**EIS-HHS-AOA-REG2**

**Moderator: ROBERT GROENENDAAL**

**June 1, 2022**

**2:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by. All participants will be able to listen only until the question and answer portion of today's conference. At that time you may press star 1 on your phone to ask a question. Today's conference is being recorded. If you have any objections please disconnect at this time.

I would now like to turn your conference over to Mr. Robert Groenendaal. Sir, you may begin.

Robert Groenendaal: Thank you. Yes. Good afternoon, everyone. This is Rob Groenendaal. I'm with ACL, Administration for Community Living within the Center for Innovation and Partnership. I'm here to discuss the funding opportunity announcement for HHS-2022, ACL-CIP-ATTA-0053. The CFDA number is 93.464. And so I just wanted to welcome everyone to this informational call.

Section 6 of the Assistive Technology Act authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, ACL, to fund programs to support national activities for state training and technical assistance for AT programs and the national AT public internet site under Section 6(b) of the Assistive Technology Act, to fund a cooperative agreement. So this is a priority, the funding opportunity title.

This action assists entities funded under the AT Act to administer and manage their programs in order to improvise and improve, implement performance to enhance information to the public, and increase access to and acquisition of AT devices and services for individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. The AT Act requires ACL to support training and technical assistance to the entities funded under the AT Act. Those entities are the state grant for AT programs funded under Section 4 as well as entities not funded under the AT Act, and to support again, for this priority, a national AT public internet site, as well as the delivery of technical assistance and training to improve awareness of, and access to, AT devices and AT services, through a grant cooperative agreement, or a contract.

This priority is for a cooperative agreement, and the plan for this is to fund it for a five-year project period, 12-months for each project year. The purpose of the AT National Activities Program is to support those activities designed to improve the administration of the AT Act, which authorize the grants in Section 4, and to support the comprehensive statewide Assistive Technology Act programs, within those states and territory AT Act programs.

Under this funding opportunity announcement, this FOA, the applicant must address state-specific information requests regarding assistive technology from the entities funded under the AT Act, and entities not funded under the AT Act. The requests would also result in effective approaches to federal and state coordination of activities related to improving funding for or access to AT device and services, for individuals with disabilities of all ages.

It would facilitate access to AT devices and services focused on regulations and policies, practices, and procedures, in order to do so. Requests for information on effective approaches to developing, implementing and evaluating, sustaining activities described under Section 4 of this Act, the AT Act, would be part of the technical assistance and training delivery, in addition to providing information on effective approaches to the development of consumer controlled systems that increase access to AT devices and services.

Focus on training for entities funded under the AT Act as well as, again, those public and private entities not funded under the AT Act. Another important category would be to assist targeted individuals and entities by disseminating information about federal and state laws, regulations, policies, practices, procedures, and provide technical assistance activities in order to include inclusion into society, community living, community participation for people with disabilities of all ages.

It would provide state-specific, regional, and national training and technical assistance concerning AT, to again, those entities mentioned funded under the AT Act, as well as entities not funded under the AT Act. In doing so, annually provide a conference or a forum for exchanging information and promoting programs, policy improvements, required activities for those state grant for AT programs.

Facilitating onsite and electronic information sharing on emerging topics that have an impact in effect, the state grant for AT Act programs. Convene experts from the AT Act program funded under Section 4. Representatives of organizations who focus on work to enhance the lives of individuals with disabilities, older adults, researchers, developers within the realm of assistive technology, AT vendors, and make recommendations with regard to those national emerging issues, to have an impact on the lives of people with disabilities.

Focused on priority topics to benefit state AT programs coordinating the implementation of those training activities, technical assistance activities, with the Administration for Community Living. Sharing information on those evidence based and promising practices, across the AT Act programs. State No Wrong Door Systems, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, Early Intervention and Special Education services, Centers for independent Living, and other programs that address assisting individuals to improve their lives in a number of areas, as well as including addressing social isolation, and aging and disability networks.

So, just across all the different ways of trying to help folks who may need assistance, even in home modifications through housing programs, transportation programs, etc. Another area would be to reduce the cost of assistive technology through model cooperative volume-purchasing mechanisms. To leverage knowledge and resources to reduce duplication of similar activities.

