**Transcript**

**Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) Reentry Projects 2018
Prospective Applicant Webinar**

**Slide 1:**

**Alexander**: Welcome to the pre-recorded Reentry Employment Opportunities 2018 Applicant Information webinar, for the Funding Opportunity Announcement titled Reentry Projects.

**Slide 2:**

**Alexander:** Today, you’ll be hearing from Melissa Abdullah, Grant Officer in the Office of Grants Management, Alexander Green, in the Reentry Employment Opportunities Unit, and Jessica Lohmann, Senior Evaluation Specialist from the Chief Evaluation Office.

**Slide 3:**

**Alexander:** Today we will focus on three key areas of the FOA:

* Eligible Applicants and High-Crime, High-Poverty Requirements
* Application Submission Requirements; and the
* ETA Evaluation

**Slide 4:**

**Alexander:** Now we will be turning it over to Melissa in the Office of Grants Management…Melissa?

**Melissa:** Thanks, Alexander. In the next few slides I will go over the application submission requirements.

**Slide 5:**

**Melissa:** Proposals submitted in response to this FOA must consist of four separate and distinct parts: (1) the Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance; (2) Project Budget, which consists of the SF-424A and the budget narrative; (3) Project Narrative; and (4) attachments to the Project Narrative. It is the applicant’s responsibility to ensure that the funding amount requested is consistent across all parts and sub-parts of the application.

**Slide 6:**

**Melissa:** Applicants must include the items listed here. There is no exception to this requirement.

* The SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance – all applicants for Federal grant and funding opportunities must have a DUNS number and must supply their DUNS number on the SF-424. Applicants must also register with the System for Award Management (SAM)
* The Project Budget must consist of the SF-424A, Budget Information Form and the Budget Narrative

Each of these items are explained in more detail in the FOA, and all must be addressed in the application or it will be deemed non-responsive and will not be reviewed.

**Slide 7:**

**Melissa:** Applicants will most likely spend the majority of their time preparing the Project Narrative. This is where applicants demonstrate their capability to implement the grant project in accordance with the provisions of this announcement. Applicants 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. The guidelines for preparing the Project Narrative are found in Section IV.B.3.A and it will be evaluated using the criteria identified in Section V.A.

The Project Narrative is limited to 25 double-spaced single-sided 8.5 x 11 inch pages for intermediary organizations and 20 double-spaced single-sided 8.5 x 11 inch pages for non-intermediaries. All narratives must use Times New Roman 12 point text font and 1 inch margins. You must number the Project Narrative beginning with page number 1. We will not read or consider any materials beyond the specified page limit in the application review process.

Applicants applying as intermediary organizations should describe throughout the Project Narrative the role of the sub-grantees in implementing the project, as appropriate. Applicants applying as non-intermediary organizations should describe how they will directly implement the project.

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**Slide 9:**

**Melissa:** We have instituted procedures for assessing the technical merit of applications to provide for an objective review of the applications and to assist you in understanding the standards against which your application will be judged. The evaluation criteria are based on the information required in the application as described in Sections IV.B.2 (Project Budget) and IV.B.3.A (Project Narrative). Reviewers will award points based on the evaluation criteria as shown in this chart. See the FOA for the full description of each criterion.

**Slide 10:**

**Melissa:** The checklist shown here should be used as a guide when preparing your application package to ensure that the application has met all of the screening criteria. Note this checklist is only an aid for applicants and should not be included in the application package. We urge you to use this checklist to ensure 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.

**Slide 11:**

**Melissa:** Applications must be received by 4:00:00pm (Eastern Time) on the closing date.

You can submit applications by regular mail, overnight mail, hand delivery, or online at www.grants.gov. The mailing address can be found in the FOA. Please reference FOA-ETA-18-02 in your application submission. See the FOA for details on how to submit your application.

**Slide 12:**

**Melissa:** Eligible applicants must indicate if they are applying as an intermediary organization or a non-intermediary organization. For purposes of this announcement intermediary organizations are defined as organizations that have an affiliate network or offices in at least 3 communities and across 2 states; and non-intermediary organizations are those that have single sites or multiple sites within one state.

**Slide 13:**

***Melissa TO Alexander*:** Now I would like to turn it back over to Alexander. Alex?

**Alexander:** Thank you Melissa. We wanted to touch on some of the main changes this year as it pertains to Eligible Applicants and High-Crime, High-Poverty Requirements

**Slide 14:**

**Alexander:** As far as Eligible Applicants

Eligibility is determined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. For these grants:

* All eligible applicants must be community-or faith-based organizations with IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit status, (which also includes) women’s and minority organizations; (also) state or local governments; or any Indian and Native American entity eligible for grants under section 166 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Eligible applicants may be rural-serving or urban-serving organizations. This applies to both the young-adult and the adult projects that will be proposed.

