Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)
Section 1115 Grants – FY 2009 (Round Two)
Pre-Application Conference Call of June 30, 2009

"Partnership to Strengthen Families: Child Support Enforcement/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families/University Partnership Demonstration Project"

Announcement Number HHS-2009-ACF-OCSE-FD-0093

This series of questions and answers addresses major points about the above grant priority. The questions and answers are sorted into three categories:

> **Category I provides information about the priority**
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> **Category II focuses on general information about eligibility and the application process**
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> **Category III offers grant writing tips**

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Category I
Information about the Priority

1. **Do applicants need to establish official relationships between CSE, TANF agencies and a University in order to be considered for funding under this announcement?**
   No. Formal agreements such as a Memoranda of Understanding are not required. However, as indicated in the evaluation criteria, applicants that do not include letters of commitment from the TANF agency and a University partner will be assigned zero points. Similarly, proposals to work with any additional partners will be expected to be accompanied by letters of commitment from those organizations. The applicant must play a substantive role in the implementation of the project and not serve primarily as a conduit of funds to other organizations. However, sub-agreements at many levels are expected to promote partnerships and buy-in.

2. **Are there any required outcomes that must be measured?**
   Yes, project evaluations are expected to assess the extent to which project activities will lead to increased financial well-being for children or improved child support enforcement program operations.

   Grantees are to produce valid and reliable documentation and measurement of the project activities, including successes and challenges. This information will be useful to the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement as well as to other CSE and TANF agencies and universities.

3. **Must the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) agency propose to work with <u>both</u> the TANF agency AND a University partner, rather than just one of these entities?**
Applications that do not include letters of commitment from the TANF agency and a University partner will be assigned zero points under the relevant Evaluation Criterion.

4. **This grant announcement appears to be quite broad. Does OCSE have specific kinds of projects in mind?**
No. OCSE is interested in a range of well-conceived projects that address the objectives as specified by Section 1115, but which meet the diverse needs and interests of State partners.

5. **Must the project activity address statewide issues?**
No. Applications submitted by the State CSE agency, but proposing partnerships at the sub-State level (e.g., partnership between one or more county CSE and TANF agencies and a University partner) to address issues specific to one or more local area(s) will, also be considered.

Category II
General Information about OCSE Section 1115 FY 2009 Grants

6. **Why is there a second round of Section 1115 grant announcements this year?**
We share a Section 1115 grant budget with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This year CMS conducted their grants with other funding sources and they graciously offered their share to us. This enabled us to fund additional projects this year.

7. **Who is eligible to apply for the Section 1115 grants?**
State Title IV-D agencies or their umbrella agencies are eligible to apply for Section 1115 grants. This includes the IV-D agencies in the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Tribal IV-D agencies are not eligible to apply, but they may, and are encouraged to, partner with State IV-D agencies in the development of a project.

8. **Why is the priority funded only for 17 months?**

Funding for this priority is available to us for 1 year; therefore we cannot issue grants for multiple years. We designed the priority to create a funding opportunity that can have immediate effects. Grant-making rules permit us to extend the project period to 17 months rather than limit it to 12 months.

9. **What is meant by the terms "Ceiling" and "Floor" on the amount of individual awards?**

OCSE recognizes that some project activities may require more resources than others. A "ceiling" is the maximum funding level for which an applicant may apply and a "floor" is the minimum amount. This announcement has a ceiling of $100,000 but has no floor amount.

10. May urban jurisdictions or County IV-D agencies apply directly for the Section 1115 grants?
No, the applications must be submitted through the State IV-D agency. OCSE recommends that jurisdictions contact the State Office as early as possible if they plan to propose a project.

11. What are the waiver provisions in the Section 1115 grants?
Section 1115(a)(1) of the Social Security Act allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to waive a State plan requirement in Section 454, and Section 1115(a)(2)(A) allows the Secretary to treat certain unallowable expenditures as allowable State expenditures for purposes of the demonstration project. The State must specifically request in the application any waiver of a State plan requirement or matching for an "unallowable" cost and explain how the waiver furthers the purposes of the project.

Because a large part of this grant is funded through Federal Financial Participation (FFP), OCSE will not approve any waivers that will significantly increase program costs, but will consider waivers for "unallowable costs" and State plan requirements, such as statewideness, which facilitate the conduct of the project or enable the State to accomplish the purposes of the project.

