**EIS-HHS-AOA-REG2**

**Moderator: ROBERT GROENENDAAL**

**May 31, 2022**

**2:00 pm CT**

Coordinator: Good afternoon and thank you for standing by. I would like to inform all participants that your lines have been placed on a listen only mode until the question and answer session of today's call. Today's call is also being recorded. If anyone has any objections, you may disconnect at this time.

I would now like to tell the call over to Mr. Rob Groenendaal. Thank you. You may begin.

Robert Groenendaal: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. Good afternoon, everyone. I want to provide some information on the funding opportunity from the Center for Innovation and Partnership on the Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Program. The Funding Opportunity Number is HHS-2022-ACL-CIP-ATTF-0055. I just want to make sure that everyone is in the correct call for this afternoon.

And I want to let folks know that with respect to this Funding Opportunity Announcement that you're strongly encouraged to submit your application a minimum of three to five days prior to the application closing date. That application closing date for this opportunity is June 28, 2022.

Applications that do not meet the application due date will not be reviewed, will receive no further consideration for this opportunity. So, again just want to remind folks, do not wait until the last day in the event you encounter some technical difficulties with the submission process. And so you want to ensure that everything is in compliance with grants.gov. Familiar with that Web site, which is www.grants.gov as it can potentially take up to 48 hours to notify you of a successful submission of your application.

The due date for the Letter of Intent is June 3. While it's not required, the Letter of Intent is helpful to this review process for Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Programs. So, the purpose of the FY 2022 Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Program, AFP, is to support programs that provide for the purchase of AT devices, such as a low interest loan fund, interest buy down program, revolving loan fund, a loan guarantee or an insurance program to name some examples.

The AFP will expand and emphasize consumer choice and control for individuals with disabilities across the life span. State agencies and community-based disability organizations that are directed by and operated for individuals with disabilities shall be eligible to compete for this funding opportunity. Applications should incorporate credit building activities in their programs, including financial education and information about other possible funding sources.

Successful applications must emphasize consumer choice and control, build programs that will provide financing for the full array of assistive technology devices and services and ensure that all individuals with disabilities regardless of type of disability or health condition, age level or income of residents have access to the Alternative Financing Program.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act authorized HHS ACL, the Administration for Community Living, to assist individuals with disabilities as noted of any age, to obtain financial assistance for AT devices and services. So, under this FOA, this Funding Opportunity Announcement, applicants must establish one or more of the following types of Alternative Financing Programs of AFP, alternative financing mechanisms.

I mentioned some examples that include alternative financing loan programs such as the low interest loan fund, interest buy down program, revolving loan fund, loan guarantee insurance program, programs operated for the purchase, lease or other acquisition of assistive technology devices or assistive technology services, another mechanism that provides financing and is also approved by the Secretary of HHS, Health and Human Services.

The application must contain components that are listed in the Funding Opportunity Announcement. Administrative policies and procedures, it would contain an assurance that within the first three months, a policies and procedures document would be submitted to ACL. And there's some components within there that would ensure that through this funding, the applicant would identify the type or types of AFP to be supported by the grant and submit the contents of the policies and procedures for review and process in a timely manner requests for financial assistance for the assistive technology needs, including eligibility and determination of the specific AT device or service to be financed through the program.

A policy and procedure to ensure individuals are allowed to apply for financing for as noted, a full array of AT regardless of type of disability or health condition, age, income level and everything that we talked about in terms of location of residence, type of AT device or service requested for financing through that program.

It's - it is permissible for programs to target individuals with disabilities who would have been denied conventional financing as a priority for the AFT funding. A policy or procedure for sustaining the AFP, grantees must provide a sustainability plan that identifies that what is expected to be needed on the ongoing basis for the program in order to ensure that there is continued funding for the program’s availability of funds to continue beyond that initial federal grant award.

The policy for incorporating credit building activities to the AFP. And also in addition to the administrative policies and procedures, there would be fiscal and reporting assurances that the applicant would submit. The grantee would draw down, place all federal funds in a restricted account with the use of such funds limited to implementation of the Alternative Financing Program. The grantee is permitted to draw down the entire award in advance to capitalize the loan funds so that - so the funds are placed in a restricted account.

The grantee will expend funds in a restricted account solely for the purpose originally designated for the implementation of the AFP. And this restricted fund will continue until all federal and other dollars placed in the restricted fund are expended for that purpose.

In terms of some of the reporting, there's the requirement noted: within the first three months for the submission of policies and procedures for the program. There's also a semi-annual report in addition to a final federal financial report and programmatic report as described by the Administration for Community Living at the conclusion of that one-year grant award.

