

Transcript of Volunteer Generation Fund TTA Call Recording from July 15, 2013

Andrea: Welcome and thank you for standing by. All participants are in a listen-only mode. During the question and answer portion of today's call, please press *1 to ask a question. I will now turn this meeting over to Ms. Rosa Moreno Mahoney, you may begin.

Mahoney: Thank you, Andrea. Good Morning Everyone, thank you for joining us this morning. I want to kind of go over the format of the call this morning. I am joined this morning by Mal Coles. And the two of us will cover some topics and hopefully answer your questions. What we'll do in just a second, is we will review topics of interest that we identified from the notice of funding availability, and at the end we will open the call for questions and answers. To restate, the purpose of this call is for eligible applicants who are interested in the VGF grant competition. As many of you are all very familiar, the purpose of the grant fund—the VGF grant fund serves retain and increase the number of people who volunteer in meaningful roles. The VGF grants will be used to develop and support community-based entities to recruit, manage and support volunteers and CNCS is seeking to fund effective approaches that will in essence do three things: expand volunteering, strengthen the capacity of volunteer-connector organizations to recruit and retain skill-based volunteers, and three to develop strategies to effectively use volunteers to solve problems. Specifically, the VGF grants will support efforts that expand the capacity of the volunteer connector organizations to recruit, manage, and support and retain the people to serve in high-quality volunteer assignments. So that is the purpose of the grant fund.

Who's eligible? So we'll find out later this afternoon who is actually on the phone call. Since this is technically a public phone call I want to make sure we know who is eligible to apply. Eligible organizations exist of current Volunteer Generation Fund grantees. So if you are on the phone and you are not currently a grantee of the Volunteer Generation Fund, then for this particular fiscal year you would not be eligible to apply. I would encourage you at that time to keep a list—to keep an eye for our funding opportunities so that when it is open you can consider applying. Otherwise, if you are on the line and you are a current Volunteer Generation Fund grantee then the rest of this information will apply directly to you and we want to make sure we cover that.

Important things: application deadlines. The notice of intent to apply is due on Wednesday, July 24th, which is about two and a half, which is in a week next Wednesday, that's when it is, a week and half next Wednesday, is when the notice of intent to apply is due. And then, about a week or so later, on Friday August 9, is when the deadline for applications. 5PM, Eastern Time. Again, notice of intent to apply Wednesday, July 24th, application deadline 5 PM, Eastern Time, Friday, August 9th.

What I want to do is take a few minutes to highlight some things in the notice of funding opportunity that I thought would be critical information. Of course, please, please read the notice of funding availability in its entirety. For purposes of this call I'm just going to highlight a couple things, but it would be imperative that you all read it because oftentimes there are changes and differences and you want to ensure that you are familiar with all of those.

First, and foremost, the project period. For this particular grant funding opportunity the project grant is for one year only. This means that there will not be continuation grants in subsequent years, so you will

be preparing your program design and your budget with one year in mind. Please note that while CNCS anticipates awarding one-year grants, variances in actual award period may occur. This would be as a result of the availability of the appropriations program requirements for special circumstances of an individual application. But what you need to be mindful of is that you are preparing a proposal in which subsequent years there would not be continuation funding. So what's important is for this one year project period, for many folks we've received questions about why we limited eligibility funding to existing VGF grantees only. In particular, this project period was that reason. For FY 13, we're building on the progress by accepting proposals from this pool of current grantees for one year grants. Given the shortened project period under this competition, I mean it's one year only, the current grantees we determined were best positioned to enhance the current, the currently funded initiatives and share the findings with the larger national service community. So we wanted to be more about the fact that we were doing one year project funding, and felt it made sense to continue the existing investment and focus on lessons learned and sharing best practices instead of starting programs that would start and end in one year. So that's just something you should keep in mind as you consider applying for this grant opportunity.

The next thing we want to highlight are performance measures. Applicants who apply for this funding will be required to use national measures and are required to select from a set of priority measures that we've provided, and you may select additional complementary measures that are delineated in the notice. What's important to note is that you actually will not enter any information in the performance measures section of egrants at this time, for now you will articulate your performance measures and targets in the narrative section of your application. And what we will do is we'll make the performance measures section in egrants available during the clarification process and it will be at that time that you will be asked to enter the focus areas, service categories, and performance measures following the prompts on the screen in egrants. Particularly, the reason why we are doing this at this time is that as you probably are familiar, we have been doing egrants modification related to performance measures. It's been in development over time and we want to make sure that the section specific for VGF, because the module for VGF is still being built out, actually by now it is built out, but we need to make sure that we have all of the actual correct information around screenshots and things of that nature and felt it was a little too early to include it now and determined it was more important to get it right and work with you during the clarification process. Again, you will describe and articulate your performance measures and targets in the narrative section in your application, and we then will eventually open the egrants functionality related to performance measures during the clarification process so that you can enter the specific performance measures at that time. So that will be important that you make sure you include it in your narrative at the time of submission because it's a selection criteria element and you want to be sure that you review all of the selection criteria components and specifically not only acknowledge the information that were requesting but then specifically focus on the things that we will be assessing your application against.

