the other?

Greg Link: Caroline, do you know the answer to that question?

Caroline Ryan: I think we will need to go back and make sure that we have the appropriate information to provide. So what we can do is with any questions that we're unable to respond to during this call, we will be having a frequently asked questions document where we will capture all of these questions and provide answers after this call.

Greg Link: We want to make sure we get you the exact right answer for that because that is a good question.

(Issa Williams): Okay. Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Katie Nikas). Your line is open.

(Katie Nikas): Yes. I had a question regarding one of the requirements for training participants that says they must be enrolled full or part-time in a school receiving grant funding, but it doesn't say whether it needs to be an accredited health care or medical program such as nursing. Can you clarify what the requirement is on that exactly?

Greg Link: I don't believe ACL had any specific requirement in mind. That would be an area where the applicants for this would look at how we've laid out this opportunity and then propose the approach that they believe would be the strongest.

(Katie Nikas): Okay. Thank you.

Coordinator: I show no further questions in queue.

Greg Link: For those still on the line, there was a couple of other questions. This one is a really good technical one. Are you able to clarify how much detail is needed in the letter of intent?

As Caroline mentioned, the letters of intent are optional, but we sure do appreciate them because it helps ACL estimate first the number of applications that we're going to receive so that we can recruit the appropriate number of third-party reviewers.

And so that we have an idea of who is going to be submitting an application, we want to make sure that we can select reviewers that don't have any conflicts of interest upfront.

One of the hardest things to do is to scramble to find new grant reviewers when we realize that there is a conflict of interest and so we try to avoid that through the letters of intent.

Letters of intent can be very, very simple. It can be an email to the DCW mailbox simply stating that X organization intends to apply. It doesn't have to be anything formal, anything more than that. It does not have to provide any details about what you intend to propose. That will all come in your application.

So it could be a very, very simple quick email. Hey, we intend to apply and here's the name of our organization or if your organization requires something more formal, that is certainly fine, but it's not required.

There was another question that came about that asked state governments are eligible - state government entities are eligible to apply. And they wanted to check if it matters if this would include a state Medicaid agency, would county public authorities be eligible for funding?

And the answer is yes. These are the types of entities that would be eligible. However keep in mind that again we're expecting - ACL expects that the grantee will work on a national level. So if it's a state agency and, you know, an agency in a particular state, the expectation is that the work that they do would address the needs of the entire nation and not just that particular state. So keep that in mind as you're applying.

The same would go for a university or a hospital, you know, a nonprofit hospital system. Again we would expect that work to be done nationally and have a national scope.

Are there other questions, Valerie?

Coordinator: Yes. We do have a couple more questions. The next question comes from (Brian Depaulo), your line is open.

(Brian Depaulo): Hi. Thank you very much. I just have a quick question sort of related to the section on page 18 that discusses the content and form of the submission. I was just wondering for the sections below the LOI, the project narrative and the summary abstract, in the copy I have it looks like there's just like sort of a little ellipsis or a period after some of those. I was just wondering are there going to be further instructions sort of forthcoming about the exact structure of the narrative or do we sort of base it more on the review criteria that comes later in the RFP?

Technically the project narrative should include a summary like an abstract. It should include a thorough description of the proposed intervention, the target populations, organizational capacity. Those are the types of things that it should include. I need to look through the NOFO to see if we are missing anything.

(Brian DePaulo): Thank you very much.

Greg Link: But certainly the review criteria would be very helpful.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Karen McCallo). Your line is open.

(Karen McCallo): Thank you very much. I have just two brief questions. One is we know the deadline of when the proposal is to be submitted. But when would the approximate date be that the grantee would be notified if they received the grant?

The second question is I would like to hear your vision of where you think the organization who received this grant should be as of - and I think it was October 1 when the grant begins. What is your vision on where that organization or organization's partner should be at that point since there is no funding to begin to develop subcontracts and so forth? What's your vision of where we would be October 1 if we are recipient of the grant?

Greg Link: Sure. So with respect to the first question, the anticipated start date for this particular project is September 1, 2022. We anticipate that the grantee, the successful grantee will receive a Notice of Award sometime near the end of August for a 9/1 start date.

This is an incredibly busy time of year. If you track the number of funding opportunities that ACL puts out, we have quite a number of them on the street and that puts a significant - has a significant amount of pressure on our grants and program offices.

But we anticipate having all of the work done to complete the review, both the programmatic review and the business review that the grant's office does complete in August, and a Notice of Award would come out near the end of August for a 9/1 start date.

Now this is a fairly - so to get to your second question, this is a very complex project and it is a multiyear project. And so in my experience working with projects of this scope, there is always a ramp-up period.

So we would anticipate that very soon after a 9/1 start date within the first couple of weeks, that the ACL program officer and the prime grantee and key partners would schedule a kick-off meeting to go over the results of the grant review to iron out any perhaps minor deficiencies that might have been called out by the application reviewers, correct any issues that may be in place or address, like I said, any shortcomings that may have been found as a part of the grant review and then we would work with you to finalize your work plan and your approach.

So one month into your project ACL does not expect that you're going to have everybody on staff. I mean, you know, organizations who submit applications for funding generally can't hire somebody until they have a Notice of Award, and they know that they have funding in place.

