



Social Security Administration

Funding Opportunity Title:	Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP)
Funding Opportunity Number:	ICAP-ICAP-21-001
Financial Assistance/CFDA Number:	96.007
Due Date for Applications:	Monday, June 21, 2021

I. Program Description

A. Program purpose

This funding opportunity will establish a new cooperative agreement program to allow the Social Security Administration (SSA) to collaborate with States, private foundations, and other non-federal groups and organizations who have the interest and ability to identify, operate, and partially fund interventional research. The research and interventions under this program will target the increased employment and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities, including people of color and underserved communities (whether beneficiaries, applicants, or potential applicants of the Disability Insurance (DI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs); coordinating planning between private and public human services agencies to improve the administration and effectiveness the DI, SSI, and related programs; assisting claimants in underserved communities apply for or appeal decisions on claims for DI and SSI benefits; and conducting outreach to children with disabilities who are potentially eligible to receive SSI.

SSA intends the projects to have a project period of 5 years, with the first year intended to put any necessary data agreements into place, recruit additional partners¹, allow the recipient to secure additional funding from other sources, and other implementation planning activities. If the project is able to meet these milestones in the first year, funding will be continued to field and evaluate the project for up to four years.

B. Background

There is increased attention by policymakers to the employment of individuals with disabilities and their participation in the DI and SSI programs (e.g., the [SSDI Solutions](#) and [SSI Youth Solutions](#) initiatives). Usually, SSA's demonstration projects test new policies and programs designed within SSA to improve employment and self-sufficiency for beneficiaries, applicants, and potential applicants. Due to the recent growth in awareness of

¹ In this request for applications, partners include all collaborating parties on a proposed project (e.g., SSA, the lead applicant, sub-awardees, grant organizations, etc.)

public-policy interventional research outside the traditional SSA-led demonstration agenda, multiple entities (e.g., States, foundations, employer associations, not-for-profit organizations) have shown expanded interest in testing policies that complement SSA's policies or require a waiver of SSA program rules. This work will complement and be coordinated with SSA's current demonstrations and partnerships with other Federal agencies. Partnering with external organizations benefits SSA in several ways. Cost sharing from other funding sources, along with our research funds expands the reach of our research portfolio. SSA will also benefit from the ideas brought by entities with first-hand experience with issues related to the agency's own policies and programs. SSA also expects all projects to include people of color and members of underserved communities, both on their research teams and in the intervention's target population, as appropriate.

SSA's demonstration authority for this solicitation is derived from Section 1110² [42 U.S.C. § 1310] of the Social Security Act (Act). Section 1110 focuses on preventing or reducing dependency on Social Security programs and coordinating planning between human services agencies to improve program administration and effectiveness, and allows SSA to waive requirements, conditions, and limitations of Title XVI, the SSI program. The interventions proposed through this cooperative agreement program will be performed in cooperation between SSA and the awardees, with substantial involvement from SSA. SSA may have the authority to waive program rules for proposed interventions. When SSA agrees to waive such rules, SSA will require a greater level of involvement and control in the project.

These cooperative agreements represent a valuable opportunity for groups to partner with SSA on the development and evaluation of the proposed intervention. When SSA data is needed for the proposed intervention or evaluation, SSA may include data sharing terms as a part of the cooperative agreement. All data sharing must be consistent with applicable law and regulation.

C. Priority topics of interest

Proposals must address goals under at least one of the following priority topics. Proposals should identify the priority topic(s) the proposed intervention(s) will address and explain how the intervention(s) would address the priority topic(s).

- Examining the structural barriers in the labor market, including for racial, ethnic, or other underserved communities, including people with disabilities, that increase the likelihood of people receiving or applying for DI or SSI benefits;
- Promoting self-sufficiency by helping people enter, stay in, or return to the labor force, including children and youth;
- Coordinating planning between private and public human services agencies to improve the administration and effectiveness the DI, SSI, and related programs;

² [Full text of Section 1110](#)

- Assisting claimants in underserved communities apply for or appeal decisions on claims for DI and SSI benefits; and
- Conducting outreach to children with disabilities who are potentially eligible to receive SSI.

II. Award Information

A. Type of award

SSA expects to award at least two awards totaling up to \$6 million (combined) in cooperative agreements under this request for applications (RFA). The total amount awarded will be determined based on the strength of the applications received and programmatic considerations. SSA reserves the right to determine the number of awards, make no awards, or to make awards for amounts less than the amounts requested by the applicants.

Cooperative agreements require close cooperation and coordination between SSA and the awardees. SSA will have substantial involvement in the administration of the cooperative agreement, and SSA's input and approval is required before conducting most activities.

B. Award amount and period of performance

The agreements will have one base year with four one-year option years. The one-year base period of each cooperative agreement will support the development of data sharing agreements, project planning, evaluation design, and other administrative aspects of the agreement. If, at the end of the first year, or sooner if the necessary agreements and other planning and administrative aspects are in place, the planning process results in an evaluable project, as determined by SSA, cooperative agreements may be extended for up to four additional years during which the awardee will implement and evaluate the intervention.

The start date will be no later than September 30, 2021. Applicants may not apply for more than the ceiling of \$3 million from SSA for each causal intervention or the ceiling of \$1.5 million for each feasibility intervention. Applications with budgets including expectations of funding from SSA exceeding the ceiling will be deemed non-responsive and will not be considered. SSA will only consider one application per organization. See Section V. for information on the scoring selection criteria.

Projects require a 40 percent cost share. The budgeted costs of the project should include the non-cooperative agreement funds in order to be approved for award. Details of this requirement are found in Section III.B of this RFA.

SSA will determine a proposal's funding eligibility and level of funding based upon the evidence rating that currently exists for the proposed intervention or would likely be attained for the proposed intervention. SSA will also consider the efficacy (strength) of the proposed intervention. (See Section IV.B.ii.3.a.ii. for additional information on evidence ratings and proposal requirements.)

SSA may fund interventions for which there is a high level of causal evidence or a high likelihood of generating causal evidence, as identified using the criteria mentioned above, for up to 5 years with a total of up to \$3 million from SSA. Base year spending (i.e., the spending for the first year of the award) should be no more than \$250,000 or 10% of the total budget, whichever is greater.

Feasibility studies with no causal evidence, as identified using the criteria mentioned above, may be funded up to \$1.5 million. Base year spending should be no more than \$250,000 or 10% of the total budget, whichever is greater.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible applicants

The following applicants are eligible to apply and will be referred to throughout the RFA as the “lead applicant” or “applicant”:

- States: For purposes of this RFA, the term “State” shall be consistent with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) at 2 CFR Part 200, include any of a State’s agencies or instrumentalities, and the terms “local government” and “federally recognized Indian tribe” shall have the meanings given in the Uniform Guidance and set forth in Appendix I.1, Applicants. (2 CFR 200.54, 200.64)
- Local governments
- Federally recognized Indian tribes
- Foundations
- Employer associations
- Not-for-profit organizations
- For-profit organizations, such as firms
- Educational institutions

i. Responsibilities of the Lead Applicant

The lead applicant will serve as the awardee and have overall fiscal and administrative responsibility for the cooperative agreement, including performance of any sub-awardees. Fiscal responsibility may not be delegated to sub-awardees. Administrative responsibilities, such as project management, coordination, or delivery of intervention services, may only be delegated to sub-awardees with approval from SSA. The fiscal and administrative responsibilities for the cooperative agreement lead applicants include, but are not limited to, the following:

- the primary point of contact with SSA to receive and respond to all inquiries or communications under this RFA and any sub-recipients;
- the entity with authority to draw down funds;

- the entity responsible for submitting to SSA all work products under the cooperative agreement, including all related technical and financial reports, regardless of which partnership member performed the work;
- the entity that may request or agree to a revision or amendment of the cooperative agreement;
- the entity with overall responsibility for oversight or coordination of carrying out programmatic functions, including intervention implementation, administration, and collecting required project data, as well as the stewardship of all expenditures under the cooperative agreement;
- the entity responsible for working with SSA to close-out the cooperative agreement;
- the entity responsible for ensuring data accuracy, security, and privacy, including ensuring all individuals, including individuals under sub-awardees, follow all guidelines for protecting Personal Identifiable Information (PII) and ensuring completion of personnel suitability clearances.

B. Cost sharing or matching

The ICAP requires cost-sharing or other financial contributions from the applicant or any of the collaborative partners in the proposal. Proposals must provide evidence of meeting this cost-sharing requirement. Applicants are encouraged to collaborate with their partners and leverage resources to meet the cost-sharing requirement. The project requires a minimum cost sharing of 40% over the 5 years of the project. SSA uses the Total Project Cost Method to calculate cost-sharing. In this method, federal funds plus cost-share = total project cost. To calculate Required Recipient Cost-share Amount:

- $\text{Federal Award Amount} / \text{Federal Share Percentage} = \text{Adjusted (Total) Project Cost}$
- $\text{Required Recipient Share Percentage} \times \text{Adjusted Project Cost} = \text{Required Recipient Cost-share Amount}$

Awardees may use the first project year to secure other sources of funding in order to meet the 40 % cost-share required for all project years of the cooperative agreement funding; if the 40% cost-share is not met, projects will not continue. However, for the first year a project may be allowed to meet only 20% of the cost-sharing requirement, provided that the awardees' budget provides a plan to make up for the additional cost sharing over the remaining 4 years of the project.