The one thing then, I want to drive our next piece is the application page limit. The page limit on this one is twelve double spaced pages. And that basically includes the narrative, your executive summary, and the face sheet. And this is as it prints out from egrants. So I think many of you are familiar with the how

we count pages it is just important to make sure you pay attention to that. Twelve pages is the limit. Of course, this does not include the budget or performance measures. If you provide anything that exceeds the page limit requirements, then the reviewers won't even look at that material and its important that you pay attention because egrants will allow you to enter information above and beyond what we're requiring because we don't have the ability to set a limitation so egrants will allow you to submit more so its your responsibility to make sure you're within the twelve pages.

Match, this grant has a match requirement, and for programs which are in year four, which given that this competition is limited to existing VGF grantees, all of you would be in year four of your matching requirement and your match at this time is 50%. So just something to consider.

There are a couple of budgets, your budget should look familiar. I wanted to highlight two things because these are things that are common, sometimes items we had to submit back for clarification. If you are going to be issuing sub-grants, meaning you issue sub-grants to nonprofits who will actually carry out the work to do these things. Then in your budget you'll want to actually delineate a line that says sub grants and specify the amount. This ensures that we're aware that you're issuing sub-grants and it helps us keep track of that. So please make sure you create a separate line item that will articulate sub grants. And we highlight that that needs to be, going through the [nofa] right now, I believe its section I of your budget, but I'll find out for sure in just a second and confirm that for you, yes it is section I and other program operating costs. Enter the sub grant costs in a line entitled sub grants. Additionally in section I, is making sure that if necessary, that you enter costs for criminal history background check. All CNCS recipients must comply with a criminal history check regulation. And basically under the regulation, a criminal history background check is required for all employees or other individuals who receive a salary, stipend, or similar payment from the grant fund. This includes CNCS or non-CNCS share of funds. And so be cognizant that we will be looking to see that you've entered costs of criminal background history checks. If you have not, we will be clarifying why you did not, so its best if you can ensure that you make that evident on the application from the onset.

I wanted to point out really quickly that included in the notice of funding opportunity is a summary of what you can expect in your progress report. We are currently looking at the information related to progress reports and maybe making some revisions. But in the interim, I wanted to highlight the required information that you will need to be reporting. Basically we're required, as part of the Volunteer Generation Fund, to track new and retained volunteers. And as a result, if you are selected as a grantee, you will be required to report the total number of leverage volunteers and the number of volunteer hours, as well as the number of new volunteers and the number of new volunteer hours. Additionally we will ask for information that talks about the types and amounts of activities carried out by the volunteers.

What I want to iterate really quickly, is that in September, as part of the grantee meeting, we will be convening a training to discuss VGF reporting requirements. Specifically what we will be doing is we will be answering questions related to what do we mean by new retained...things of that nature to ensure that as you are setting up your data collection systems that we are on the same related to the information that needs to be reported. So that will be happening.

The selection criteria is outlined in the notice of funding availability. Specifically, we articulate not only the information you need to include when addressing the criteria, which is the program design, organizational capability, budget adequacy, and cost effectiveness, but we also share with you that when considering the information you provide that reviewers will assess the quality of the application based on the set of factors. And we then articulate the factors. And so the assessment of applications involves a wide range of factors and consideration. In the end, the review and a selection process is intended to produce a diversified set of high-quality programs that represent a commitment to the goals of the Volunteer Generation Fund and represent the priorities and selection factors described in the notice. In the 2013 competition, CNCS expects to fund applicants that successfully meet the requirements described in this notice, and within that context, CNCS seeks to target its grant-making towards programs that are likely to generate a significant, measurable improvement in the number of volunteers generated and retained, and especially related to those engaging skill-based volunteers. And hopefully as you're reading the notice of funding opportunity you'll clearly see the alignment between, as I said, the purpose of the funds and what we're trying to achieve with this investment.

Quickly before we open it up for questions, I want to just remind you the timeline. Letter of intent to apply, July 27th, submit your application by August 9th, the clarification process, if applicable, we expect to be about five days in length, and to take place in late August/early September, and we expect to announce awards by mid-September so we can issue your grant awards by September 30th. So with that Andrea if we could open the line for questions.

Andrea: If you would like to ask a question please press *1, again if you would like to ask a question please press *1. One moment please. Again to ask a question over the phone please press * 1.

I have a question from Jim Snow. Your line is open.

Snow: Thank you. Hey Rosa, I know we're not eligible, and you kind of answered the question as to why you're leaving it to current grantees only. But I think your premise is really flawed. The Corporation asks state commissions to do things on short notice and be successful all the times. Including starting new AmeriCorps programs that are successful within a year and I think State commissions in general are perfectly capable of starting up new programs that are successful within a one year time frame.