But in your applications, you should address sort of your plan. In the organizational capacity section of your application, you can address how you plan to start up the project, perhaps propose some startup milestones. You know, within the first two to three months we anticipate being able to do X, Y and Z. That should also be part of your work plan.

You know, oftentimes in the work plan, there is a task about bringing, you know, the organization up to, you know, a full staffing level for the project and you can anticipate the milestones there.

So we certainly want organizations to apply that understand the issue, have background in this issue if possible, but we also recognize that you're not going to come to this necessarily 100% staffed. Many simply can't. So does that answer your question?

(Karen McCallo): Yes, it does. Thank you very much.

Greg Link: Sure. Questions?

Coordinator: I show no further questions.

Caroline Ryan: This is Caroline, Greg. We did have a question come in through the mailbox for someone who was unable to unmute on their line. So (Marla Devries), could you talk about the reporting requirements?

Greg Link: Sure. So this particular project is what is known as a discretionary grant. And with discretionary grants awarded by ACL there is the - and I'm going to speak to the programmatic reporting and then I'm going to turn it over to (Carla) and Renee to speak to the financial reporting requirements and together you should have a full picture.

The grantee will be expected to submit a semiannual progress report, so semiannual every six months, outlining the key accomplishments that you've made to date on the particular project. So key accomplishments, progress towards measurable outcomes, the key products that you have developed and disseminated in that time frame as well as a discussion of any challenges that you've had, you know, with the project in that particular reporting period and how you've addressed those challenges.

The reporting format is fairly straightforward. It's four questions. And we will provide guidance to the successful grantee for what the programmatic reporting requirements are. (Carla) or Renee, can you speak to the financial reporting requirements?

(Carla Kirksey): Yes. Renee had to step off so it's (Carla). I will be addressing this issue. Yearly you would submit a federal report, a federal financial report. And when it comes to your actual submitting your application, you want to make sure that you have budgets not just for the first year, but you want to make sure you have your budget laid out for every single year for all five years.

You want to also make sure that you filled out the budget section of your SF-424. Make sure you have that together. You want to make sure that you when you - also one thing else I want to mention on my side of the office that's extremely important that you have the correct EIN number.

And what I mean by that, it's a nine-digit number. However for your particular entity to determine - let's say you're in Hawaii and I'm just going to make up two organizations. Let's say it's Hawaii Department of Mental Health, Hawaii Department of Commerce and Insurance.

Each one of those may have the same exact EIN number. However to distinctly know which one is your organization, there are two other digits at the end. It's actually a letter and there's another number.

So you would have the EIN standard nine digits and then you would have let's say an A4 at the end. And that those two right there are so important because it lets us see the money. Where is the money going? When it hits the system, it's going to go to your organization.

So you want to make sure you tack on those two additional - well it is a letter and another digit. Because what will happen if you don't have that and if I'm trying to find your information in the system, it could be a delay in our payment management system, which we call PMS, in identifying your organization and being able to access your funding.

So you want to make sure that you have those two - you have that additional letter and additional digit at the very end of your EIN number.

Again there's no matching for this particular requirement. However one thing you want to make sure if you do decide to volunteer across the board, regardless of what application it is, if you volunteer to put matching in your application, we have to hold you accountable for that.

So two years down the road, you're not going to be able to say, well, you know, we're short on the funds. No. It's like our - that budget is like our contract with you. So if you commit to matching then you have to put it in there. We have to review it along with the rest of the budget.

And I just want to highlight any budget restrictions that are listed, for example, in the - as was mentioned earlier, page 9, you definitely want to look at any budget restrictions, whether it's meals, whether it's construction, whether it's - whatever it may be. Because you just don't want to have us contact you or what have you regarding that.

And I think that's it for - and let me just add one other thing. As far as grants.gov goes, make sure you take a look at that. That's a Web site that's really a great tool. It has great training resources and videos. It has frequently asked questions for applicants and all about how to apply and how to track your application. So you definitely want to consider that as well.

And make sure if you get - when, if you don't already have it, your unique identity identifier, your UEI, which is fairly new to some people. That you make sure - if you have to apply, give yourself a few days to complete the process because it's not an overnight thing and you would apply at sam.gov.

And I think that's going to do it for me. Thank you.

Greg Link: Thank you, (Carla). Any other questions, Valerie?

Coordinator: I show no further questions.

Greg Link: Okay. Well, Caroline, I think we can probably wrap this up. We want to thank those of you who dialed into this informational call. We wish you all the best of luck as you complete your applications and we look forward to working with the successful grantee.

Caroline Ryan: Okay. Thank you, Greg, and thanks, everyone, for joining the call today. Just a couple of reminders of the next steps. The due date for the letter of intent is May 31. The due date for the application June 28.

We will have this recording, a transcript available as well as a frequently asked questions document within grants.gov after this call to respond to the questions that we talked about on today's call.

And then if you have any additional questions after today's call, please email our direct care workforce email address, [dcw@acl.hhs.gov](mailto:dcw@acl.hhs.gov), with any follow-up questions and we will respond through the mailbox.

Thank you again, everyone, for attending this call and hope you have a good rest of the day. Thank you very much. END