**Pathway Home (PH) Prospective Applicant Webinar**

**Webcast Transcript**

**March 25th, 2020**

**Slide 1**

**Alexander**: Welcome to the pre-recorded webcast for Prospective Applicants for the Funding Opportunity Announcement titled Pathway Home (PH)

**Slide 2**

**Alexander**: Today, you’ll be hearing from Melissa Abdullah Grants Officer, Ariam Ferro, the Lead Grants Management Specialist for this Funding Opportunity.

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**Alexander**: myself, Alexander Green, in the Reentry Employment Opportunities Unit, and Jessica Lohmann, Senior Evaluation Specialist from the Chief Evaluation Office.

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**Alexander**: Today we will focus on three key areas of the FOA: Application Submission Requirements, Eligibility, Services, Partnerships, and Priority Consideration, and the ETA Evaluation.

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

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

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**Melissa**: Proposals submitted in response to this FOA must consist of four separate and distinct parts: the Standard Form (SF) 424, Application for Federal Assistance, Project Budget, which consists of the SF-424A and the budget narrative, Project Narrative, and 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.

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**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.

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**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 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 with 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.

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**Melissa**: In addition to the Project Narrative, applicants must submit attachments.

All attachments must be clearly labeled as Attachments. We will only exclude those attachments listed in Section IV.B.4 from the page limit. You must not include additional materials such as resumes or general letters of support. These will not be considered. You must submit your application in one package because documents received separately will be tracked separately and will not be attached to the application for review.

I’ll now turn it over to Ariam to go over criteria and application submission.

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**Ariam**: 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 that 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.

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**Ariam**: 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. (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

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

Amendment one to the FOA limited the method of submission to only electronic submissions. You can only submit applications online at www.grants.gov. See the FOA for details on how to submit your application through grants.gov.

Now I would like to turn it back over to Alexander. Alex?

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**Alexander**: Thank you Ariam. In the next few slides we will touch on Eligibility, Services, Partnerships, and Priority Consideration.

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

The following organizations are eligible to apply: community- and faith-based organizations with IRS 501(c)(3) non-profit status, (which includes) women’s and minority organizations, and post-secondary education institutions with 501(c)(3) status; (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).

The Department of Labor intends to award approximately 50 percent of the available funds to organizations serving persons incarcerated in state correctional facilities and approximately 50 percent of available funds to organizations serving persons incarcerated in local jails…pending the department receives sufficient applications… of fundable quality.

We do have a clarification, in that if, you are, a public, Higher Education Institution or member of a state college system, and not, a 501c3, you are still eligible to apply.

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**Alexander**: Participants eligible to receive workforce services must be at least 18 years old, reside, at the time of enrollment in the program, in a state correctional facility or local jail for adults, have a release date scheduled within 20 to 180 days of the individual’s enrollment into the program, be scheduled to return to reside upon release in the target area identified in the applicant’s application, be low-income as defined under WIOA, Section 3(36), and be legally eligible to work in the United States.

Grantees have the discretion to enroll individuals convicted of violent offenses or sexual offenses and those assessed as high-risk of either offense. Grantees that choose to serve these populations must conduct a rigorous risk assessment of criminogenic need (i.e., causing or likely to cause criminal behavior). In all cases, the grantee must have a clear and consistent written enrollment policy that addresses program enrollment. Grantees will be required to submit their written enrollment policies if awarded a grant.

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**Alexander**: Pre-Release Services. The applicant must identify and explain how they will provide, at a minimum, all of the following employment and career services pre-release; job preparation, comprehensive case management, developing IDPs using local Labor Market Information (LMI) including identifying barriers to employment (additional information regarding “career” services, as defined in WIOA, can be found in Section 134(c)(2) and in TEGL 19-16), needs assessment, career exploration and planning, legal assistance (e.g., modification of child support orders, expungement proceedings, securing participant licenses, child custody assistance, protective and restraining order assistance, and referrals to other legal services), counseling, and assistance with linking inmates to the social services required to help them transition back to their communities.

The applicant must provide, as an attachment to the Project Narrative, a sample schedule of activities for a month of pre-release operations. These activities must include, at a minimum, the items listed in part (vii) of the Project Design (vii) in the FOA.

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**Alexander**: Post-Release Services. The applicant must identify and explain how they will provide all of the post-release skill-building services—apprenticeships and occupational training in in-demand industries that lead to industry-recognized credentials—and explain how the Individual Development Plan (IDP) links to employment and post-release and follow-up services to ensure a continuum of services; identify how assessments, including an assessment of each individual’s risk of reoffending and their level of job readiness, will be incorporated into the IDP; describe a plan for directly linking participants to their program, employers, and external service providers before they exit the correctional facility; describe how the pre-release case manager will be retained post-release, and how post-release and follow-up activities will be delivered, and describe a plan to continue services to participants post-release and to secure lasting partnerships with local service providers and employers and the strategies for achieving buy-in from local employers and industry associations in order to increase employment opportunities for participants post-release.

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**Alexander**: Mandatory Partnerships. Applicants must identify, and provide a written commitment from, the state correctional facility or local/county jail the applicant intends to partner with for this project.

The written commitment must, at a minimum, address how the applicant and partner staff will access the state correctional facility or local or county jail and how partners will provide services pre-release, accommodations for services to be provided, a strategy for internet accessibility or an alternative, resources and space supplied by the correctional facility, facility requirements for inmate participation and selection, and security for applicant and partner staff.

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**Alexander**: Grantees are encouraged to work with additional partners (other than the partner correctional facility) to leverage resources.