The successful grantee would be successful in developing highly impactful community partnerships that would assist individuals with disabilities to gain more access points for ease of access to assistive technology devices and services. There are other programs within the priority here, that talk about enhancing acquisition of AT devices and services through programs such as Medicaid Money Follows the Person, and Home and Community Based Services waivers.

Access to experts in the area of banking, micro lending, and finance for not only individuals with disabilities, but also entities funded under the AT Act and other entities to acquire assistive technology. Collaboration at the national and state level, working in coordination with ACL on a number of different activities including transit administration, promoting and improving accessibility features within those types of mobility organizations.

Increase awareness and use of assistive technology. Focusing on those other ACL-funded technical assistance resource centers, including Housing and Service Resource Center which is HSRC, Paralysis Resource Center, PRC, Long Term Service and Support Technical Assistance Center, National Disability Rights Network, NDRN, and others.

Also, facilitating consumer involvement in the entities funded under the AT Act at the national and state level. Updating and maintaining an accessible national public internet site. And, with that site, tune in on availability of information at any time. The site must be developed and designed so that any member of the public may obtain information posted on the site.

The site must maintain updated information and provide links to device demonstration programs funded under the AT Act. Device loan programs funded under the AT Act. Device reutilization programs that focus on providing exchange, repair, recycling, or other realization of assistive technology devices. State financing systems including alternative financing programs, operated through or independently of, state grant for AT programs, as well as other sources of funding for AT devices. Cooperative volume purchasing programs, Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology programs, the PAAT programs. Other projects funded under Section 6 of the AT Act, relevant state and federal resources, programs that provide for the increased access to AT devices and services.

Within that there would also be resources. You know, a library on assistive technology, comprehensive working library on AT for all environments, including home, workplace, education, transportation that would assist users in the problem definition and selection of appropriate AT devices, services, and resources in order to provide a solution.

Information on accommodating individuals with disabilities. So this would key in on evidence based research, best practices, on how AT can be used to accommodate individuals with disabilities in the areas of education, employment, healthcare, community living, telecommunications and information technology, also resources for a number of disabilities including relating to low level reading skills.

Collaborate in developing and providing training and technical assistance with other organizations, such as organizations representing individuals with disabilities, assistive technology programs. Agencies engaged in delivery of assistive technology, organizations representing State No Wrong Door systems, Aging and Disability Resource Centers, Early Intervention and Special Education services, UCEDDs, University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. Centers for Independent Living, Agencies on Aging, and other organizations from the aging and disability networks.

Tribal organizations, serving people with disabilities and older adults. The entity responsible for data collection, reporting and assistance, under Section 6 of the AT Act. It would include plans to increase awareness and use of assistive technology through partnerships at the national, state, and community level. Provide ACL data information, surveys, and feedback necessary to evaluate and improve the delivery of technical assistance and training, to the AT Act programs, and revise, re-direct activities, as necessary.

Include plans for evaluating the effectiveness of technical assistance and training for programs funded under the AT Act, not funded under the AT Act, as well as enhancing the national public internet site. The statutory authority is Public Law 108-364. This is the Assistive Technology Act of 1998 as amended, or the AT Act of 2004. As noted previously, the intent of this discretionary grant competition is to fund a cooperative agreement.

The expected number of awards for this priority is one. The stated award floor would be $500,000 per budget period; the award ceiling, $625,000 per budget period. That total estimated funding at the ceiling level, for five years, would be $3,125,000. As noted earlier as well, the length of the project period is expected to be a 60-month project period with those five 12-month budget periods.

Once a cooperative agreement is in place, requests to modify or amend that cooperative agreement or the work plan, may be made by ACL or the awardee at any time, as long as it stays within the original confines of the proposed project descriptions. In terms of cost sharing or matching for this priority, there is no cost sharing or matching requirement.

For the application screening criteria, in order for an application to be reviewed, there are some screening requirements that are very important to consider. Applications must be submitted electronically through Grants.gov. That's HTTP://www.Grants.gov. And it would be by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on the deadline date, which is June 28, 2022.

The project narrative section must be double-spaced on an 8-1/2 x 11 inch plain white paper. Of course that is submitted electronically. With 1-inch margins on both sides. It would have a standard font size not less than 11 and preferably within a standard format, such as Times New Roman or Arial. For this priority, the project narrative must not exceed 35 pages. Those that do so will have the additional pages removed and only the first 35 pages of that project narrative will be provided to the merit reviewers for consideration.