Indirect costs can be used as part of the cost-sharing requirement, if the applicant already has approval for their indirect cost rates. In-kind contributions should not exceed 15% of cost share in the first year and 20% in following years.

While the minimum cost share requirement is 40%, projects are allowed and encouraged to see additional outside funding, though the federal award amount will not increase. An

applicant’s ability to secure funding above the minimum required cost share will be part of the application review and ratings.

C. Other eligibility criteria

- i.** The intervention must relate to one of the priority topic areas listed in the Program Description, Section I.C.

- ii.** Number of Applications Applicants May Submit
 SSA will consider only one (1) application from each applicant. If SSA receives multiple applications from the same applicant, SSA will only consider the most recently received application that met the June 21, 2021 deadline. If the most recent application is disqualified for any reason, SSA will not replace it with an earlier application.

- iii.** Application Screening Criteria
 Use the checklist below as a guide when preparing your application package to ensure that the application meets all of the screening criteria. This checklist is only an aid for applicants and should not be included in the application package. Use this checklist to ensure that your application contains all required items. If your application does not meet all of the screening criteria, it will not move forward through the merit review process (see Section V.B.).

Application Requirement	Complete?
The June 21, 2021 deadline submission requirements are met	
Eligibility	
To submit documents in Grants.gov, the components of the application are must be saved in any of the specified formats and are not corrupt. (<i>We will attempt to open the document, but will not take any additional measures in the event of problems with opening.</i>)	
Application for federal funds request does not exceed the ceiling amount.	
SAM Registration	
SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance, including a DUNS Number	

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. How to obtain an application package

This RFA, found at www.Grants.gov, contains all of the information and links to forms needed to apply for funding for this cooperative agreement program. Applicants must register for a Grants.gov account and submit the application on the site.

B. Content and form of application submission

- i.** Notice of Intent to Apply
 The Application Deadline is **Monday, June 21, 2021 at 11:59 PM Eastern Time**. SSA strongly encourages organizations interested in applying to submit to SSA a Letter of

Intent to Apply to the ICAP Office. Obtaining advance information about the potential number of applications, as well as the general structure of the proposed intervention projects and evaluation plans, prior to the application deadline will assist SSA in developing a more efficient application review process. A Letter of Intent to Apply should be submitted via e-mail to SSA.Demonstrations@ssa.gov on or prior to **May 21, 2021**. Please use “Intent to Apply” in the e-mail subject line and include the following information:

- The applicant’s name and address;
- A general overview of the intervention, including the target population and priority (from list in project description) the project will address, anticipated outcome(s) of the project, and a brief summary of the evaluation design (including, where applicable, federal data sets to which the project partners and/or evaluator anticipate needing to access, and the plan to gain access to that data);
- Existing evidence supporting the quality of causal evidence;
- Evidence supporting the efficacy (strength) of the intervention;
- Any preliminary information identifying the project partners;
- The intervention period (not to exceed five years, including one start-up year); and
- Total anticipated funding and total anticipated budget for the proposed project.

An applicant that does not submit a Letter of Intent to apply may still apply for a cooperative agreement, and an application may differ from what the applicant included in its Letter of Intent to Apply. See Section VIII.A regarding submission of proprietary information in response to this RFA.

ii. Application for project award

Proposals submitted in response to this RFA must consist of four separate and distinct parts:

- SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance;”
- SF-424A “Budget Information Form”
- Budget Narrative (upload);
- Budget Detail Worksheet
- Risk Analysis Questionnaire
- Project Narrative;
- Attachments to the Project Narrative;

If applicable, applications must also include the following:

- SF-LLL, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (Note: if you do not lobby, type “N/A” in the required fields; and

You must ensure that the funding amount requested is consistent across all parts and sub-parts of the application.

Below is a description of each required part of the application.

1. *SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance”*

You must complete the SF-424, “Application for Federal Assistance” (available in the Grants.gov Grant Opportunity Package).

In the address field, fill out the nine-digit (plus hyphen) zip code. Nine-digit zip codes can be looked up on the USPS website at <https://tools.usps.com/go/ZipLookupAction!input.action>.

The SF-424 must clearly identify the applicant and must be signed by an individual with authority to enter into a grant or cooperative agreement. Upon confirmation of an award, the individual signing the SF-424 on behalf of the applicant is considered the Authorized Representative of the applicant. As stated in block 21 of the SF-424 form, the signature of the Authorized Representative on the SF-424 certifies that the organization is in compliance with the Assurances and Certifications form SF-424B (available at <https://apply07.grants.gov/apply/forms/sample/SF424B-V1.1.pdf>). You do not need to submit the SF-424B with the application.

- Requirement for DUNS Number
 - All applicants for federal grant and cooperative agreement funding opportunities must have a DUNS number, and must supply their DUNS Number on the SF-424. The DUNS Number is a nine-digit identification number that uniquely identifies business entities. If you do not have a DUNS Number, you can get one for free by calling 1-866-705-5711 or visiting the D&B website: <https://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/displayHomePage.do>.
 - Grant and cooperative agreement recipients authorized to make sub-awards must meet these requirements related to DUNS Numbers
 - Grant and cooperative agreement recipients must notify potential sub-awardees that no entity may receive a sub-award from you unless the entity has provided its DUNS number to you.
 - Grant and cooperative agreement recipients may not make a sub-award to an entity unless the entity has provided its DUNS number to you.
 - (See, Appendix A to 2 CFR section 25.)

- Requirement for Registration with SAM

- Applicants must register with the System for Award Management (SAM) before submitting an application. Find instructions for registering with SAM can at <https://www.sam.gov>.
- Award recipients must maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application under consideration. To remain registered in the SAM database after the initial registration, the applicant is required to review and update the registration at least every 12 months from the date of initial registration or subsequently update its information in the SAM database to ensure it is current, accurate, and complete. For purposes of this paragraph, the applicant is the entity that meets the eligibility criteria and has the legal authority to apply and to receive the award. If an applicant has not fully complied with these requirements by the time the Grant Officer is ready to make a federal award, the Grant Officer may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

2. *SF-424A “Budget Information Form”, Budget Narrative and Budget Detail Worksheet*

You must complete the SF-424A Budget Information Form provides SSA with summary information (available in the Grants.gov Grant Opportunity Package). In preparing the Budget Information Form, you must also provide a concise narrative explanation and show calculations to support the budget request, explained in detail below. The Budget Detail Worksheet included in the Grant Opportunity Package is a sample that includes some formulas. You are free to modify the format as long as the calculations are clear and concise.

Budget Narrative and Detail Worksheet: The budget narrative must provide a description of costs associated with each line item on the SF-424A. It must describe how the proposed budget aligns to the project work plan and identify how each milestone will be adequately funded within the proposed budget. Overhead and administrative costs should be reasonable and clearly identified, such that they can be compared to the level of funding allocated to project service coordination and delivery. It is expected that a majority of project funding will be devoted to project service coordination and delivery. The budget narrative should detail how the applicant plans to meet the cost sharing requirements set forth in Section III.B.

Use the following guidance for preparing the Budget Detail Worksheet:

- **Personnel:** List all staff positions by title (both current and proposed). Provide the annual salary of each position, the percentage of each position’s time devoted to the project, the amount of each position’s salary funded by

the cooperative agreement, and the total personnel cost for the period of performance.

- **Fringe Benefits:** Provide a breakdown of the amounts and percentages that comprise fringe benefit costs such as health insurance, FICA, retirement, etc.
- **Travel:** Specify the purpose, mileage, per diem, estimated number of in-state and out-of-state trips, and other costs for each type of travel.
- **Equipment:** Identify each item of equipment you expect to purchase which has an estimated acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit (or if your capitalization level is less than \$5,000, use your capitalization level) and a useful lifetime of more than one year (see 2 CFR 200.33 for the definition of Equipment). List the quantity and unit cost per item. Items with a unit cost of less than \$5,000 are supplies, not “equipment”. In general, we do not permit the purchase of equipment during the last funded year of the cooperative agreement.
- **Supplies:** Identify categories of supplies (e.g. office supplies) in the detailed budget and list the quantity and unit cost per item. Supplies include all tangible personal property other than “equipment” (see 2 CFR 200.94 for the definition of Supplies).
- **Contractual:** Under the Contractual line item, delineate contracts and sub-awards separately. Contracts are defined according to 2 CFR 200.22 as a legal instrument by which a non-federal entity purchases property or services needed to carry out the project or program under a federal award. A sub-award, defined by 2 CFR 200.92, means an award provided by a pass-through entity to a sub-recipient for the sub-recipient to carry out part of a federal award received by the pass-through entity. It does not include payments to a contractor or payments to an individual that is a beneficiary of a federal program. For each proposed contract and sub-award, specify the purpose and estimated cost.
- **Construction:** Construction costs are not allowed and this line must be left as zero. Minor alterations to adjust an existing space for activities that are part of the cooperative agreement (such as a classroom alteration) may be allowable. We do not consider this as construction and you must show the costs on other appropriate lines such as Contractual.
- **Other:** Provide clear and specific detail, including costs, for each item so that we are able to determine whether the costs are necessary, reasonable and allocable. List any item, such as stipends or incentives, not covered elsewhere here.
- **Indirect Costs:** If you include indirect costs in the budget, then you must include one of the following:
 - If you have a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), provide an explanation of how the indirect costs are calculated. This explanation should include which portion of each line item, along

with the associated costs, are included in your cost allocation base. Also, provide a current version of the NICRA.