12. Do the Section 1115 grants require a match from the applicant?
Yes, grantees must provide at least 5 percent of the total approved cost of the project. This 5 percent may be provided through cash, including incentives, and in-kind services.

13. Can a partnering agency provide in-kind contributions to the grantee Title IV-D agency?
The grantee Title-IV D agency may accept in-kind contributions from partnering organizations if the contributions meet the requirements of 45 C.F.R. Sec. 92.24.

14. May the grantee Title IV-D agency use contributed in-kind to satisfy the 5 percent matching requirement?
Yes. In-kind contributions may be used by the grantee Title IV-D agency to satisfy the 5 percent matching requirement. If Title IV-D agencies intend to use in-kind contributions to meet the matching requirement, the applicant should request prior approval as part of the application's Budget Justification (see Section III.2. in HHS-2009-ACF-OCSE-FD-0095 and HHS-2009-ACF-FD-0098).

15. How does the applicant request prior approval for using incentive funds or in-kind services to meet the 5 percent match?
The applicant should describe how they plan to meet the 5 percent match in the required budget justification/narrative. This would fulfill the prior approval requirements.

16. What is the deadline for submitting an application?
Applications, whether they are mailed, hand-delivered or submitted electronically, must be <u>received</u> by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) no later than 4:30 p.m., Eastern Time, on **August 24**. Any applications received after 4:30 p.m. on that date will not be considered for competition.

17. Must the application be submitted electronically through www.Grants.gov ?
Applications do not have to be submitted electronically. However, if you choose to submit electronically, it must be through www.Grants.gov . Be sure to read the several pages of guidance in the announcement regarding the use of www.Grants.gov for electronic submission. Do not send your applications by email or fax as these are not allowable methods of submitting applications.

18. If an applicant chooses to send the application in hard copy, what should they be aware of?
Applicants that submit their applications in paper format should submit one original and two copies of the complete application with all the required forms, certifications, assurances and appendices. The original copy must have the original signature of the Authorized Organization Representative/Authorized Official.

Applications under the IV-D/IV-A/Partnership announcement are to be sent to an off-site location; the address is in the grant announcement material. Under other circumstances, OCSE does not recommend sending applications through the U.S. Postal Service because ACF/OCSE mail is irradiated. This adds a few days to the delivery process and the paper becomes brittle, making reading and copying the applications difficult.

We have learned from recent experience that couriers do not always deliver as promised. Applications hand-carried by applicant couriers, other representatives of the applicant, or by overnight/express mail couriers must be received by the established deadline. If at all possible, have applications submitted well in advance of the due date.

19. What is the page limit for the applications?
The length of the application should be no more than 35 double-spaced pages; they may be shorter. Any pages beyond the 35-page limit will not be reviewed. This page limit excludes the table of contents, application forms, letters of support, certifications

and résumés. Use a 12-point font with margins set between 1" and 1.25". These standards are required for ease of reviewing.

20. Who reviews the applications for OCSE?
OCSE conducts the reviews with Federal staff, and/or external experts who are familiar with the program(s) in the particular announcement.

21. How will the applications be evaluated?
Reviewers will use the evaluation criteria listed in the grant announcement to score the application. The content and components of the application need not be presented under headings related to the evaluation criteria but rather may be organized such that a reviewer will be able to follow a seamless and logical flow of information (i.e., from a broad overview of the project to more detailed information about how the project will be conducted). However, applicants should be sure that every item listed in the evaluation criteria is addressed.

22. Can grant funds be used to contract out the services needed for the project?
Yes, once awarded, grantees may make sub-grants or sub-contracts for specific services or activities necessary to conduct the project. OCSE recommends that the appropriate State procurement/contract office be notified that the State is submitting a grant application that, if funded, will require a contract or task order. Experienced grantees say that this helps the procurement personnel plan accordingly.

Grantees may, and often do, sub-grant or contract out a lot of the work associated with a project, as long as the IV-D agency will play an active and substantial role in the grant activity. However, OCSE will not approve applications in which the IV-D agency will not be actively involved and which are merely "pass-throughs."