For previous grant recipients, information must be submitted on the previous amounts that were awarded by ACL. So there is a chance that some of the applicants have previously received grant awards funded by ACL. They would provide information about the remaining funds, number of loans, extended, individuals served, credit building activities developed, et cetera, on those grant awards.

So in terms of the award information, it is anticipated that there will be approximately three to four grant towards with the goal of providing the funding depending on the applications submitted, the award floor would be $100,000 per budget period up to $700,000 per budget period for this competition.

There is no cost sharing requirements for the Assistive Technology Alternative Financing Program. I think some important information with respect to the submission of the proposals, the applications, you know, please ensure that the proposals are submitted on time by 11:59 PM Eastern Time by the due date that was previously mentioned, June 28th, 2022. There is important information about the project narrative section, it is essential that the narrative section be submitted double spaced.

Obviously there - these are electronic submissions, but within that electronic submission it would be on an 8 and a half x 11 plain white paper if you will, with one-inch margins on both sides, standard font size no less than 11 point preferably New Times Roman or Ariel for that submission.

The page limit for the project narrative is 25 pages. So please ensure that the narrative of the application does not exceed that amount. Note that the project work plan, Letters of Commitment, resumes of key project personnel are not counted as part of the project narrative for the purposes of the 25-page limit.

If you do encounter system problems that exist for this submission, you want to make sure that you think about the submission error notification and/or tracking number in order to substantiate any missing content that could have not met the application deadline. This is really important, you know, when working with grants.gov. There will be a tracking number and notification of submission of the application for this.

Some of the content that is also important is that you have to ensure that there's - that your application as the applicant that you're registered at grants.gov. The process can take several days. If your organization is not currently registered, hopefully you would have already done this already, please begin that process immediately. For assistance with this, I mentioned the grants.gov Web site www.grants.gov. Contact them at support@grants.gov or 800-518-4726 between the hours of 7:00 am and 9:00 pm Eastern Standard Time.

It's important for all applicants to have a Unique Entity Identifier Number. So this is the UEI. It replaced the DUNS number that had been used previously. So you want to ensure that you have that, you're registered within the System for Award Management, the Sam, S-A-M.gov and maintain an active SAM registration until the conclusion of the application process until that process is complete. It's vital to make sure that all this information is certainly current and active.

Once your SAM registration is active allow 24 to 48 hours for the information to be available in grants.gov. So, you know, failure to submit the correct EIN suffix, the Employee Identification Number suffix can lead to delays into that identifying your organization and access to funding in the Payment Management System. These are some other things that you want to ensure that everything is kind of lined up with respect to the UEI, Unique Entity Identifier Number as well as the Employee Identification Number, EIN for the submission of your proposals.

Register in SAM, obviously S-A-M.gov prior to submitting an application or plans for this competition. Maintain that active SAM registration, provide the UEI Number so that you know everything is current.

You must submit all documents electronically, I mentioned that, including all information included on the SF-424 and all necessary assurances and certifications for the application for AT AFP. After you electronically submit your application, you will see an automatic acknowledgment from grants.gov that contains the tracking number so that, so ACL will retrieve that application form from www.grants.gov. I want to make sure that we're all lined up with respect to that.

I mentioned that the due date for the Letter of Intent, if your organization chooses to submit one, is June 3, 2022. In terms of the layout for the content and the application submission there's information in the priority where you can address the project narrative. We've mentioned the 8.5 by 11 paper with margins. Suggested length for the project narrative is 20 to 25 pages. That maximum, 25 pages is the maximum length allowed.

The project work plan, budget narrative, justification, budget template, Letters of Commitment, letters of support, resumes that tell you of key personnel are not counted as part of the project narrative for the purposes of the 25-page limit. There's some sample components for the project narrative in this priority. It's part of the 25-page limit.

There's the summary abstract. For the summary abstract, there would be no more than 265 words maximum. A description of the project, goals, objectives, outcomes of what you're trying to achieve with this application, problem statement, the nature and scope of the problem or issue, the proposed intervention is designed to address within this priority.

Goals and objectives, goals, and major objectives for the funding to support the program and provide for the purchase of AT devices in ways that expand and emphasize consumer choice and control.

Proposed intervention should provide a clear and concise description of the intervention that you are proposing to achieve with the project, including factors such as lessons learned, similar projects previously tested in the community, what you've done, the rationale, you know, the successes previously achieved as an organization from working on this problem, proposed intervention would seek again to enhance the ability of individuals with disabilities. You have enhanced access to assistive technology through alternative financing loan programs.