Applicants should identify local organizations, employers and industry organizations, which will provide services to support program operations, such as workforce services, housing, and substance abuse and mental health treatment for participants.

Applicants must describe the specifics of their partnership(s) and provide a Memorandum of Understanding or Letter of Commitment signed by the authorizing agent of the partner organization, which describes services to be provided to the organization or participants, procedures for enrollment or recruitment, if applicable, and any resources to be committed to the program.

Applicants must explain how employers and industry organizations will be engaged in the program to provide curriculum development, occupational education, and employment pre- and post-release.

Applicants must explain how partners will communicate pre- and post-release to support program operations and ensure that all required services are available to all program participants.

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**Alexander**: Applicants will receive priority consideration of one (1) bonus point if the applicant has demonstrated in item number 10 of their abstract, at least one census tract in their target area is a qualified Opportunity Zone designated by the Secretary of Treasury; applicants will not receive additional bonus points for more than one opportunity zone.

Designated Opportunity Zone census tracts may be found at: [www.cdfifund.gov/pages/opportunity-zones.aspx](http://www.cdfifund.gov/pages/opportunity-zones.aspx) (which is also listed in the Priority Consideration section of the FOA pg. 33)

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

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**Jessica**: Thanks, Alex. My name is Jessica Lohmann and I’m a Senior Evaluation Specialist in DOL’s Chief Evaluation Office. 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 reentry research, particularly around pre- and post-release services, and explain where you fit in.

**Slide 22**

**Jessica**: Today I am going to discuss the importance of evidence and evaluation, give an overview of reentry research, particularly around pre- and post-release services, and explain where you fit in.

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**Jessica**: The use of evidence and evaluation is needed 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 its impact on those we serve.

Using existing evidence and building evidence with evaluation can help programs determine if they are achieving the desired end goals and results for participants, making decisions that impact outcomes of interest (such as employment and recidivism), tweaking programs to improve their impacts, and help determine how to better use of scarce resources.

In addition to program benefits, 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 FY2021 budget which discusses the use of “Evidence to Promote Better Outcomes” and emphasizes that, “The Administration continues to implement evidence-building activities to improve policy, programs, and regulations, including through multiyear learning agendas, annual evaluation plans, and capacity assessments.“

Additionally, congress recently passed and the President signed the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act that enhances evidence-building capacity in government and requires all government agencies to develop an evaluation plan. Federal agencies are currently developing plans to implement this legislation.

There are numerous other organizations and areas focused on using and building evidence to improve programs including federal evidence reviews 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.

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**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 (or the expected outcomes associated with program services) 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.

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**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 incarcerated individuals make successful transitions back to the community, including providing employment opportunities. That is why we are planning an independent evaluation of these grants.

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 ETA and CEO to add to the evidence base of employment-focused reentry models.

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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**: This new grant design builds on previous findings from the Linking Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP) implementation study. The LEAP pilots provided pre-release services through jail-based American Job Centers and linked participants to post-release services. These two-year grants, which ended in 2017, have shown potential for breaking the cycle of recidivism by linking participants to the workforce system early—while still in jail—and then immediately upon reentry into the community. The experiences of the LEAP grantees highlight important lessons learned and some areas for continued refinement or potential replication in similar contexts.

The Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), funded an evaluation of the LEAP grants. The evaluation looked at approaches to providing services before and after incarceration across 20 sites based on site visits, phone interviews, focus groups, and grantee quarterly performance reports. The findings are presented in a final reports and a compendium of 10 issue briefs that summarize key issues important to helping the workforce development and corrections communities improve employment outcomes for those involved in the justice system. The report and compendium are linked on the resources slide.

The final report states that, “Although this implementation evaluation cannot make causal claims, the evidence suggests that it is possible to use jail-based AJCs to link participants to post-release services and that this may be a promising approach to support returning individuals in successful reentry…

“Workforce development, corrections, and other partners, as well as participants, identified many successes along with significant challenges and promising strategies to address them. The qualitative evidence collected through this implementation evaluation suggests that introducing new services, partnerships, and ways of thinking about reentry hold promise for lasting effects on the workforce and corrections systems in some sites. The experiences of the LEAP grantees highlight important lessons learned and some areas for continued refinement or potential replication in similar or different contexts.”

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**Jessica**: The LEAP evaluation identified many promising practices for offering both pre- and post-release services.

The requirement in the Pathway Home grant for participants to maintain the same caseworker pre- and post-release, was actually suggested as a promising practice in the LEAP Implementation Study.

Additional promising practices include:

-Recognizing not only pre-release and post-release services but to think about the critical middle stage involving preparing for the transition and reengagement post-release.

-Creating strong partnerships with local organizations and leveraging their expertise.

-Ensuing a smooth transition through means such as using the same staff to provide services pre- and post-release, bringing post-release staff into the jail early to build relationships, and enabling pre-release staff to reach out after release to facilitate connection.

I recommend that you all review the findings from this evaluation to get a sense of the challenges and successes of the LEAP grantees.

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**Jessica**: The LEAP final report and compendium as well as a number of the other 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.

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**Jessica**: As you will see in the FOA, a commitment to participate in an 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 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. We may require applicants 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 program operating personnel, participants, and operational and financial records, and any other relevant documents to calculate program costs and benefits; (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 evaluation contractor under the direction of DOL.

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

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**Alexander**: This concludes our prospective applicant webinar. If you have additional questions on the Pathway Home Funding Opportunity Announcement, you can contact Ariam Ferro, the grants management specialist listed as the contact in the Funding Opportunity Announcement.

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**Alexander**: Thank you!