OR

- If you intend to claim indirect costs using the 10 percent de minimis rate, please confirm that your organization meets the requirements as described in 2 CFR 200.414(f). Clearly, state that your organization has never received a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), and your organization is not one described in Appendix VII of 2 CFR 200, paragraph (D)(1)(b).
- Applicants choosing to claim indirect costs using the de minimis rate must use Modified Total Direct Costs (see 2 CFR 200.68 below for definition) as their cost allocation base. Provide an explanation of which portion of each line item, along with the associated costs, are included in your cost allocation base. Note that there are various items not included in the calculation of Modified Total Direct Costs. See below the definitions to assist you in your calculation.

2 CFR 200.68 Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each sub-award (regardless of the period of performance of the sub-awards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each sub-award in excess of \$25,000. Other items may only be excluded when necessary to avoid a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

See Section IV.E.i for more information. Note that the SF-424, SF-424A, and budget narrative must include the entire federal grant or cooperative agreement amount requested.

Applicants should list the same requested Federal grant or cooperative agreement amount on the SF-424, SF-424A, and budget narrative. If SSA finds minor inconsistencies between the budget amounts specified on the SF-424, SF-424A, and the budget narrative, SSA will consider the SF-424 the official funding amount requested. However, if the amount specified on the SF-424 would render the application nonresponsive, the Grants Management Officer will use his or her discretion to determine whether the intended funding request (and match or cost share if applicable) is within the responsive range.

3. *Project Narrative*

The Project Narrative must demonstrate the applicant's capability to plan and implement the proposed project in accordance with the provisions of this RFA. It should provide a comprehensive framework and description of all aspects of the proposed project. It must be succinct, self-explanatory, and well organized so that reviewers can understand the proposed project. Instructions for the content of the Project Narrative are provided below.

The applicant is responsible for funding and securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the proposed project.

Applicants are discouraged from submitting information considered proprietary unless it is deemed essential for proper evaluation of the application. See Section VIII.A regarding submission of proprietary information in response to this RFA.

The Project Narrative is limited to no more than 40 double-spaced single-sided 8.5 x 11 inch pages with Times New Roman 12 point text font and standard 1-inch margins. Attachments to the project narrative are not included in the 40 page limit but we will only exclude those attachments listed in the Attachments section below from the page limit. Applicants must number the Project Narrative beginning with page number 1. There should be no more than 2 call out boxes per page. Any text in call out boxes or other exhibits should be no smaller than 8 point text font. Applications should be 508 compliant.

SSA will not evaluate materials beyond the specified page limit in the application review process.

The following instructions provide all of the information needed to complete the Project Narrative. Carefully read and consider each section, and include all required information in your Project Narrative. The agency will evaluate the Project Narrative using the evaluation criteria identified in Section V.A.

Applicants should use the following section headers for the Project Narrative:

- Strategic Approach and Project Design
 - Comprehensive Description of the Model
 - Supporting Evidence
 - Evaluation Strategy
 - Work Plans and Timelines
- Organizational Capacity and Quality of Key Personnel
- Management/Operational Plan
 - Risk Management and Opportunities
 - Continuous Quality Improvement

Below is a description of what must be included in each section of the project narrative.

a. Strategic Approach and Project Design

This section must include at least the following subsections:

- Comprehensive Description of Model
- Supporting Evidence
- Evaluation Strategy
- Work Plans and Timelines

Additional subsections may be included, but size limitations for the project narrative will apply.

i. Comprehensive Description of Model

This subsection of the application must describe the design of the proposed model including the type, duration, and scope of the services to be provided in the service delivery model and the outreach, recruitment, and enrollment strategies that will be employed for identifying and targeting the applicable population and engaging stakeholders. Applicants are encouraged to use Community Engaged Methods as a part of their project design, specifically the inclusion of people from the target communities in the development of the research design, data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings. As appropriate, the design should include how the project will incorporate people of color, underserved communities, or those with lived experiences in the issues studied as stakeholders and in their target population for the project. The plan must clearly address the priority topic(s) to be addressed by the project design. It must also show how the requested funds and other resources will support the proposed activities and how the proposed activities will lead to the proposed interim outputs and ultimate outcomes.

This subsection must describe specific strategies to be used or adapted by the project. The description must identify the theory of change for the model and its evidence base. The applicant must also identify the activities that will be conducted. Applicants must also describe any past and current efforts to address the issue. They must also describe how the activities in the proposed project differ from those currently occurring, and how the new activities will lead to improved outcomes, specifically, how the proposed intervention will benefit current, potential, or future beneficiaries.

Applicants must identify the target population(s) their efforts will focus upon and provide data and information to support the need for their proposed efforts, including characteristics, estimated size of total population, and expected sample size. Information must be provided to

explain how focusing on the target population aligns to the goals of their intervention. Applicants must include available detail on the evidence base for the target population. Projects must be tailored to the specific context(s) in which implementation is planned, including demographic and socioeconomic issues of relevance. In articulating the problem or issue, applicants must demonstrate the extent of the problem in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Assumptions used to determine and describe the target population and expected sample size should be included as part of the project narrative, as well as support for why each of these assumptions is reasonable (i.e., the assumptions should be clearly stated and supported).

ii. Supporting Evidence

The subsection must include a discussion of the evidence base for including each strategy with respect to the project and the target population and how the strategies will address the priority topic(s) problem(s) or issue(s) noted in the Strategic Approach and Project Design section of the Project Narrative. Applicants should use this section to support the cooperative agreement category for which they are applying, whether causal or feasibility.

There are two ways to qualify for the causal category of funding. Causal studies must either build on existing highly rated causal research or be designed with a methodology that could produce highly rated causal research. Well-designed studies that do not meet the threshold for high rated causality methodology would be eligible for feasibility category of funding.

If the proposed project builds on any prior research that has been previously reviewed and rated by a clearinghouse, such information should be included in the project narrative (see Section IV.B.ii.3). For a proposed project that does not build on research that has been previously reviewed and rated by a clearinghouse, the project narrative should include information about the rating the project would likely receive under the clearinghouses' criteria based on the project's design.

If applying for causal category funding based on prior research, applicants must provide rating(s) of causality from reputable evidence clearinghouses and ratings structures if available, including Department of Labor's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR), Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, and Health and Human Services' Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse.

All proposals must include information about any evidence ratings assigned to similar interventions and evaluation methods by relevant clearinghouses regarding the causal impact of the proposed intervention. Application reviewers will use the criteria from the Department of Labor’s Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR)³, the Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)⁴, the Administration for Children and Families’ Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse⁵, and other similar clearinghouses to determine the level of each proposal’s claims of, and likelihood of producing, causal evidence.

The clearinghouses rate causal studies. (Non-causal studies are not eligible for ratings, but the clearinghouses have provided guidelines for reviewing such studies that promote quality and consistency.) The clearinghouses assign causal studies one of three evidence ratings: high, moderate, or low. A high rating denotes strong evidence that the effect observed are solely attributable to the intervention. A moderate rating denotes some evidence that the effects are at least partially attributable to the intervention. A low rating denotes that there is little evidence that any effects observed can be attributed to the intervention. More information about the rating process can be found in publicly available reference documents for the CLEAR review process.⁶

Please refer to Section II.B for information on how evidence will effect the level of funding a project may request.

iii. Evaluation Strategy

This subsection must include the evaluation strategy for the intervention. The application must identify the evaluation methods to be used in the proposed project and any anticipated evaluation-related challenges. The evaluation panel will score proposals with strong causal identification strategies, such as randomized studies, and the ability to conduct a cost-benefit analysis higher in this area than those with weak identification strategies. However, all evaluation methods (including, but not limited to, qualitative, quantitative, participatory, mixed-methods, experimental, and quasi-experimental) are welcome and proposals will be judged by their overall completeness and quality.