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

For the outcomes section, with regard to this funding opportunity, outcomes would be - would include improvements in the ability of individuals with disabilities to purchase AT devices as a result of the program supporting and/or increasing the amount of choice and control among target consumers as a result of the design of the proposed Alternative Financing Program.

We focus on, you know, describing those outcomes that would be produced by the project and as well as the use of the evaluation section, describe how those outcomes would be measured and reported on.

Project management, this section would include a clear delineation of the roles and responsibilities of the project staff on the Alternative Financing Program, partner organizations, how they will contribute to the project's objective and outcome.

Touched on a little bit about evaluation, the evaluation section was described in the techniques and tools that will be used to achieve the outcome of the project. Dissemination, this section would describe the method that will be used to disseminate projects results, findings in timely manner. Organizational capacity, which should include an organizational capacity statement as well as some of the content of the organization, including key project personnel that would be working on this project.

The budget narrative justification can be provided using the format included in the document in the example document in the Funding Opportunity Announcement, budget narrative justification - sample format and which is attached at the end of the funding announcement. The work plan would reflect the activities be consistent with the project narrative and budget of the application.

Going on to letters of commitment from key participating organizations and agencies you would include information on the commitment of the project that would be submitted in the application. So, the proposal would have Letters of Commitment, letters of support of additional entity partners, community collaborators, that would assist with the caring out of the activities for the Alternative Financing Program.

So, you know, I can't emphasize enough obviously that the due date is June 28. That is a little bit less than a month from today. May 31, 2022. You have essentially four weeks for potential applicants to submit their proposals. Please do so, please make sure that the applications are submitted on time. Again, strongly encourage to submit your application a minimum of three to five days prior to the application closing date.

You can always submit an application early if that makes sense. I've seen it where some entities have submitted an application early. It can be a tricky process, but it has happened before where an application was submitted and then there was another application that was submitted on top of that. Don't necessarily think that should be the way to go, but just want to ensure that you're getting your proposals in on time, don't want to risk that something might occur, technical difficulty with the submission if you're doing so at the last minute or at some point on the last day.

Obviously when submitting your application via grants.gov you have a designated authorized organization representative submitting for your organization. You register with grants.gov as the AOR for this. And there are steps outlined for that on Grants.gov: https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html

If you're experiencing problems submitting your application through grants.gov, please contact the grants.gov support desk. That is a toll free number. It's 1-800-518-4726. And again, you'd obtain the grants.gov support desk number and keep a record of that.

So the funding restrictions, you know, for the AT AFP is fairly straightforward as it relates to other activities that are not fundable by HHS ACL. What is not fundable? Construction and/or major of rehabilitation buildings, basic research, for example, scientific or medical experiments, continuation of existing projects without expansion or new and innovative approaches.

In terms of the application review information, I'd like to get into that a little bit. So, for the criteria, note that reviewers of applications report that an application written in a format that follows the peer reviewer criteria and contains a separate budget section, greatly facilitates the review process.

Such a process for this priority includes in Section A, a proposed intervention, the Section B, special target populations and organizations, problem statement, Section C. I think maybe this was flipped when it was - when the funding announcement was issued and published, but it's C problem statement D, project personnel, E, organizational capacity, F, project management, G, project evaluation and H, budget section. It includes in the Appendices: assurances, certifications, resumes, bibliography, letters of support, etc. Must mention also, project work plan.

For the proposed intervention for the AT AFP priority, the maximum points is 40. And, for AFP applications there will be a total score assigned at a maximum of 100 points across the eight sections of selection criteria that I mentioned. The proposed intervention, Section A, is the one containing the most points.

For this section, criteria would focus on does the AFP clearly and adequately respond to the Funding Opportunity Announcement, as described in this program announcement? Does the AFP include a high quality plan for project implementation, use appropriate tools to ensure successful achievement of the project? Does the Alternative Financing Program represent an exceptional approach to this funding opportunity?

Will the AFP successfully address the needs of target populations submitted within the proposal and as well as other, additional identified needs? Is the AFP likely to build capacity to provide, improve, or expand services that address the needs of the target population? Will the AFP establish linkages with other appropriate agencies and organizations providing services to the target population?

Does the Alternative Financing Program encourage consumer involvement, address a procedure to ensure consumer choice and consumer-control oversight of the program? The extent to which the AFP involves development, or demonstration of promising new strategies to build on alternatives to existing strategies while incorporating credit building activities including financial education and information about possible funding sources.

Does the AFP propose a design that would build statewide capacity, sustain the program, mirror results that extend beyond the period of the federal financial assistance which is that 12-month project? And of course, also the sustainability plan submitted within the proposal.