This, specifically, is a change from last year. the applicant pool proposing to serve adults has now been broadened to include rural-serving organizations and not just urban-serving organizations proposing to serve the adult population. just like the young adult projects can. Another change from last year is that both State and Local Governments, as well as Indian and Native American entities eligible under Section 166 of WIOA are eligible.

**Slide 15:**

**Alexander**: Please note that the Department evaluates applications on the need of the proposed service area.

All projects must serve high-crime, high-poverty communities. For the purpose of this FOA, high-crime and high-poverty communities are defined as:

* **High-crime**: communities with crime rates within the targeted area that are higher than the rate for the overall city (for urban areas) or of non-metropolitan counties in the state (for rural areas). (For more information on metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties, see the following link: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications.aspx>.)
* **High-poverty**: communities with poverty rates of at least 25 percent as exhibited through the use of American Community Survey (ACS) data. Instructions on using ACS data are outlined in Section VIII.F of the Funding Opportunity Announcement.

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**Alexander:** In regards to High-Crime , High-Poverty

All projects’ target areas must be located in high-crime, high-poverty communities; applicants must submit documentation demonstrating this, in a table format, which is a slight change from last year.

Applicants must use the latest available American Community Survey Five-Year data to find the cumulative poverty rate of the various Census Tracts or counties included in their target community or communities.

Applicants must also compare the most recently available crime rates of the police precinct, sheriff’s office, county police department, or other relevant jurisdiction that most closely overlaps with their target community or communities to the crime rate of the overall city (for urban areas) or of non-metropolitan counties in the state (for rural areas) where each target community is located.

**Slide 17:**

**Alexander:**

Applicants must justify the number of participants that they will serve. Applicants must provide a table that shows: 1) the overall population; 2) the population below the poverty level in each of the Census Tracts in the target community; and 3) all Census Tracts combined.

The table must also show the high-crime rate for each target community. Instructions for accessing American Community Survey data for applicants to include in their applications are in Section VIII, Part F of the FOA.

**Slide 18: Alexander**

The applicant must submit an attachment confirming that the project is located in high-crime, high-poverty communities. This attachment must include the following two tables:

1.) The first of two tables, that Applicants must include, is a crime rate table showing the most recently available crime rate of the police precinct, sheriff’s office, county police department, or other relevant jurisdiction that most closely overlaps with the target community compared to the crime rate of the overall city or of the non-metropolitan counties in the state for each target area.  Applicants applying as intermediary organizations must submit this information for each sub-grantee.  A suggested format is as follows:

**Slide 19:**

**Alexander:**

This is an example of the 2nd table that must be submitted as an attachment to confirm that the project is located in high-crime, high-poverty communities. The poverty rate table must show the overall population and the population living below the poverty level by Census Tract in the applicant’s target area or area(s). If the target area is an entire \*county, applicants do not need to break this down to the census tract level.  Applications using zip codes instead of census tracts or counties on this attachment will be disqualified and not move forward through the merit review process.  The table must include the percentage of the entire target area living beneath the poverty line.  At least 25 percent of the overall population of the target service area must be living below the poverty line.  Applications that have a service area wherein less than 25 percent of the total population lives below the poverty line will be disqualified and not move forward through the merit review process. Below is a suggested format.

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**Alexander:** The Department is especially interested in program models that offer apprenticeship opportunities, including in registered apprenticeship programs, industry-recognized apprenticeship programs, as well as pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

Under the June 15, 2017 Presidential Executive Order on Expanding Apprenticeships in America, it is the policy of the Federal Government to provide more affordable pathways to secure high-paying jobs by promoting apprenticeships and effective workforce development programs.

Included is the Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeships website for additional information.

**Slide 21:**

**Alexander:** We will now turn it over to Jessica in the Chief Evaluation Office. Jessica?

Jessica: Thanks, Alex. My name is Jessica Lohmann and I’m a Senior Evaluation Specialist in DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office and the Federal Project Officer for the Reentry Employment Opportunities Evaluation. The Chief Evaluation Office is an independent evaluation office at DOL that coordinates, manages, and implements DOL’s evaluation program. We are committed to rigorous, independent evaluations and building an evidence-based culture at DOL.

Today I am going to discuss the importance of evidence and evaluation, give an overview of the REO evaluation, and explain where you fit in.

**Slide 22:**

**Jessica:**

There has been an increased focus and emphasis on using evidence to inform policy making in recent years. This is reflected in a number of areas including the President’s FY2018 budget which states, “An effective and efficient Federal government requires evidence – evidence about where needs are greatest, what works and what does not work, where and how programs can be improved…”;

A bi-partisan independent Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking was established from September 2017 to July 2018 to develop a strategy for increasing the availability and use of data in order to build evidence about government programs. The Commission published a final report that discusses their recommendations and is accessible via the link on the slide. The Commission quote, “envisions a future in which rigorous evidence is created efficiently, as a routine part of government operations, and used to construct effective public policy.”

