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2017 VOCA AWARD FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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Thank you for submitting an application for the VOCA grant. Every RFP is challenging because invariably, there are *more* applicants requesting *more* funding than we have to allocate. That also makes it exciting, especially in the case of this VOCA grant, because we are able to see new projects and proposals from our current and potentially new sub grantees. It can also be challenging because as in this case, the award was for 17 million dollars and we had 56 applications with proposals totaling close to 50 million dollars. An application may have been scored relatively high and/or provided all the required elements but may still not have been awarded.

The critical elements reviewed, as outlined in the RFP and the webinars included:

- Adherence to the technical guidelines required by the proposal, the narratives that supported the amount requested, and an accurate and complete proposed budget along with required attachments.
- Whether services proposed were allowable under the VOCA federal guidelines.
- Whether services included in the request were Medicaid reimbursable or available through other agencies.
- The location of the agency and whether the services being requested were priority areas as outlined in the RFP.
- Duplication of services regionally
- If an agency or organization is currently funded by the Division, current compliance and achievement of goals and objectives were also considered

Following a month of individual review and analysis, the entire evaluation team convened for several days to discuss the proposals and provide scores and recommended funding. This discussion included all of the above elements and allowed the entire team to review the awards from a regional and total services perspective.

Subsequent meetings with Division and Department leadership were held to ensure that each application was given the most equitable and appropriate consideration.

FREQUENT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE GRANT AWARD

1. I feel like our application had all the requirements and even had services to underserved populations. I don't understand why we didn't get funded. What else were they looking for?

ANSWER: An application may have been scored high and/or provided all the required elements but may still not have been awarded depending on all the selection criteria. While the evaluators knew the total of the grant award (17 million), they were instructed to grade each application on its merit, using the score sheet included in the RFP. Some of the critical elements they reviewed, as outlined in the RFP and the webinars were:

- Adherence to the technical guidelines required by the proposal, the narratives that supported the amount requested, and an accurate and complete proposed budget along with required attachments.
- Whether services proposed were allowable under the VOCA federal guidelines.
- Whether services included in the request were Medicaid reimbursable or available through other agencies.
- The location of the agency and whether the services being requested were priority areas as outlined in the RFP.
- Duplication of services regionally

- If an agency or organization is currently funded by the Division, current compliance and achievement of goals and objectives were also considered

2. How many reviewers were there?

ANSWER: Depending on the RFP, the evaluation committee can be as small as three or as large as 8 or more. For this RFP, we had 10, who were from multiple agencies. We do this to ensure we have an objective process along with subject matter experts in the field.

3. How many people reviewed our application? Did everyone get to weigh in?

ANSWER: Each of the evaluators were each given up to five applications to review; three of the evaluators reviewed all 56. Following a month of individual review and analysis, the entire evaluation team convened for several days to discuss the proposals and provide scores and recommended funding. This discussion included all of the above elements and allowed the entire team to review and discuss all of the applications from a regional and total services perspective. Many applications may have had high scores and/or recommendations for high or full funding. It was at this point, that discussion took place around of the criteria below and such as:

- Adherence to the technical guidelines required by the proposal, the narratives that supported the amount requested, and an accurate and complete proposed budget along with required attachments.
- Whether services proposed were allowable under the VOCA federal guidelines.
- Whether services included in the request were Medicaid reimbursable or available through other agencies.
- The location of the agency and whether the services being requested were priority areas as outlined in the RFP.
- Duplication of services regionally
- If an agency or organization is currently funded by the Division, current compliance and achievement of goals and objectives were also considered
- Cost effectiveness and sustainability of the program

4. Did anyone from the Department level review the decisions?

ANSWER: Yes. In an effort to ensure critical services are getting to the most vulnerable and appropriate populations, the DCFS GMU team worked closely with the DHHS Office of Community Partnerships and Grants (CPG, formerly known as the Grants Management Unit) which also played an integral part in the evaluation and funding decision of your award. Subsequent meetings with Division and Department leadership were held to ensure that each application was given the most equitable and appropriate consideration.

5. Did you fund the same people you always do? Did anyone new “make the cut”?

ANSWER: Yes. Several new agencies that have not been previously funded, were awarded VOCA funds. Many of these proposed services not previously offered or located in underserved areas. VOCA federal guidelines require the State to ensure agencies funded through VOCA have an established reputation of providing services. For new applications, VOCA federal guidelines also have requirements such as program sustainability beyond federal funding, etc.

6. Would someone be able to review my application with me and assist me for the next time?

ANSWER: DCFS wants every organization to be successful and if time allows, we can review the application and provide some general comments around the request. Ensuring that an application falls within the guidelines set forth in the RFP as well as (and importantly) the services are allowable under the federal guidelines (links and info also provided in the RFP) are the most important way you can ensure a strong application.

7. Is there an appeal process?

ANSWER: The State Administrative Manual (SAM) Section 3020 addresses grant awards and requires an agency to have a method “to address complaints”. Any complaints regarding an award or denial of award may be elevated to the Division Administrator and/or designee but does not guarantee a repeal of the funding decision.

8. Will I have another chance to apply?

ANSWER: Yes. Continue to check the Division website for new RFPs and/or opportunities for funding. With the increase in VOCA funding expected to continue, the State is conducting a gap analysis to ensure funding and services are always reaching the areas that have the most critical needs. Results of this analysis may result in some additional future funding opportunities. You may also request your name be added to a list of interested candidates. The GMU will ensure you are sent an announcement of any RFP in which you might be interested but they will always be posted on the Division website.

9. How does the RFP process work? We never did ours this way.

ANSWER: The process for an RFP has several steps. In some cases, our State Purchasing Office will conduct the RFP but with Division grants, we are allowed to conduct them, after receiving a waiver from the State Purchasing offer, because of the unique and special program requirements. Requirements for the grant award process are found in the State Administrative Manual (SAM), Section 3020.

After we issue the RFP, we offer/require several webinars that you attended and that explained the process, requirements, etc. and allowed for questions. We also posted, as required by SAM, the questions on the website throughout the review period. Once the applications were received, the evaluation committee was given about three weeks to a month to review and score the applications.

Depending on the RFP, the evaluation committee can be as small as three or as large as 8 or more. For this RFP, we had 10, who were from multiple agencies. We do this to ensure we have an objective process along with subject matter experts in the field.

Each of the evaluators were each given up to five applications to review; three of the evaluators reviewed all 56. Following a month of individual review and analysis, the entire evaluation team convened for several days to discuss the proposals and provide scores and recommended funding. This discussion included all of the above elements and allowed the entire team to review and discuss all of the applications from a regional and total services perspective.