³ <https://clear.dol.gov/>

⁴ <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>

⁵ <https://pathwaystowork.acf.hhs.gov/>

⁶ <https://clear.dol.gov/about>

This subsection must also include information on data that will be collected for evaluation and any data the applicant wishes to request from SSA. If an applicant's recruitment, implementation, or evaluation strategies require other SSA data, the application must clearly identify it so that SSA can determine whether it will be possible to provide the data during the period of performance. See Section VI.B.viii. for additional information.

Work Product Ownership and Rights in Data will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should include in their proposals to SSA any specific rights or ownership requested or claimed over the data or work product to be used, collected, or developed.

iv. Work Plans and Timelines

The work plan must include a description of the planning, start-up, implementation, closeout, and evaluation activities that will be conducted, along with a timeline and proposed milestones, outcomes, and metrics. Activities must include but are not limited to:

- Partnerships:
 - Establishing or finalizing necessary partnerships, MOUs, and sub-award agreements, including data sharing agreements and contracts and financial agreements for service delivery;
 - Meeting and engaging in strategic planning with partners identified in the application and other interested stakeholders to ensure service coordination and readiness for program implementation; and
- Partnership with SSA:
 - Clearly identify the role(s) you are proposing that SSA have, including any necessary data sharing agreements, policy consultations with subject matter experts, and time commitments.
- Service components and planning logistics:
 - Finalizing a plan for communication, outreach, recruitment, and enrollment of the target population; and
 - Establishing a process for any service or supports for participants.
- Personnel and training:
 - Developing training program and materials for service providers using evidence-based strategies and best practices to be used in the proposed model (identified in the previous section); and
 - Hiring and training of other necessary personnel.
- Implementation plan:

- Proposed milestones, interim outputs, and outcome goals;
- Proposed metrics for measuring process and program outputs and outcomes;
- A detailed project timeline;
- Initial plans for partnering with other key stakeholders;
- A proposed data collection plan, which identifies the data collection process and data sources that will be utilized, how the required programmatic data elements will be provided, and how the data will be used for operational purposes;
- A description of how any existing partner data systems will be utilized; and
- A justification of any proposed incentives to study/intervention participants, both financial and non-financial incentives, which includes a description of why the incentives are necessary to further cooperative agreement-related activities and identifies the incentive value(s) and how they will be distributed and tracked.
- List of proposed deliverables:
 - Project management reports;
 - Special topic reports; and
 - Final report(s).
 - The minimal requirements are laid out in Section VI.D.
- A viable strategy for identifying, recruiting, and enrolling a sufficient number of participants to allow for a valid evaluation of impacts, including:
 - How the proposed target population will be identified and recruited (e.g. through a health care organization, an employer, an insurer, or other existing entity), including a projected timeframe for recruitment;
 - How many individuals are estimated to qualify;
 - How many individuals the applicant expects to serve; and
 - A power analysis to show the size of effect that can be expected and why the expected effect size is policy relevant.
- Evaluation activities; and
- Communication/dissemination/engagement activities

b. Organizational Capacity and Quality of Key Personnel

This subsection must include information about and describe the readiness of the applicant and all partners to participate in both planning and implementation, and any resources that will be needed for full readiness to

implement the project, if selected. This must include past, relevant experience running large, complex demonstration projects or other complex interventional projects. All resources, personnel, and established and planned partnerships must be identified. The research team should be diverse and inclusive, including people of color, members of underserved communities, and those with lived experiences, as appropriate. Applicants are encouraged to include institutions of color and scholars of color or from underserved communities, including people with disabilities, as collaborative partners. Applicants should have experience working with people of color, underserved communities, and individuals with lived experiences, as appropriate.

Applicants must describe their capacity to effectively manage and carry out the programmatic, fiscal, administrative, and independent evaluation-related activities of the proposed projects. The application must describe the guiding principles of the organization and its past experience and track record of performance. It must also demonstrate an understanding of the needs of the community or population that the applicant seeks to target. The application must include a description of the governance, organizational, and structural functions that will be in place to implement, monitor, and operate the model. The tasks to be conducted by each administrative component must also be described.

Applicants also must include a list of key personnel. Each project must include at least a Principal Investigator and a Project Manager. This list should also include any position that will function as a lead for a particular task, including service administration and evaluation. For each person on this list, applicants must describe their relevant background, their roles, and overall responsibilities. Résumés must be included as attachments to the Project Narrative (see below).

Applicants must provide evidence of the following:

- The applicant must demonstrate relevant experience in successfully operating projects of similar size and complexity as well as the ability to support the independent evaluation. The applicant must provide up to five examples from the last five years to demonstrate successful operation experience and evaluation ability. The lead applicant must have the necessary facilities or the ability to secure such facilities. The lead applicant must also have the necessary infrastructure to effectively lead and implement the project.
- The establishment of a Leadership Team and the applicant's strategic plan for utilizing this team. The application must provide documentation that entities on the Leadership Team will have sustained, substantial commitment and active involvement. Such

documentation can be provided through signed MOUs, letters of commitment, or other similar documents.

- Documentation of the establishment of relevant partnerships and partners' relevant experience in evidence-based strategies.
- The professional qualifications required of the project manager, project coordinators, program data collection lead/evaluation coordinator, and other key personnel, along with how these qualifications will be sufficient to ensure proper management of all project activities, including timely reporting and the ability to manage strategic partnerships.

c. Management and Operational Plan

Applicants must submit a detailed Management and Operational Plan that:

- Describes the activities and budgets for the period of performance;
- Includes a detailed timeline for implementation with major milestones; and
- Articulates an effective strategy for self- monitoring, risk management, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

The plan must include roles and responsibilities of key partners and major milestones and dates for successfully executing the Management and Operational Plan.

The applicant must provide an organizational chart (see required attachment list below) demonstrating how the primary applicant will successfully manage this cooperative agreement and how the primary applicant will manage and facilitate the relationships between that entity and all other partnering or participating organizations to lead to the successful provision of services to participants under the model.

Applicants must explain in detail their project management approach and demonstrate their experience implementing a project of the proposed scope.

The plan must contain the following subsections: Risk Management and Opportunities and CQI:

i. Risk management and opportunities

This subsection must identify potential risks to planning and implementing the proposed project, such as difficulty recruiting a sufficient number of participants. Each identified risk must be accompanied by a proposed plan for addressing or overcoming the risk.

This subsection must also identify any opportunities to accelerate the project's planning or implementation and plans for taking advantage of such opportunities. Opportunities to accelerate the project could include leveraging existing partnerships.

ii. CQI

Awardees will be expected to analyze process data as part of CQI in order to improve processes **without changing the underlying model**. This subsection must describe the applicant's approach to CQI and how it will be coordinated with the evaluator. It must identify a specific CQI model and detail how the model will be utilized. The CQI plan must support the theory of change identified in the Strategic Approach and Project Design section of the Project Narrative and must clearly align with the required Project Logic Model attachment.

4. *Attachments to the Project Narrative*

In addition to the Project Narrative, you must submit attachments. All attachments must be clearly labeled as Attachments. We will only exclude those attachments listed below from the page limit.

You may include additional materials such as general letters of support. You must submit your application in one package because documents received separately will not be attached to the application for review.

Save all files with descriptive file names of 50 characters or less and only use standard characters in file names: A-Z, a-z, 0-9, and underscore (_). File names may not include special characters (e.g. &, -, *, %, /, #), periods (.), blank spaces or accent marks, and must be unique (i.e., no other attachment may have the same file name). You may use an underscore (example: my_Attached_File.pdf) to separate a file name.

Required Attachments

- Project Logic Model
- Staffing
 - Résumés of Proposed Key Personnel (no more than 1 page per person)
 - Organization Chart

Requested Attachments

We request the following attachments, as applicable, but their omission will not cause us to eliminate the application.

- Abstract
 - Applicants are strongly encouraged, though not required, to submit an up to three-page abstract summarizing the proposed project, including

but not limited to the scope of the project and proposed outcomes, including how the proposed intervention will benefit current, potential, or future beneficiaries. The abstract should include the following information:

- Lead applicant’s name and contact information
 - Project name/title
 - Description of proposed geographic areas to be served
 - Description of the proposed target population
 - Funding level requested and sources of additional funding
 - Overview of the proposed project including the proposed partners and the role that each will play
 - The proposed project overview should succinctly describe the activities to be carried out and the applicant’s plan for achieving their proposed outcomes. When submitting in grants.gov, this document should be uploaded as an attachment to the application package and specifically labeled “Abstract.”
- Indirect Cost Rate Agreement
 - If you are requesting indirect costs based on a Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement approved by your Federal Cognizant Agency, then attach the most recently approved Agreement. (For more information, see Section IV.B.2. and Section IV.E.1.) This attachment does not affect scoring of the application.
 - The evidence base for the target population as documented through reports, papers, or other available data.

C. Submission Date, Times, Process, and Addresses

All applications are due by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on **Monday, June 21, 2021**. To obtain an application package visit the Grants.gov website: <http://www.grants.gov/>. The application package includes the standard forms used to apply for SSA grants, i.e. SF-424, 424B and SF-LLL. Eligible applicants may apply via the new Grants.gov **Workspace** or by completing all necessary forms and documents offline and uploading them directly to the **Grants.gov** site.