There are numerous other organizations and areas focused on using and building evidence to improve programs including tiered funding in which funding levels are tied to the strength of evidence and private organizations pushing for and requiring evaluation as part of pilot projects.

DOL understands the importance of using data and evidence to make decisions. We want to fund programs that we know have been successful in the past and continue to learn about new strategies being implemented in the field.

This increased focus on evidence-based policy-making also emphasizes the need for continuous learning and program improvement on the ground. It is important to build evidence where it does not exist and continue to build upon what we already know. For those programs that we don’t have evidence on, we want to pair the experience of those in the field with evaluations to build that knowledge. It is important to test theory and practice in the field to understand it’s impact on those we serve.

**Slide 23:**

**Jessica:** Building evidence and evaluation is a continuous cycle. When building evidence it is important to plan ahead and determine how to structure your program in a way that will hopefully lead to successful outcomes for participants. To do this, you need to examine what, if any, data and evidence can help inform your program. The planning process can also apply theory, particularly in cases when there is little to no evidence. Developing a theory of change will help ground the program model and lay the groundwork for what the intended impacts are. Once you have planned and determined your key program components then it is time to implement it in the field. Evaluating the results of the program will help inform potential program improvements. It is vital that the evaluation be used to then inform future planning.

This cyclical process helps ensure programs and policies are continuously informed with the latest information and evidence. We all want to help the people we serve and evaluation provides the evidence, or “tools”, so that we can do so as effectively as possible.

**Slide 24:**

**Jessica:** DOL’s REO program is committed to learning what strategies work best to assist communities in planning and implementing comprehensive reentry programs to address the full range of challenges involved in helping formerly incarcerated adults and young adults who have been involved in the juvenile or adult justice system make successful transitions back to the community including employment opportunities. That is why we are funding an independent evaluation of REO grants which I will discuss in a moment. First, I’d like to take a minute to discuss some of what we currently know about reentry and employment.

There is strong empirical evidence for the connection between employment and criminal activity, including recidivism. Those who are employed are less likely to become involved in criminal activity and those with previous criminal involvement are less likely to commit a new offence if they are gainfully employed.

However, there have been few rigorous studies on the cause-and-effect relationship, particularly in the context of employment-focused reentry models. Further, among the few studies produced so far, results have been mixed. It is the goal of the REO evaluation to add to the evidence base of employment-focused reentry models.

Past research suggests that programs that focus on older ex-prisoners, integrated services, and perhaps models using financial incentives can have modest positive results. A study of the Center for Employment Opportunity, a transitional jobs program in New York City, found small effects on reducing recidivism, but a larger study of a transitional jobs program in four sites found no such effects. A rigorous study of DOL’s Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD) program found promising early employment results but they are partially the result of the participants’ placement in the programs’ transitional jobs. Full results are anticipated later this year.

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**Jessica:** Ancillary services can help to make employment programs more effective. For example, past research has found positive results for employment assistance programs with an intervention that included intensive case management and wrap-around services.

Cognitive behavioral therapy has also consistently been shown to be important in reducing recidivism.

There are many new strategies being implemented by practitioners that have yet to be rigorously examined. This includes interventions and programs that target higher quality jobs to reduce recidivism and workforce services that emphasize skill building and career preparation which may be more effective than those providing job placement assistance only.

Evidence is continuously being developed in this area and we hope to build off of that by learning from the programs implemented under this grant.

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**Jessica:** A number of the strategies I just discussed can be found in the resources listed on this page. Besides providing descriptive information about program approaches, several of the websites also provide syntheses, or summaries, of the strength of a collection of studies to establishing evidence in the field. Further, these webpages include information about programs that have been evaluated as well as theories and strategies that have yet to be tested. This list is by no means comprehensive and additional research and models exist.

**Slide 27:**

**Jessica:** As I mentioned, DOL hopes to add to the evidence base to better understand reentry and employment. In partnership with ETA and the REO office, the Chief Evaluation Office contracted with Mathematica Policy Research and its partner Social Policy Research in 2017 to conduct an independent, rigorous 5-year evaluation of DOL’s REO grant programs, including 2018 grantees.

The goal of the REO evaluation is to identify and evaluate promising practices used in reentry employment programs which are comprehensive strategies to address the range of challenges formerly incarcerated adults and young adults who have been involved in the juvenile or adult justice system face in making a successful transitions back to the community.

This evaluation will include an implementation and an impact study among select REO grantees to understand their effectiveness in achieving the goals of improving participant outcomes such as employment, earning, and recidivism.

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**Jessica:** As part of the evaluation we hope to learn about how programs are implemented and their impacts on participants. This includes answering the following questions:

How were programs implemented? What are the types and combinations of services and approaches provided? What employment focused services were offered?