23. Can grant funds be used to hire people to carry out the project?
Grant funds may be used to hire staff if it is directly related to grant activities. As in the case with contracts, OCSE recommends notifying the appropriate State personnel office of the applicant's plans for staffing, should the application be approved. Please note that grant funding may not be used for <u>routine</u> child support activities that would normally be reimbursed under the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program, e.g., adding staff positions to perform <u>routine</u> CSE tasks. Grant activity would not be considered routine.

24. Are there projects that OCSE will not fund?
OCSE will not award grant funding for projects that duplicate automated data processing and information retrieval system requirements/enhancements and associated tasks that are specified in the Social Security Act. This means OCSE discretionary grant funds cannot be used to meet mandatory automation requirements such as those outlined in the OCSE Certification Guide. But discretionary grants can be used, and are used, to automate a manual process, or enhance the automation functionality above and beyond what is mandated. We also will not fund projects that require use of proprietary applications.

25. What forms are required and where are they found?
Refer to the checklist in the announcement to ensure the application is complete. The forms are available on the ACF website and on the OCSE website on the discretionary grant pages.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cse/grants/resources/application_kit/

26. What does OCSE anticipate as the start date for the Section 1115 grants?
ACF has a goal of awarding grants 45 days after the due date of the applications. The start date would be no later than September 30, the last day of the Federal Fiscal Year. Grants must begin in the fiscal year in which the award is made.

Category III
Tips for Grant Writing

27. Do applications have to be written by professional grant writers to be approved for funding?
No. Many award-winning proposals in the past have been written by existing CSE staff. One successful grantee says they make the application a group assignment, or team effort, involving a variety of staff members. Each person works on a different section of the proposal and then one person serves as the editor to ensure the information flows easily and that all the evaluation criteria are addressed.

28. How is the announcement information organized?
Much of the announcement is comprised of boilerplate language provided by the Administration for Children and Families, the agency that houses the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement, including the Project Description Overview section, found in Part IV of the announcement. This is ACF standard language provided for guidance to applicants so they can "tell their story" in an organized way and include vital information.

Some items appear twice in the announcement, which may seem confusing to an applicant. One example is "Approach." The guidance found in Project Description Overview, the standard language referenced earlier, gives the applicant *general guidance* about how to plan out and present the project; in other words, how you plan to carry out your work. "Approach" also appears in the Evaluation Criteria section. Keep in mind that the Evaluation Criteria is what the application is scored on. The reviewer will consider how well the applicant has been able to "marry" the general guidance to the more specific evaluation criteria and score the application accordingly.

29. What does a reviewer look for in an application?
Reviewers appreciate well-organized and well-written proposals. Basically, they want to know <u>what</u> the work is, <u>why</u> it is needed, <u>where</u> it will be done, <u>who</u> will be doing it and <u>how</u> it will be completed.

A reviewer looks for current data and references to current research used by the applicant to "build their case" about why the grant funding is needed. They look for simply stated goals, and budgets and timeframes that are reasonable. They want to be sure the staffing level is appropriate to the size of the project. They want to be sure partners you have identified are on board and committed to the project. They appreciate budget narratives that are easy to follow and match the figures found in the budget sheets (the 424-A).

Keep in mind that a reviewer scores the application based on the evaluation criteria, so be sure that you have addressed everything listed in the Evaluation Criteria section.

30. How should the application be organized?
There is no required format for presentation of information. You should consider that reviewers will be reading multiple applications, so presenting information in clear, succinct and logical order will be helpful. OCSE recommends that you use page numbers throughout, including on the attachments. (You may need to hand print some of the pages.) Reviewers need page numbers so they can document their comments. A table of contents is required and helps the reviewer find materials quickly. Applicants are encouraged to use the checklist as a guide when preparing your application package to ensure all required information is included.

31. What if our proposal is not funded?
Reviewers provide comments on the scores they give to the applications and these comments are summarized. If your application is not awarded a grant, be sure to request a summary of comments and ask for feedback. Some States that were unsuccessful in their first attempt at grant writing were awarded grant funding the very next year.

OCSE and grant reviewers are on your side. We want to encourage more States to apply for grants.

32. Who can I call for more information about the Section 1115 grant?
Keep in mind that we cannot provide anything beyond what is in the announcement because no applicant can be given any kind of advantage over another. However, we will be happy to assist you within these parameters. Questions should be directed to our contract support staff at: Educational Services, Inc., phone: 866-429-0520; fax: 240-744-7005; or email: partnershipreview@esi-dc.com