The next section is special target populations and organizations. This is 15 points. In determining the quality of the services to be provided by the proposed AFP, the reviewers would consider the quality and sufficiency of the strategies for ensuring equal access for the services provided by the program. Just note that there's focus throughout all ACL-funded priorities, including this one, to focus on underrepresented individuals based on race color, national origin, gender, age or disability.

The special target population section will look at the extent to which the services to be provided by the applicant would reflect up-to-date knowledge and effective practices to guide the design of program.

What is the likely impact of the services to be provided by the proposed Alternative Financing Program and the intended recipients of those services? The extent to which the services provided by the proposed AFP will be collaborative and have appropriate partners to maximize the effectiveness of the project services.

So, you know, it's important for Alternative Financing Programs to engage in and partnering with community-based organizations, in order to ensure that greater needs are met through the program.

Will the AFP address specific gaps or weaknesses along those lines within this section in services and opportunities that have been identified to be addressed with the project, including the magnitude and scope of increasing services and addressing those gaps or weaknesses identified?

In C program statement, there's ten points. Are the AFP's proposed services appropriate to the needs of the intended recipients or beneficiaries of those services? Are they focused on those with the greatest needs in the community in terms of the extent in which the services provided by the AFP will focus on those in most need and also the magnitude of the needs of the services provided, the activities to be carried out by that proposed Alternative Financing Program?

The project personnel, in D, is five points. This section encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age or disability with respect to the staff that conduct the activities of the Alternative Financing Program.

The time commitments of the project director and other key project personnel would be appropriate and adequate to meet the objectives of the proposed Alternative Financing Program, as well as the qualifications including relevant training and experience of the AFP project director and other key project personnel for the proposal for Alternative Financing Program funds.

Within organizational capacity, this is E, there's ten points maximum. Look at the adequacy of support, including facilities, equipment, supplies, other resources that would be necessary for the lead applicant in the proposal to carry out the objectives of the proposal. Demonstrated commitment of each partner in the proposed project for implementation and success of the AFP. The extent to which the budget is sufficient to support the proposed project. And also the proposed AFP would involve the use of sufficient strategies, including the use of technology as appropriate and the leveraging of non-project resources for the success of the AFP.

For F project management, it's five points to assess the adequacy of the management plan to achieve objectives of the proposed Alternative Financing Program on time and within budget, including clearly defined responsibilities, focusing also on ensuring high quality products and services from the proposed Alternative Financing Program. Does the applicant ensure that there is a diversity of perspectives that are brought, you know, brought to bear in the operation of the proposed Alternative Financing Program, including those of individuals with disabilities, family members, guardians, advocates, teachers, community members, a variety of others within the field in order to represent beneficiaries of these services and others to enhance people to be able to get assistive technology to meet their goals in community, education, and employment settings?

Project evaluation in Section G, that's a maximum of five points. Are the methods of evaluation appropriate to the goals and objectives and outcomes of the proposed AFP? Does it provide for examining the effectiveness of the project implementation strategies? Does the evaluation provide performance, feedback and periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes and continuous improvement in the operation of the Alternative Financing Program?

H budget section, this is ten points resulting in a total of 100, f we add it all up. The budget page is the last section and you would want to determine is the budget submitted for this FY 2022 grant award justified with respect to the adequacy and reasonableness of resources that would be used for the administration of the proposed AFP?

Does the AFP address the establishment of a restricted account using controlled funds and develop a sustainability plan for program administration? We'll look at the extent to which the time commitment of the proposed director, and additional key staff on the project is sufficient to assure that there's success towards the establishment or expansion of the Alternative Financing Programs.

There's some additional key points, you know, to note with respect to the AT AFP Funding Opportunity Announcement. There's an independent review panel of at least three individuals who will evaluate applications that pass the responsiveness and screening criteria for the AT AFP competition. These reviewers are experts in their field, drawn from academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, state and local government, federal agencies. The final award decisions will be made by the administrator of ACL.

The anticipated project start date is September 1, 2022. For the award notices, successful applicants will receive an electronic Notice of Award. Unsuccessful applicants are generally notified within 30 days of the final funding decision and would receive a disapproval letter via email from the Administration for Community Living.

The award is subject to Health and Human Services Administrative requirements which can be found in 45 CFR Part 75 and standard terms and conditions included in the Notice of Award implemented through the HHS grants policy statement.

Reporting frequency will be noted by ACL with the terms and conditions on the Notice of Award. I mentioned that there would be within three months or so of the start of the project that there will be a submission of policies and procedures for new grant that would be issued and funded to start September 1 2022. There's also the submission of the semi-annual report as well as a final report.