What impact does the REO program, or strategies implemented under this program, have on the outcomes of participants?

To what extent do outcomes and impacts vary across selected subpopulations, including type of offense, age, and veteran status?

Are there key program elements that are common to successful models of comprehensive reentry programs (for example, structure, organization, service delivery, or partnerships)?

**Slide 29:**

**Jessica**: As I discussed earlier, the REO evaluation will include an impact study to assess the effects of the program on participants. The evaluators will use the most rigorous design possible, either a random control trial or a quasi-experimental design, so that we are able to learn as much as possible about the programs that grantees offer and are confident that any positive outcomes there are, are caused by the services provided and not external factors that are unrelated to the program such as changes to the economy.

In random control trials, individuals are randomly assigned to two groups: the treatment group who are eligible to receive the program services or the control group who do not receive program services.

Without random assignment, there may be other factors influencing the difference between the treatment and comparison group and we are unable to see the true impact of the intervention. For example, if the study were to compare people who completed a program with people who did not, then the difference between the outcomes could be attributed to the fact that the first group is more motivated or had other traits that led them to be more successful—independent of their participation in or benefit from the program.

I’d like to give a quick example that highlights why random assignment is so important. Imagine that an evaluation has been conducted on a program offering employment services to unemployed men and women. When the program has concluded 75% of men have found work, but only 50% of women have. This may lead one to believe that the program is more effective for men.

However, when compared to a control group, we find that 75% of men not offered the program services also found work, while only 40% of women in the control group were working, indicating that the program was in fact more effective for women. The ability to see what would have happened if the services were not provided allows us to see the true impacts of the program services on participants.

**Slide 30:**

**Jessica:** The REO evaluation will also include an implementation evaluation to help us better understand how program services were delivered or implemented. An implementation evaluation looks at the extent to which a program was implemented with fidelity or as intended and provides important information on how program services were delivered. An implementation evaluation often involves surveys, interviews, focus groups, site visits and document review.

**Slide 31:**

**Jessica:** All of the 2018 REO grantees will be partners in the evaluation. By partnering with DOL and the evaluators from Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research, the 2018 grantees will help build evidence and inform the field of the latest strategies for assisting reentering individuals with employment opportunities. If selected, not only will you have the opportunity to learn about your own program, but you will be able to add to the evidence base and inform other programs.

Those who are selected for the evaluation will partner with DOL and the evaluators pre-evaluation to (1) document clear goals and objectives for your program (such as developing a theory of change, or developing a program logic model); and (2) develop questions on what you'd like to learn about the program; During evaluation grantees will work with DOL and the evaluators to: (1) share data and insights on program implementation, including any ways that the data being collected are accurate or inaccurate; (2) work with evaluator to identify ways that the program has been implemented as documented as well as ways that it's different; and post-evaluation: (1) identify ways that you'd appreciate learning about the evaluation findings (such as webinars, short papers, or presentations); (2) share what you've learned with others; and (3) integrate evaluation findings into program improvements.

**Slide 32:**

**Jessica:** As you will see in the FOA, a commitment to participate in the evaluation is a condition of award. This includes willingness to actively participate in the implementation and/or impact study and to assist in obtaining the cooperation of program partners. Conducting an impact analysis could involve random assignment (which, as described earlier, involves randomly assigning eligible participants into a treatment group that would receive program services or enhanced program services, or into a control group that would receive no program services or program services that are not enhanced, i.e. “business as usual”). The use of random assignment means that select grantees will need to over-recruit to be able fill both the treatment and control groups.

We may require grantees to collect data elements to aid the evaluation. As a part of the evaluation, as a condition of award, grantees must agree to: (1) make records available to the evaluation contractor on:  participants, employers, and funding; (2) provide access to the program’s operating personnel, site participants, and operational and financial records, and any other pertaining documents to calculate program costs and benefits; and (3) in the case of an impact analysis, facilitate or support as requested the assignment by lottery of participants to program services (i.e. treatment group) or to the control group (i.e., no program services), (including the possible increased recruitment of potential participants); and (4) follow evaluation procedures as specified by the national evaluator evaluation contractor under the direction of DOL, including following random assignment procedures and recording data.

CEO and the evaluators from Mathematica Policy Research and Social Policy Research will provide technical assistance for the evaluation throughout the grant. We look forward to working with the grantees on this evaluation and sharing the results with the REO community.

I will now turn it back over to Alex to wrap up the webinar.

**Slide 33:**

**Alexander**: This concludes our prospective applicant webinar. If you have additional questions on the Reentry Employment Opportunities Funding Opportunity Announcement, you can contact Aiyana Pucci, the grants management specialist listed as the contact in the Funding Opportunity Announcement.

**Slide 34:**

**All:** Thank you!