The Funding Opportunity Number for this solicitation is ICAP-ICAP-21-001. The Grants.gov /Register/ webpage is available to help explain the registration and application submission process. In addition, new Federal award applicants may find the Grants.gov /Register/ Link at the following link to be helpful (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/register.html>).

If you experience problems with the steps related to registering to do business with the Federal Government or application submission, your first point of contact is the Grants.gov support staff at support@grants.gov, 1–800–518–4726. If this does not resolve your Grants.gov difficulties, you may also contact the SSA Grants Management Team at Grants.Team@ssa.gov for assistance. Please include ICAP Question in the subject line.

You may submit questions about the program to SSA_TA@grantreview.org. We will post all questions and answers regarding this Funding Opportunity to a dedicated website at <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/icap.html>. All potential applicants should monitor the website frequently to ensure that they have the latest updates and information.

D. Intergovernmental Review

This funding opportunity is not subject to Executive Order 12372, “Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.”

E. Funding Restrictions

All proposed project costs must be necessary and reasonable and in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget’s Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (OMB Uniform Guidance), codified at 2 CFR. Part 200. Determinations of allowable costs will be made in accordance with the Cost Principles, codified at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, Subpart E. Disallowed costs are those charges to a grant or cooperative agreement that the grantor agency or its representative determines not to be allowed in accordance with the Cost Principles or other conditions contained in the grant or cooperative agreement. Applicants, whether successful or not, will not be entitled to reimbursement of pre-award costs.

i. Indirect costs

As specified in Subpart E of the OMB Uniform Guidance Cost Principles, indirect costs are those that have been incurred for common or joint objectives and cannot be readily identified with a particular final cost objective. An indirect cost rate is required when an organization operates under more than one grant, cooperative agreement or other activity, whether federally-assisted or not. You have two options to claim reimbursement of indirect costs.

- Option 1: You may use a NICRA or Cost Allocation Plan (CAP) supplied by the Federal Cognizant Agency. If you do not have a NICRA/CAP or have a pending NICRA/CAP, and in either case choose to include estimated indirect costs in your budget, at the time of award the Grant Officer will release funds in the amount of 10% of salaries and wages to support indirect costs. Within 90 days of award, you are required to submit an acceptable indirect cost proposal or CAP to your Federal Cognizant Agency to obtain a provisional indirect cost rate. (See Section IV.B.4. for more information on NICRA submission requirements.)
- Option 2: Any organization that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate, with the exceptions noted at 2 CFR 200.414(f) in the Cost Principles, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (see 2 CFR 200.68 for definition) which may be used indefinitely. If you choose this option, this methodology must be used consistently for all federal awards until such time as you choose to negotiate for an indirect cost rate, which you may apply to do at any time. (See 2 CFR 200.414(f) for more information on use of the de minimis rate.)

ii. Travel

Any travel undertaken in performance of this cooperative agreement shall be subject to and in strict accordance with federal travel regulations.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Withdrawal of Applications: Applications may be withdrawn by written notice to the Grants Management Officer at any time before an award is made.

V. Application Review Information

A. Scoring criteria

This section fully describes the selection criteria for applications received in response to this funding opportunity. In preparing applications, applicants are strongly encouraged to review the programmatic requirements. Applications will be scored on a scale of 0-100 according to the point distribution specified in the table below. For scoring purposes, more weight will be given based on quality than on quantity.

Criterion	Points
Strength of Strategic Approach and Proposed Project Design	30
Strength of Evidence	15
Quality of Evaluation	15
Organizational Capacity	15
Budget and Budget Narrative	10
Monitoring and Reporting	15
Total	100

The following criteria will be used to assess applications received in response to this announcement:

i. Strength of Strategic Design and Proposed Project Design

The likelihood of success will be determined by whether the particular project is designed, structured, and implemented in a way that will foster success. To this end, the panels will assess the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of the applicant's work plan for delivering the intervention.

The design must be based on relevant evidence and appear to have a high likelihood of success, and the funding level requested should be commensurate with the level of evidence. The model design must be feasible and appear likely to result in significant improvement upon existing service. Panels will also review any Community Engaged Methods included in the project design to determine the level of inclusion of the people from the target communities in development, data collections, analysis, and dissemination of findings.

Applications will be assessed with respect to both the thoroughness of the timeline and the extent to which the intervention is achievable, particularly the service delivery plan. To the extent the applicant intends to use partners to secure additional funding and has not already identified and received commitments from them, the panel will consider the experience of the primary applicant or other secured partners in raising funds for social service investments, and the proposed plan for obtaining sufficient funds to meet the required funding cost share rates.

The application should explain why the target population identified is appropriate and the evidence base for the chosen target population. The proposal should indicate the overall expected magnitude and breadth of impact of the project on improving outcomes. The proposal should set goals for improvement that are aggressive, but credible given the description of the model.

Panels will also review the criteria used to determine the eligibility of an individual for the project, including how the target population will be identified, how individuals will be referred to the project, and how they will be enrolled in it, including, as appropriate, information about the proposed inclusion of people of color and members of underserved communities. Applications will be assessed based on the soundness of the methodology for identifying the target population, the size of the relevant target population, and the thoroughness of the applicant's plan for referring and enrolling individuals, including assurances that the process avoids targeting easier-to-serve individuals from the target population for enrollment. The panel will also consider whether, to the extent applicable, the applicant has demonstrated that members of the target population are not being unfairly discriminated against in the selection, referral, and enrollment process.

ii. Strength of Evidence

Panels should evaluate the information in the proposals about any evidence ratings assigned to similar interventions by relevant clearinghouses regarding the causal impact of the proposal intervention. The panels should refer to the criteria from the Department of Labor's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR), the Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), the Administration for Children and Families' Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse, and other similar clearinghouses to determine the level of each proposal's claims of causal evidence.

The clearinghouses rate causal studies. (Non-causal studies are not eligible for ratings, but the clearinghouses have provided guidelines for reviewing such studies that promote quality and consistency.) The clearinghouses assign causal studies one of three evidence ratings: high, moderate, or low. A high rating denotes strong evidence that the effect observed are solely attributable to the intervention. A moderate rating denotes some evidence that the effects are at least partially attributable to the intervention. A low rating denotes that there is little evidence that any effects observed can be attributed to the intervention. More information about the rating process can be found in publicly available reference documents for the CLEAR review process.⁷

In connection with this consideration, panels will award more points to applications providing greater evidence in support of the intervention and its specified outcomes or that propose methods that are likely to provide causal evidence. In particular, points will be awarded for evidence based on previous interventions or interventions similar to the proposed intervention that were shown to produce the desired outcomes as a direct result of the intervention and not as a result of other factors.

If the proposed project builds on any prior research that has been previously reviewed and rated by a clearinghouse, such information should be included in the project narrative (see Section IV.B.ii.3). For proposed projects that do not build on research that has been previously reviewed and rated by a clearinghouse, the project narrative should include information about the rating the project would likely receive under the clearinghouses' criteria based on their design.

iii. Quality of Evaluation

SSA will consider the expected quality of the evaluation that would be conducted with respect to the agreement. The panels will assess the project's evaluation design; the metrics that will be collected and analyzed in the evaluation to determine whether the outcomes have been achieved as a result of the intervention and how the metrics will be measured; and the applicant's explanation of how the metrics used in the evaluation are independent, objective indicators of impact and are not subject to manipulation by the service provider (the organization delivering the services described in the project narrative portion of the proposal), intermediary, or funding partners, if any. Additionally, the panel will assess the independence of the evaluator from the other entities involved in the project and the evaluator's experience in conducting rigorous evaluations of program effectiveness, including, where available, well-implemented evaluations on the intervention or similar interventions. Randomized control trials (RCTs) and designs with

⁷ <https://clear.dol.gov/about>

the ability to detect unambiguous causal impacts will receive a higher score, but strong evaluation designs will not outweigh poorly designed interventions.

The panelists will assess whether the applicant's plans to collaborate with the evaluator are clear and well-developed, and demonstrate an ability to effectively and consistently support a rigorous evaluation. Additionally, the evaluation plan should demonstrate a clear legal and logistical ability and willingness to provide all required project data, including through any necessary data sharing agreements.

iv. Organization Capacity

This should reflect the combined capacity of all collaborative partners. It is not necessary for the lead applicant to meet all the requirements, just that all requirements can be met by the collaborative team.