Note that the project work plan, justification, budget narrative, budget template, letters of commitment, letters of support, resumes of key staff/key personnel are not counted as part of the project narrative for the purposes of the 35-page limit. If a problem does exist, if a system problem exists with the submission, the electronic submission of the application, you would want to ensure that there was authentication verification from www.Grants.gov, from that system where you're submitting that electronic application.

And you'd have to have that submission error notification and/or tracking number, in order to substantiate missing that application deadline. Let's just hope that that does not occur. In fact, I strongly encourage, as noted previously, that these applications would be submitted earlier than on the day of the deadline for the application. So, aim for three to five days prior to that, just to be safe. And ensure that you have everything submitted on time.

The Grants.gov registration process can take several days. So, if your organization is not currently registered please begin this process as soon as you can. For assistance with this, it is through Grants.gov, again, www.Grants.gov. Contact them at Support@Grants.gov or (800) 518-4726 between 7:00 am and 9:00 pm Eastern Time. All applicants must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number, and be registered with the System for Award Management which is SAM, that is www.SAM.gov and maintain an active SAM registration until the application process is complete for this grant competition.

Once your SAM registration is active, allow one day to two days, 24 hours to 48 hours, for the information to be available in Grants.gov, before you can submit an application through Grants.gov. And, failure to submit the correct EIN, employer identification number suffix, can lead to delays in identifying your organization and access to funding in the payment management system. So, it's important to register in SAM prior to submitting an application. Maintain an active SAM registration. And then also provide that UEI number.

You must submit all documents electronically, as noted, including all information on the SF 424 and all the necessary assurances and certifications. After you electronically submit your application, you will receive an automatic acknowledgment from Grants.gov that contains the Grants.gov tracking number. The Administration for Community Living will retrieve your application from Grants.gov.

I am the contact person, Robert Groenendaal, Center for Innovation and Partnership. I am the contact person for this program announcement, for this funding opportunity. My email address is Robert.Groenendaal@ACL.HHS.gov. You can see it in the notice itself, Robert.Groenendaal@ACL.HHS.gov. For those entities that plan on submitting a letter of intent, the deadline for doing so is June 3, 2022, which is in a couple of days. Applicants are requested but not required, to submit a letter of intent to apply for this funding opportunity.

In terms of looking at some of the features of the application proposal itself, you know, examining the project narrative, the suggested length for the project narrative is up to 35-pages. So, obviously 35-pages is the maximum length allowed. I want to emphasize the project work plan, letters of commitment, letters of support, resumes, are not counted as part of the project narrative for the purposes of that project narrative limit, which is again, 35-pages, so stay within that.

The sample components of the project narrative counted as part of the 35-page limit include the summary abstract. The section should include a brief, no more than 265 words maximum, description of the proposed project, including goals, objectives, outcomes, products to be developed.

Problem statement: the nature and scope of the problem or issue the proposed intervention is designed to address, goals and objectives, description of the project's goals and major objectives.

Proposed intervention should provide a clear and concise description of the intervention, the rationale for achieving that. Note any major barriers you anticipate encountering with your project. How your project will be able to overcome those barriers. Describe the role and makeup of any strategic partnerships you plan to involve in implementing the intervention, including other organizations, supporters, commitments, and consumer groups.

Special target populations and organizations - this section would describe how you plan to involve organizations in a meaningful way in the planning and implementation of the proposed project.

For outcomes, keep the focus of this section on describing what outcomes will be produced by the project. Use the evaluation section noted below in a moment here, as a description on how those outcomes will be measured and reported.

Project management - this section would include a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of project staff, partner organizations, how they will contribute to the project's objectives and outcomes.

For evaluation, describe the specific outcomes, methods, techniques, tools that will be used to achieve the anticipated outcomes and goals.

For dissemination, should describe the method that will be used to disseminate the project's result and findings in a timely manner.

Organizational capacity - each application should include an organizational capacity statement and resumes for key project personnel.

Budget narrative justification - the budget narrative justification can be provided using the format included in the document, “Budget Narrative Justification - sample format.”

For the work plan, should reflect and be consistent with the project narrative and budget and should cover all five years of the project period.

Letters of commitment from key participating organizations and agencies include confirmation of the commitments to the project. Those key collaborating organizations and agencies would be included in this part of the application.