Mahoney: That's helpful Jim. Appreciate it. The decision at the point of time, to start something that would start and end in one year, did not seem, our decision was that it didn't seem particularly wise, strategic and thought that was not in the best interest of a community to only make a one year investment in something. So it wasn't about whether the ability of a commission to do it or not, it was more about is it wise to do that, and the decision was that, no we would better serve the investment to continue in the investment in what we've been looking at and already funding and use that as lessons learned to inform future competition, was the rational. But I appreciate the comments that you are offering, and will definitely make sure that it gets communicated back to the group. What I want to make sure that folks on the line that are eligible understand is that this particular process is still a competitive process. So although you were a recipient of VGF funding, its not a guarantee of funding because it is a open, competitive process, its just limited to a smaller pool applicants.

Snow: So what happens then, if none of the current grantees who submit applications are considered strong enough to be funded?

Mahoney: So there a couple of things that could happen. We will look at applicants and see which applicants are selected for funding, and then consider the funding levels that they will be requesting, and the goal will be to identify the highest quality applicants for funding. But in any competition if there's never enough applicants, so let's say the number of quality applicants is below the available funding, then we fund what we have identified as applicants worthy of receiving funding, and in some instances, in that case things may be what we call forward-funded right, that's the note where I said to you, depending on how much available funds we have and whose qualified, we may be looking at making an investment for additional resources if necessary. So we kind of have different scenarios Jim that we play out in the event that something like that happens. And thought through the "what if," because you are raising the "what if" question, and kind of have identified what that what if is, but we would not be in a position then, to reopen the competition because there would not be sufficient time to do that.

Coles: Hi, Jim, this is Mal Coles, can you hear me?

Snow: Yes, I can

Coles: Good. I just want to amplify the first part of Rosa's response. We did give considerable thought to what ought to be the competitive pool, who ought to be in it. And part of the larger contextual thinking had to do with the planned rollouts based on the President's FY 14 budget to create the George Herbert Walker Bush Volunteer Generation Fund. Which would be, if you will, the next generation of volunteer generation funds. Which may or may not have great similarities or disparities with what we're funding right now. We didn't want to promote a confusion that this was in some respects, an early rollout of a program that has not yet been fully formulated.

Snow: So with that new program, then, I guess it is too early to know whether that's going to a formula-based or competitive-based program?

Coles: yeah, it's hard to tell. The other thing we know is that the president's CBJ mark was for 10 million, and last week the Senate came in with a mark of 5 million for that. Beyond that, again, it's a tabularasa, there's no particular considerations of what ought to be the eligibility criteria or the design.

Mahoney: The president's budget for the 10 million has the funds all going out on a competitive basis.

Coles: correct.

Mahoney: Any other question Jim?

Snow: No...I, yeah no.

Mahoney: So as Mal was just iterating it was a little bit about the one year investment, the reason we decided to do one year specifically was in anticipation of potential for the 14 budget and the George

Herbert Walker Bush Volunteer Generation Fund and the program design that we wanted to start new programs all under that new initiative, and we're not planning to make continuation grants specifically. So one year then led us to a decision to say how do we want to make that investment in one year.

Okay. Andrea, any other questions?

Andrea: I have no other questions

Mahoney: Okay. So I think I said, I gave a wrong date earlier so the letters of intent are due July 24th, I think I accidentally said the 27th, I think that's the day I go on vacation, so that's wishful thinking. July 24th is when your letter of intent is due, and so again that's next Wednesday. And if you have any questions, please you can submit them to: volunteergeneration@cncs.gov. Please submit questions and we will answer them, otherwise we look forward to receiving letters of intent and applications.

Make sure there are no questions. Okay Andrea if there are no other questions then we will end the call

Andrea: I do have one more question. It's from Alan Mendel, your line is open

Mendel: I have a question, how many organizations are eligible to apply? What's the number?

Mahoney: The number I believe at this time, it is 18.

Mendel: And on your website it tells how to become a member eventually.

Mahoney: yeah, so what you would do Allan is, so our notice of funding opportunity always delineates who is eligible to apply. For this fiscal year, we limited eligibility to existing grantees, and particularly that was in anticipation that in FY 14, if the VGF gets appropriation, then we at that point in time would like it to be an open competition. Then in 14, you could consider applying. At this time, what I would suggest that you do is that you would keep an eye on our funding opportunities, so that you could see what the projected time frame is, but then that would be a way for you to apply and be considered to be grantee of the Volunteer Generation Fund.

Andrea: I have no other questions

Mahoney: Okay. Great. Well thank you all very much and for those of you on the line, as I said, if you not current eligible grantees but are interested please continue to visit our website and keep an eye for funding opportunities because that would be the way you would apply and be considered for the funding, and if you are an existing eligible organization and are planning to apply your letter of intent is due next week followed by the application due on August 9th. Thank you all very much and have a wonderful rest of the day.

Andrea: And this concludes today's conference, please disconnect.