- **Relevant Experience**
 - The applicant must demonstrate relevant experience in successfully operating up to five innovative projects of similar size and complexity to the intervention proposed, in the past 5 years as well as the ability to support the independent evaluation.
 - The applicant or other collaborative team member should demonstrate experience working with people of color, underserved communities, and individuals with lived experiences, as appropriate.
- **Facilities and Infrastructure**
 - The lead applicant should have the necessary facilities and infrastructure to effectively lead and implement the project, and the application must describe a track record or a path to establishing the required processes and infrastructure to achieve proposed milestones.
- **Key Personnel**
 - The key personnel proposed to lead the project must have the skills and experience needed to assure smooth and effective planning and pilot activities, as well as support the independent evaluation. The key personnel should reflect a research team that is diverse and inclusive of people of color, members of underserved communities, and people with lived experiences, as appropriate. Refer to Section VI.B.ii.3.b. for full instructions.
- **Partners**
 - In recognition that the likelihood of success is also determined by the capabilities of the project partners (if there are any), the panels will assess the assigned responsibilities and the qualifications of the partners. This will include an assessment of the applicant's description of the roles and responsibilities of each entity involved in the project, including, to the extent applicable, any State or local government entity, intermediary, service provider, funding provider, or other stakeholder. Applicants are encouraged to include institutions of color and scholars of color or from underserved communities, including people with

disabilities as collaborative partners. The panel will also assess the relevance and depth of expertise of each service provider and capacity of each service provider to deliver the intervention, as described by the applicant. Likewise, the panel will review the relevance and depth of experience of any project intermediary and the capacity of the intermediary to fill the roles assigned to it. Refer to Sections IV.B.ii.3.a.iv., IV.B.ii.3.b., IV.B.ii.3.c., and IV.B.ii.4 for all requirements for partners.

v. Budget and Budget Narrative

The proposed budget and budget narrative should be carefully developed, with plans for efficient use of funds. The budget should be constructed from a data-driven evidence base that informs its projections. Overhead and administrative costs must be reasonable and the majority of funding is projected to be used for project activities. Cost sharing requirements must be met and described (or a clear and realistic plan is in place to obtain the funds). Incentives must not constitute more than 10 percent of any annual budget.

vi. Monitoring and Reporting

The Management and Operational Plan (see Section IV.B.ii.3) must be well-described and show evidence of effectively supporting the project. The proposed Management and Operational Plan should be specific and show a realistic probability of the applicant's ability to effectively meet the objectives and carry out the proposed project to achieve the desired outcomes on time and within budget. Staff and partner responsibilities should be clearly defined, and the project partners identified by the applicant have the administrative ability to carry out their part of the project. The time allocated to conduct project activities should appear adequate, and the timelines and milestones identified for accomplishing project tasks are detailed and reasonable.

The applicant should present a well-designed and credible plan for regular reporting of performance and quantitative data for self-monitoring the progress of the project. The minimal reporting requirements are laid out in Section VI.E., including quarterly financial reports, quarterly performance reports, evaluation progress reports, and final evaluation report.

The applicant should clearly include quantifiable metrics for monitoring the progress of its project using CQI and for supporting evaluation assessing the project's impact on improving outcomes. Monitoring is separate from, but related to, evaluation and there should be distinct metrics tied to operational goals and outputs (such as recruitment, documents mailed, level of service receipt, etc.) and program outcomes (such as employment, benefit receipt/amount, etc.). The applicant should include a clear plan for obtaining and providing the required programmatic data. Mechanisms should be included for ensuring high-quality products and services and for maintaining fidelity to the intervention design.

B. Review and Selection Process

i. Phase 1: Completeness and Eligibility Review

In the first review phase, SSA will review all applications to determine eligibility and completeness in accordance with Sections III and IV of this RFA. This review, which will consist of a non-substantive review to determine whether the applicant is an eligible entity; whether the proposed project qualifies as an eligible project (addresses a specified priority); and whether each of the application content requirements set forth has been satisfied. SSA will reject an application received from an ineligible entity. An application for an ineligible project will be rejected. Applicants are required to affirmatively state which priority the project addresses (see Section I.C.). Incomplete applications may, at SSA's discretion, receive further consideration.

ii. Phase 2: Technical Merit Panel Review

SSA will assign complete applications submitted by eligible applicants to one or more panels of subject matter experts who will be selected based on their knowledge of the topic addressed, technical expertise in the type of intervention, experience working with the target population that is the subject of the application, or other considerations. Review panelists may be selected from federal or state agencies, non-profits, the private sector, or others.

Reviewers will be screened for conflicts of interest.

The panel assigned to an application will score that application in accordance with the criteria set forth in the table in Section V.A., which reflects the considerations that SSA will consider when granting awards. The total and component scores will serve as a reference in the further phases of review discussed below, and awards may be made out of rank order. The panel scores will not be binding with respect to these further phases of review; furthermore, SSA may reject applications that show significant deficiencies with respect to any one component that is critical to the success of the project.

iii. Phase 3: Consistency Review and Recommendation

Following the panel review, SSA will review application scores for consistency among subject matter experts on each panel and across panels and rank the applications.

The final scores will serve as the primary basis for selection of applications for funding. The panel results are advisory in nature and not binding on the Grant Officer. The Grant Officer reserves the right to make selections based solely on the final scores or to take into consideration other relevant factors when applicable. Such factors may include the geographic distribution of funds, distribution across the priorities, whether the proposal includes meaningful leveraged resources, and/or other relevant factors. For the purposes of this RFA, "meaningful leveraged resources" describes the resources (e.g., funding, systems, staff, programs, etc.) of multiple stakeholders being effectively blended in such

a way that the program's impact on participants and program partners is enhanced. The Grant Officer may consider any information that comes to his/her attention.

iv. Phase 4: Review of Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System

As required by the Uniform Guidance, SSA will review and consider any information about an applicant that is in the Federal Awardee Performance and Integrity Information System (FAPIIS) before making any award in excess of the simplified acquisition threshold (currently \$250,000) over the period of performance. Each applicant may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM and comment on any information about itself that a federal awarding agency previously entered and is currently in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM. SSA will consider any comments by the applicant, in addition to other information in FAPIIS in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in the Uniform Guidance.

Further, as required by Appendix XII of the OMB Uniform Guidance, non-federal entities (NFEs) are required to disclose in FAPIIS any information about criminal, civil, and administrative proceedings, or affirm that there is no new information to provide. This applies to NFEs for which the total value of active grants, cooperative agreements, and procurement contracts received from all federal awarding agencies exceeds \$10,000,000 for any period of time during the period of performance of an award or project. This means that SSA may reject an application based on the information contained in FAPIIS even if the applicant otherwise scores highly under the 100 point scale.

SSA will comply with the requirements of 31 C.F.R. Part 19, Government wide Debarment and Suspension (Non-procurement). Additionally, as part of its risk evaluation, SSA may impose special conditions on an award that correspond to the degree of risk identified in SSA's review of the application. Criteria to be evaluated include: (1) financial stability; (2) quality of management systems and ability to meet the management standards prescribed in the Uniform Guidance; (3) the applicant's record in managing awards, cooperative agreements, or procurement awards, if it is a prior recipient of such federal awards, including timeliness of compliance with applicable reporting requirements and, if applicable, the extent to which any previously awarded amounts will be expended prior to future awards; (4) reports and findings from audits performed under Subpart F, Audit Requirements of the Uniform Guidance, or the reports and findings of any other available audits and monitoring reports containing findings, issues of non-compliance or questioned costs; and (5) the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on recipients.

C. Application Clarification and Feedback

SSA may elect to award the cooperative agreement(s) with or without discussions with the applicant. Should a cooperative agreement be awarded without discussions, the award will be based on the applicant's signature on the SF-424, including electronic signature via E-Authentication on <https://www.grants.gov>, which constitutes a binding offer by the applicant. However, during the course of the review process, SSA may ask some applicants to provide confirming or clarifying information. SSA uses such information to inform funding recommendations. A request for confirmation or clarification does not guarantee a cooperative agreement award. If an applicant does not respond by the deadline to a request for information, SSA may remove its application from consideration.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Before the actual cooperative agreement is awarded, SSA may enter into negotiations and discussions with the applicant regarding program components, staffing and funding levels, and/or administrative systems in place to support cooperative agreement implementation. If the negotiations do not result in a mutually acceptable submission, SSA reserves the right to terminate the negotiations and decline to fund the award.