For applications submitted electronically via Grants.gov, signed letters of commitment should be scanned and included as attachments. Applicants unable to scan signed letters of commitment may fax them to ACL. And that would be to Office of Grants Management at (202) 357-3467, by the application submission deadline. In your fax be sure to include the funding opportunity number and your agency name.

For the application submission dates and times, the due date for applications is June 28, 2022. I strongly encourage you to submit your application a minimum of three days or five days even, prior to the anticipation of the closing date. If you are submitting your application via Grants.gov, you must be designated by your organization as the Authorized Organization Representative, AOR, and register yourself with Grants.gov as an AOR. So, details on these steps are outlined in Grants.gov. You can go to www.Grants.gov/Web/Grants/Register/html.

There are some funding restrictions. Before we get into the funding restrictions, though, I just want to make sure I emphasize again that if you're experiencing problems submitting your application through Grants.gov, please contact, once again, the Grants.gov support desk toll free, 1 (800) 518-4726. Obtain that Grants.gov support desk case number and keep a record of it.

So, for some of the funding restrictions for this priority and several priorities at HHS and ACL, the following activities are not fundable: Construction and/or major rehabilitation of a building, basic research such as scientific or medical experiments, continuation of existing projects without expansion or new and innovative approaches.

We can get into some of the criteria. So, reviewers of applications have reported that applications written in a format that follows the peer reviewed criteria and contains a separate budget section, greatly facilitates the review process. For this priority the process would appear as follows - it is Section A, Project Relevance and Current Need; Section B, Approach; Section C, Organizational Capacity; and D, Budget; Section E, Project Impact. Appendices to include Work Plan, Assurances, Certifications, Resumes, Bibliography, Letters of Support, Letters of commitment.

For the state training and technical assistance for AT programs and national AT public internet site, there is a maximum of 100 points across the selection criteria noted. So, getting into the project relevance and current need, it's a maximum of 15 points. It looks at, you know, does the proposed project clearly and adequately respond to the priority area, to improve the effectiveness of entities funded under the AT Act?

Does the project describe the need for the dissemination of training and technical assistance to comprehensive, statewide AT programs and technology-related assistance to individuals with disabilities? Problems to be addressed: the extent to which the applicant includes a description of the problems to be addressed by the proposed project. Is it justified in terms of the most recent, relevant and available resources and acknowledges support to national activities to improve the administration of the AT Act?

The approach section is dense. There is a maximum of 40 points. There is essentially a part - methods of addressing the problem, which is 25 points maximum. Does the project represent an exceptional approach to the funding opportunity? The extent to which the design of the proposed project is appropriate to and will address the needs of the state AT programs, in conducting the required activities under the AT Act. Design for implementing and evaluating the proposed project. Information and resources to guide possible replication of project activities.

Does the project include relevant specific expertise of state AT programs funded under Section 4 in the delivery of technical assistance and training? The extent to which the design of the project reflects up-to-date knowledge from effective practices. Does the project include a high quality plan for project implementation and methodological tools and expertise to ensure successful achievement of project activities?

Collaborating with entities to serve individuals with disabilities funded under the AT Act. The extent to which there are those linkages to other agencies and organizations to do so. Services to be provided to meet the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries and encourages consumer involvement and continuous improvement. Obtaining and using feedback from recipients of the technical assistance and training provided. The extent to which the entities served by the proposed technical assistance project demonstrate support for the project.

The training or technical assistance to be provided by the project leads to improvements in practice among recipients of the services. The proposed project involves partners for maximizing the efficiency of strategies and effectiveness of project services. Does the national public internet site include a library on AT and resources for people with disabilities at organizations that support them and assist them, to increase their awareness of, and access to, assistive technology? The extent to which the applicant plans to use data to inform and enhance technical assistance training and the National public internet site under this priority.

The work plan part of this section is 15-points maximum under this total of 40 points for approach. Objectives to be achieved in the work plan are clearly specified and measurable, including clearly defined responsibilities for accomplishing project tasks. The work plan to achieve the objectives is on time and within budget; time commitments of the project, director and other key project personnel are appropriate, sufficient to meet the objectives of the proposed project.

Moving onto organizational capacity - a total maximum of 15 points. For the first part of that, project staffing qualifications, it's a ten point maximum. Do key project personnel have the background, relevant training experience, and other qualifications required to carry out their roles for the project? Are the roles and responsibilities of project staff and partners clearly delineated and linked to specific objectives and tasks?