Well, I've taken up about I think 40 minutes so far and just wanted to pause for a moment and perhaps go into some content that has to do with some frequently asked questions for this priority. And so, some of these are - some questions that would be helpful for some of you, in terms of the design of the application and the process for the proposal that you're intending to submit for this competition.

So, one of the questions is, "Can we subcontract some or all of the Alternative Financing Program Grant activities?"

Answer: Grantees, not the federal government, decide whether it's in their best interest to subcontract some of the grant activities. That said, it's important that the grantee realize that the administrative responsibilities, oversight of all the grant activities remain with the grantee. It's recommended when subcontracting, the grantee would retain sufficient funding to adequately fulfill the administrative oversight and sustainability responsibilities under the grant.

There's a question, "Is there an upper limit on the amount of indirect costs that will be permitted?"

Answer: No, but applications that reflect lower administrative expenses will receive more favorable ratings in that category. For each 12-month budget period, grantees must recalculate their allowable indirect cost rate, which is a percentage of the portion of the grant award that is used annually for the program administration related to the Alternative Financing Program.

Question: "What is the process for obtaining an indirect cost rate agreement with US, Department of Health and Human Services?"

Answer: So, there's the Department of Health and Human Services cost allocation services, CAS, is the cognizant federal agency for negotiating an indirect agreement. Contact information and application process are provided at the CAS Web site. It's https:\\rates.psc.gov.

Another question, "Is the AFP funding opportunity open to existing and new AFPs?" The answer is yes to both.

Question: "Can we - can an application proposal support an AFP to serve more than one state?"

Answer: There's nothing in the Funding Opportunity Announcement that prevents a multi-state consortium from applying. Multi-state groups or consortia are eligible to apply for this funding opportunity.

Question: “Are the budget narrative justification and budget template included in the 25-page limit for the project narrative of the AFP grant application?"

As noted, the answer is no. The budget narrative justification and budget template are not part of the 25-page limit for the project narrative section.

Question: "What are the spacing guidelines for the project narrative of the AFP grant application?"

Answer: Again, it's essential that the project narrative section of your proposal be double-spaced.

Question: "Where is the information in the proposal included on how programs with previous AFP grant funds were spent?"

Answer: So, the question is, if an applicant had received an award prior to this competition, what would they do with that information? And there was that section that I noted referencing section one funding opportunity description under three previous grant recipients on that - on Page 3 of the Funding Opportunity Announcement.

The applicants that would have previously received an AFP grant award from ACL under a prior year opportunity would provide that information. If applicable, the applicant submits a separate attachment that is not included in the 25-page limit narrative of the current proposal and provides that information on those awards or awards that were previously received from ACL under those prior funding opportunities.

So I think we have - we do have some time remaining if there was - this might be an opportunity for some questions following the content today. And so I don't know if anyone - we can go ahead and open up the line to see if there are any questions that we can have asked for this Funding Option Announcement.

Coordinator: Thank you. To ask a question please press Star 1. Please ensure that your phone is a muted and record your name clearly when prompted. To withdraw your request, please press Star 2.

Question from (Susan). Your line is open.

(Susan): Hi (Rob). Thank you very much for today's talk. I have laryngitis, so excuse me. I have a quick question. Do you know of any primary activities? Are there any activities other than the exchange of money that would count as financing?

Robert Groenendaal: Are there any other activities other than the exchange of money that would count as financing? Do I know of any primary activities...

(Susan): Like giving away devices?

Robert Groenendaal: Giving away devices? Yes. So, the intent of the Alternative Financing Priority, Alternative Financing Program priority is for individuals to purchase and acquire AT devices. And, so in terms of the purchasing, you know, as well as the purchasing of those AT devices, there's a set of types of alternative financing mechanisms that can be a part of this process for Alternative Financing Programs to assist individuals to purchase devices for use. And so that is essentially how these programs work for individuals.

And the main thing is for individuals to acquire needed assistive technology and for the programs to sustain themselves, obviously, as well as enhanced consumer choice and control...

(Susan): Right.

Robert Groenendaal: ...and to serve the entire communities and provide the ability within the proposal a holistic way of having the opportunity to have access to a variety of types of assistive technology devices and services.

(Susan): I think that answers. Thank you very much. So you are in fact also making a distinction between state financing and alternative financing. So thank you. I'm assuming I'm correct, right?

Robert Groenendaal: I hope so, yes. I mean often, maybe look back at the language there that - in the recording...

(Susan): Okay. Thank you very much.

Coordinator: No further questions on the phone at this time.

Robert Groenendaal: Okay. Well, that's excellent. Thank you so much for hosting this call, this information call on this opportunity. And so I guess we'll be able to conclude this meeting, at least ten minutes early, right? I hope everyone has a wonderful afternoon.

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