SSA expects to announce the results of this competition by April 2021. SSA will provide successful applicants with a Notice of Award (NoA) that will set forth the amount of the award and other pertinent information. The NoA is the legal document issued to notify an applicant that an award has been made. The NoA will be sent through the U.S. Postal Service to the applicant listed on the SF-424; a copy will also be sent to the electronic mail address listed on the SF-424. The applicant's signature on the SF-424, including electronic signature via E-Authentication on <http://www.grants.gov>, constitutes a binding offer by the applicant. Note that any communication between SSA and applicants prior to the issuance of the NoA and prior to the execution of any award agreement is not authorization to begin performance on the project.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified of their status by letter, which will likewise be sent through the U.S. Postal Service to the applicant listed on the SF-424. Unsuccessful applicants may apply under subsequent RFAs.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Successful applicants selected for awards must agree to comply with additional applicable legal requirements upon acceptance of an award. All cooperative agreements are subject to the Office of Management and Budget's regulatory requirements for cooperative agreements codified in the Uniform Guidance. Awardees and, if applicable, sub-recipients must agree as part of their award agreement to comply with all requirements under 2 CFR Part 200, as

applicable. SSA does not expect that the cost principles in Subpart E of 2 CFR Part 200 will be applicable, except with regard to federal funding for the independent evaluator.

i. Administrative Program Requirements

Awards under this RFA are subject to federal laws, regulations, and policies concerning cooperative agreements. Below is a non-exhaustive list of requirements with which the applicant will need to comply:

- Lobbying Restrictions at 31 CFR Part 21.
- Government-wide Debarment and Suspension Requirements at 31 CFR Part 19.
- Government-wide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace at 31 CFR Part 20.
- Award Term for Trafficking in Persons at 2 CFR Part 175.

ii. Safeguarding Data including Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

Applicants submitting applications in response to this RFA must recognize that confidentiality of PII and other sensitive data is of paramount importance to SSA and must be observed. Awardees shall comply with all applicable laws and the terms of any agreements and contracts governing such PII.

If an applicant's recruitment, implementation, or evaluation strategies require SSA data, the application must clearly identify it so that SSA can determine whether it will be possible to provide the data during the period of performance. Any request for SSA data must explain the data sought (to the extent known), why it is needed, and any potential need to re-disclose data to any entity other than the requester. Certain data cannot be shared with awardees under any circumstances (such as earnings outcomes based on the Master Earnings File (60-0059)). SSA will only provide the minimum PII necessary for a given project or evaluation, as permitted by Federal law and regulation.

SSA cannot guarantee that the data requested will be available or able to be disclosed to the awardee. Example systems of record from which data may be authorized include⁸:

- 60-0320 – Electronic Disability Claim File
- 60-0089 – Claims Folder System

As necessary, SSA will also make available limited staff time to support the evaluation of projects, particularly for data that cannot be shared with awardees under any circumstances (such as earnings outcomes based on the Master Earnings File (60-0059)).

Depending on the intervention plans proposed and whether SSA data will be disclosed to the awardee, SSA may include award terms requiring compliance with, or assistance with complying with, the following laws, policies, and procedures:

- The Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002, 44 U.S.C. § 3541, as amended by the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014, Pub. L. 113-283
- The Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a
- Executive Order 13556 and 32 C.F.R. Part 2002, governing Controlled Unclassified Information
- The Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Revised, 44 U.S.C. § 3501 et seq.
- 20 C.F.R. Part 431, Protection of Human Subjects
- E-Government Act of 2002, P. Law 107-347, including the need to conduct Privacy Impact Assessments and Privacy Threshold Analysis for information or information systems
- Information security and privacy requirements, such as:
 - Physical location and data jurisdiction requirements
 - Data protection requirements, including but not limited to inventory, manufacturer support for software, encryption, media transport, boundary protection, configuration baseline, securing emailing, and digital service requirements
 - Data access, use, and disclosure restrictions
 - Risk remediation, continuous monitoring, and security assessment and authorization requirements
 - Requirements for Cloud-Based solutions or technology, to include but not limited to the Federal Risk and Authorization Program (FedRAMP) and SSA authorization requirements
- Incident response requirements, relating to security and PII breach and incident reporting, whether an incident is suspected or confirmed
- Federal records and data retention, inspection, and disposal requirements
- Security audit requirements
- Suitability requirements for background investigations of personnel requiring access to sensitive sites, systems, or information

The above list is not exhaustive, nor a complete explanation of a given requirement, which will be further detailed in resulting awards.

In all cases that privacy, security and data-related requirements apply, the awardee shall include all privacy and security requirements in any sub-award or contract related to performance of work under the award.

iii. Intellectual property rights

Intellectual property rights relating to the activities of the awardee and all partners in the project, including the evaluator, intermediary, and service provider(s) are subject to 2 CFR 200.315.

Work Product Ownership and Rights in Data will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should include in their proposals to SSA any specific rights or

ownership requested or claimed over the data or work product to be used, collected, or developed.

iv. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Clearance of Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) materials

Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, the Awardee shall prepare a data collection package for all data collections associated with the project and will be submitted to the SSA Project Officer for review and approval by the Office of Management and Budget. The OMB PRA data collection package will include but, is not limited to:

- All data collection instruments proposed by the Awardee and,
- All materials and forms developed by the Awardee to obtain consent.

The Awardee shall be responsible for designing the data collection instruments included in the OMB Data Collection Package. The Awardee shall allow at least three weeks for the OMB PRA Generic Clearance process to obtain approval of any survey instrument pretests. The Awardee shall allot an additional five months for the OMB PRA Standard Clearance to gain approval of the any final field survey data activities. During its period of performance, the Awardee shall clearly identify any problems and specify any suggested modifications to survey, and/or data collections inquiries or procedures that may require further OMB clearance. With the guidance of the Project Officer, the Awardee shall prepare the PRA clearance material required for submission to OMB, including any necessary Privacy Act statements.

At the SSA Project Officer's discretion, the Awardee shall participate in any briefings with OMB on the data collection packages. The Awardee shall also be prepared to assist with all necessary forms and materials, and participate in any other activities necessary to obtain OMB clearance on the package. While SSA retains the ultimate responsibility for obtaining OMB approval, the draft package will assist in that process. Critical components of the OMB package for which the Awardee is responsible include:

- The supporting statement;
- Detailed questionnaire descriptions;
- Consent forms, to be signed by all respondents explaining the voluntary nature of the study and the rights of the respondent (Refer to Task 5);
- Notification correspondence (e.g., letters emails, and phone scripts);
- Burden tables; and
- Copies of the final data collection instruments in English and Spanish (and other versions to be determined).

The supporting statement shall include: (1) justification -- necessity of information collected, purpose for using the information, efforts to reduce the burden of responding, efforts to identify and reduce duplication, assurance of confidentiality, estimates of collection burden, and plans for tabulation, statistical analysis, and publication; and (2)

statistical methods -- potential respondent universe and sampling method, procedures for collecting information, methods to maximize response rates, and tests of procedures or methods. The Awardee shall consult with the SSA Project Officer during preparation of the draft OMB clearance package to ensure that all required elements are included. The Awardee shall submit draft OMB package(s) to the COR for review and comment. The Awardee shall submit revised package(s) for OMB submission to the SSA Project Officer after SSA clears all study consent forms. SSA will submit revised package(s) to OMB. If OMB requests revisions, the Awardee shall submit a revised package that addresses these comments.

If the SSA Project Officer, in consultation with the Awardee, determines additional data collection activities are required, the Awardee shall submit to the SSA Project Officer all the materials required for an amendment. The Awardee shall make every effort to anticipate such data collection activities and include them in the initial OMB package submission. SSA will consider an OMB PRA Data Collection Package finalized after receiving formal clearance and approval from OMB.

The Awardee shall use the OMB-approved data collection tools throughout the study. When appropriate, subsequent revisions to the tools must be approved by the SSA Project Officer and subsequently OMB. The Awardee shall coordinate the tools to allow enough time for processing to meet reporting deadlines.

The Awardee shall confirm with the SSA Project Officer that IRB (and OMB) approval has been granted before any contact is made with prospective study participants or respondents.

v. Environmental Requirements

SSA approval of financial assistance is subject to compliance with applicable federal and State environmental requirements. As discussed under Section D.2.b, Application for Project Award, the applicant must identify the State and federal environmental laws, regulations, and policies that may apply to the project and the environmental documents that may be required under State and federal laws. As to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), specifically, project applications will be evaluated in accordance with SSA's NEPA procedures and categorical exclusions. Awardees whose projects do not fall within SSA's categorical exclusions will be required to assist SSA in conducting an Environmental Analysis and an Environmental Impact Statement for the project, as applicable.

vi. Non-discrimination Laws and Regulations

All awardees, partners, and sub-recipients, if applicable, must comply with applicable non-discrimination statutes and regulations. These include but are not limited to: (a) Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000-2000d7), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color of national origin, and SSA's implementing

regulations, 31 CFR part 22; (b) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, as amended (20 U.S.C. 1681-1683, and 1685-1686), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex; (c) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 794), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability, and SSA's implementing regulations, 31 CFR part 28; (d) the Individuals with Disabilities Act, as amended (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.); (e) the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended (42 U.S.C. 6101–6107), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of age, and SSA's implementing regulations, 31 CFR part 23; (f) the Drug Abuse Office and Treatment Act of 1972 (P.L. 92-255), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of drug abuse; (g) the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act of 1970 (P.L. 91-616), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination on the basis of alcohol abuse or alcoholism; (h) Section 523 and 527 of the Public Health Service Act of 1912 (42 U.S.C. 290dd-3 and 290ee-3), as amended, relating to confidentiality of alcohol and drug abuse patient records; and (i) Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3601 et seq.), as amended, relating to nondiscrimination in the sale, rental or financing of housing.