The five-point section here is organization and management. Does the applicant's approach clearly identify the capacity for carrying out the proposed project? Relevance and demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project to the implementation and success of the project. Letters from participating organizations express clear commitment, and areas of responsibility are consistent with the work plan.

For the budget section, there's a maximum of 15 points. We look at the extent to which the budget is justified for the administration of the proposed project; time commitment of the proposed project director and other key staff is sufficient to implement the proposed project, ensure proper direction of the project; budget amounts proposed for the personnel are proportionate to their activity given the scope of the proposal.

Project impact is 15 points. And, within that section there is project outcomes. That's ten points maximum. Are the proposed outcomes quantifiable and measurable, consistent with the priorities contained in this funding announcement? Will the outcome significantly benefit statewide AT programs and individuals with disabilities? Are the expected project results and benefits clear and consistent with the purpose and objectives of this funding opportunity announcement?

Project evaluation - five points maximum within this. The extent to which the methods of the evaluation provide for examining the effectiveness and impact of the project implementation strategy. Methods of evaluation will use annual AT program data, and needs assessment surveys to inform technical assistance and training. Methods of evaluation will provide performance feedback and assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.

We went through the criteria. I want to note, an independent review panel of at least three individuals will evaluate applications that pass screening, and meet the responsiveness criteria for this priority. There's, you know, information about these reviewers: experts in their field drawn from the academic institutions, non profit organizations, state and local governments, federal government agencies.

Final award decisions will be made by the administrator of the Administration for Community Living. The anticipated project start date for this funding opportunity is September 1, 2022. Successful applicants will receive an electronic notice of award. Unsuccessful applicants are generally notified within 30 days of the final funding decision and will receive a disapproval letter via email.

The award is subject to HHS administrative requirements which can be found in 45 CFR Part 75, and standard terms and conditions included in the notice of award, as well as what is implemented through the HHS Grants Policy Statement. So, for reporting frequency, the performance and financial reports will be noted within the terms and conditions on the Notice of Award.

I think we can stop at this point and can open it up for questions, if anyone has any questions.

Coordinator: Thank you. If you would like to ask a question please press star 1. You will be promoted to record your first and last name. Please unmute your phone when recording your name. And to withdraw your question, press star 2. Once again, to ask a question, please press star 1. One moment.

Robert Groenendaal: While we're waiting for questions, I can go over a few of the frequently asked questions, if this is an agreeable time to do so. It may be helpful for some folks in submission of their applications.

One question: At the end of the NOFO, there are instructions for completing the supplemental information for SF 424 form. I'm not seeing that in Grants.gov. Where do we find this form? And is it required for our application?

Answer: The supplemental information in SF 424 is for applicants submitting proposals that are projects for conducting research on human subjects. This information is not required to complete the application form for this priority, for this funding opportunity announcement, 2022 ACL-CIP-ATTA-0053.

Question: Are we able to include any additional attachments that are not requested in the NOFO, the notice of funding opportunity announcement?

Answer: Additional attachments and/or supplemental information not requested in the priority may be submitted in the application package for background and context. Panel reviewers are instructed to review and score applications based on the merits of the required documents contained in the application package.

There is another question delineating letters of support for this priority. Are we able to include letters of support along with letters of commitment? There's a focus on letters of commitment. But letters of support are noted briefly on page 19.

Answer: I want to confirm that we can include both. The answer to that question is yes.

Coordinator: This is the operator. I'm showing no phone questions at this time.

Robert Groenendaal: So, for the next part of this process, there will be an FAQ made available. I just went over a couple of them. I don't necessarily have to go over more of them now. We can give back 15 minutes of your time. Look forward to the posting of the FAQ and information about this informational call. I just want to remind folks interested in submitting a letter of intent for this funding opportunity announcement, to please do so by this Friday, June 3, 2022, to Robert.Groenendaal@ACL.HHS.gov. You see my email address is in the funding opportunity announcement.

I'll remind folks please try to submit your application proposals, packages three to five days prior to the June 28, 2022 deadline, which happens to be 11:59 pm Eastern Time. Thank you, again, for your time. And I wish you all a great rest of you afternoon. Thank you.

Coordinator: Thank you for your participation. Participants, you may disconnect at this time.

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