vii. Other Requirements

Awardees must comply with existing laws and regulations governing the subject area of the project and the relevant federal agency administering the project. If the intervention design requires exceptions to any such existing laws and regulations, the applicant must obtain a waiver from the governing federal, State, or local agency.

viii. Transparency Act Requirements

Applicants must ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (P.L. 109-282, as amended by § 6202 of P.L. 110-252) (Transparency Act). All applicants, except for those excepted from the Transparency Act, must ensure that they have the necessary processes and systems in place to comply with the sub-award and executive total compensation reporting requirements of the Transparency Act, should they receive funding. Upon award, applicants will receive detailed information on the reporting requirements of the Transparency Act, as described in 2 CFR Part 170, Appendix A. No sub-award of an award made under this RFA may be made to a sub-recipient that is subject to the terms of the Transparency Act unless that potential sub-recipient acquires and provides a DUNS number.

ix. Use of Contracts and Sub-awards

You must abide by the following definitions of contract, contractor, sub-award, and sub-recipient:

- **Contract:** Contract means a legal instrument by which a non-federal entity (defined as a state, local government, Indian tribe, institution of higher education (IHE), nonprofit organization, or for-profit entity, that carries out a federal award as a recipient or sub-recipient) purchases property or services needed to carry out

the project or program under a federal award. The term as used in this RFA does not include a legal instrument, even if the non-federal entity considers it a contract, when the substance of the transaction meets the definition of a federal award or sub-award (see definition of Sub-award below).

- Contractor: Contractor means an entity that receives a contract as defined above in Contract.
- Sub-award: Sub-award means an award provided by a pass-through entity (defined as a non-Federal entity that provides a sub-award to a sub-recipient to carry out part of a federal program) to a sub-recipient for the sub-recipient to carry out part of a federal award received by the pass-through entity. It does not include payments to a contractor or payments to an individual that is a beneficiary of a federal program. A sub-award may be provided through any form of legal agreement, including an agreement that the pass-through entity considers a contract.
- Sub-recipient: Sub-recipient means a non-federal entity that receives a sub-award from a pass-through entity to carry out part of a federal program; but does not include an individual that is a beneficiary of such program. A sub-recipient may also be a recipient of other federal awards directly from a federal awarding agency.

You must follow the provisions at 2 CFR 200.331-.332 regarding sub-recipient monitoring and management. Also see 2 CFR 200.308(c)(6) regarding prior approval requirements for sub-awards. When awarding sub-awards, you are required to comply with provisions on government wide suspension and debarment found at 2 CFR Part 180.

x. Closeout of Cooperative Agreement Award

Any entity that receives an award under this Announcement must close its cooperative agreement with SSA at the end of the final year of the cooperative agreement.

C. Special Program Requirements

i. Access to Records/Oversight

By accepting a project award under this RFA, the awardee agrees to make available to SSA or any of their authorized representatives, all data and documents that might be needed for audits, evaluation, performance measurement or any other purpose, including contracts and agreements, regardless of whether outcomes are achieved and payment is received, in the awardee's possession or available to the awardee. Awardees must also agree to provide timely and reasonable access to program operating personnel, project partners, and participants. It is critical that awardees keep this information up to date and accurate for performance measurement, evaluation, and auditing purposes. Awardees may be required to: (1) provide access to pertinent documents; (2) host site visits; (3) facilitate interviews with awardee staff, partners and the independent evaluator; (4) attend

awardee meetings; and (5) provide additional data related to the intervention and evaluation of the intervention.

ii. Changes to the Statement of Work

Upon grant of an award, the proposal with any changes negotiated before notice of award will become the cooperative agreement's statement of work. SSA at its sole discretion may approve revisions to the statement of work. Changes to the intervention strategy and source of up-front project funding may be made with prior written approval from SSA. To start this process, an awardee must timely notify the project officer of these changes as they occur and provide appropriate documentation to update the statement of work.

D. Administrative Reporting

Awardees must agree to meet the reporting requirements as listed below or as specified in the award agreement. Administrative reports must be submitted electronically to SSA, as specified in the award agreement.

i. Quarterly financial reports

A Standard Form 425; Federal Financial Form (FFR) is required until such time as all funds have been expended or the cooperative agreement period of performance has expired. Quarterly reports are due 30 days after the end of each calendar year quarter. In addition, awardees must include any sub-award amounts so we can calculate final indirect costs, if applicable.

ii. Quarterly performance reports

Awardees must submit a quarterly progress report within 30 days after the end of each calendar year quarter. The report must include quarterly information on cooperative agreement activities, performance goals, and milestones. Information collected from self-monitoring, including required programmatic data elements, must be included in these reports and must include information on the use of cooperative agreement funding and an assessment of model implementation, lessons learned, quality improvements, services provided, and cost estimates. Specific, required programmatic data elements will be determined by SSA.

The last quarterly progress report will serve as the awardee's Final Performance Report. This report must provide both quarterly and cumulative information on the cooperative agreement activities. It must summarize project activities, employment outcomes and other work products, and related results of the project, and must thoroughly document the training or labor market information approaches that you used. Submission requirements will be provided to awardees upon award. We will also provide you with guidance about the data and other information that is required to be collected and reported on either a regular basis or special request basis.

iii. Evaluation progress reports

Reports will be required on the schedule described in the notice of award. This will be as described in the proposal, unless another schedule was negotiated prior to the award. The independent evaluator must submit a written report the SSA grant officer summarizing the progress that has been made in the reporting period. Data content requirements will be specified in the agreement between the awardee and SSA.

iv. Final evaluation report

After completion of the project, within one year, or a time period to be laid out in the notice of agreement, the independent evaluator must submit a final report to SSA. This will be as described in the notice of award.

At a minimum, the report should assess the effects of the intervention and include a discussion of the findings and implications, as well as a definitive statement about whether the predetermined outcomes have been met and whether the awardee has fulfilled each obligation of the agreement. This must include information on the unique factors that contributed to the achievement or failure to achieve outcomes, including but not limited to any major change in policy or law that may have affected the project intervention, a description of the research methods, e.g., randomization of treatment and control groups, if applicable, data, sample size and characteristics, measures, and other factors, as well as findings, including impacts – for exploratory and confirmatory, short and long-term, subgroup analyses, and other findings. The report should include both qualitative and quantitative findings. The report should also include information about how the project benefitted the participants and could benefit the wider population of current and future DI or SSI beneficiaries.

The report must also assess whether, and the degree to which the project was delivered as intended. This must include a discussion of how closely the project's theory and intended procedures aligned with actual project implementation. This portion of the report must include information related to the intervention model, including whether it has evolved and whether the intervention was delivered with fidelity; staffing; recruitment and identification and screening of participants; selection and enrollment; and how the intervention was implemented.

The report must include a cost-benefit analysis breaking out the costs and benefits to relevant stakeholders over the course of the project and, if possible, for up to 10 years afterward.

This report will be made publicly available. Although the term “report” is used, the awardee and evaluator may propose multiple reports to fulfill the requirements of the award, as described in the proposal or agreed to by SSA.

E. Record Retention

Applicants must follow federal guidelines (found in 29 CFR 1470.42)⁹ on record retention, which require awardees to maintain all records pertaining to cooperative agreement activities for a period of not less than three years from the time of final cooperative agreement close-out unless records are transferred to or maintained by the Federal agency. SSA will include terms in any award explaining which records must be transferred to or are maintained by SSA.

VII. Agency Contacts

For further information about this RFA, please contact Dionne Mitchell, Grants Management Officer at dionne.mitchell@ssa.gov or 410.965.9534.

VIII. Other Information

A. Proprietary Information

Applicants are discouraged from submitting information considered proprietary unless it is deemed essential for proper evaluation of the application. However, if the application contains information that the applicant organization considers to be trade secrets, information that is commercial or financial, or information that is privileged or confidential, the pages containing that information should be identified as such.

When such information is included in the application, it is furnished to the Federal government in confidence, with the understanding that the information will be used or disclosed only for evaluation of the application. The information contained in an application will be protected by SSA from unauthorized disclosure, consistent with Federal law, including the requirements of 5 U.S.C. § 552 and 20 C.F.R. § 402.90. The Federal government has the right to use or disclose information obtained in connection with this RFA and resulting awards to the extent authorized by law.

B. Information Collection Requirements

SSA has determined that this RFA imposes new information collection requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. The information collection for the Notice of Intent to Apply, Project Narrative, Administrative Reporting, and Records Retention provisions contained in this RFA has been approved under OMB control number 1505-0260. Other information requirements gathered via the SF-424 family of forms have already been approved under the following OMB control numbers: Information for Federal Assistance covered under 4040-0004, Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs covered under 4040-0006, Budget Information for Construction Programs covered under 4040-0008, Disclosure of Lobbying Activities covered under 4040-0013, Assurance for Non-Construction Programs covered under 4040-0007, Assurance for Construction Programs covered under 4040-0009 and Key Contacts, Project Abstract and Project/Performance Site Location covered under 4040-0010.

⁹ [Full text of 29 CFR 1470.42](#)