Funding Opportunity Announcement FAQ

Many of the questions we've been asked most often have their answers buried in the Funding Opportunity Announcement! The questions and answers below lay out where to find those answers. If you are planning to apply, we strongly encourage you to read the FOA in its entirety and the Office of Head Start's updated FAQ. If you have additional questions, leave them in the comments section below.

Q: Where can I download the FOA and Application Package?

To find the Application Package, visit www.grants.gov and search for Funding Opportunity Number HHS-2015-ACF-OHS-HP-0814. Choose the "Application Package" tab and submit your email address to download the materials. To find the Funding Opportunity Announcement, go to http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/foa/view/HHS-2015-ACF-OHS-HP-0814 and click the "Download PDF" icon to access the FOA.

Q: Who can apply to be a grantee?

Page 12 of the FOA states, "Eligible applicants are any public entities, including states, or non-profit or for-profit private entities, including community-based and faith-based organizations, pursuant to section 645A(d) of the Head Start, 42 U.S.C. § 9840a(d). Applications from individuals (including sole proprietorships) and foreign entities are not eligible and will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement."

Q: When are applications due?

Page 35 of the FOA lists the Due Date for Applications as 08/20/2014 and notes, "The deadline for submission of electronic applications via www.Grants.gov is 11:59 p.m., ET, on the due date...The deadline for mailed paper applications is 4:30 p.m., ET, on the due date."

Q: What time period will the grant cover?

Page 10 of the FOA states, "The project period will be up to 59 months with an initial budget period of up to 11 months and four subsequent 12-month budget periods." The Grant Forecast suggests an estimated start date of December 1, 2014.

Q: How much funding is allocated for my state?

Page 11 of the FOA states, "Funding is available within each state based on the number of young children in poverty. The state allocations are listed in the Appendix of this FOA. Applicants are encouraged to use the state allocation funding levels as a guide in determining their proposed project funding. Applications that request funding that is higher than the state allocation for the state(s) in which they propose services will not be disqualified; however, applications that exceed the Award Ceiling listed in this section will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement. Applications may be funded in whole or in part. Successful applicants may be funded at an amount lower than that requested...ACF may also reallocate funds between states."

Q: How many grants will be given out?

Page 10 of the FOA indicates that the Expected Number of Awards is 300. This does not mean the Office of Head Start must fund exactly 300 awards, but presents an estimate.

Q: Are start-up funds available?

Page 9 of the FOA states, "Start-up costs may be requested by an applicant in addition to the base operating and T/TA grant funds. If requested, applicants must provide a separate budget for start-up costs, in addition to a 12-month budget for the base funding awarded, within the page limitations stated for the Budget and Budget Justification in Section IV.2. Content and Form of Application Submission. Examples of start-up activities are facility renovations, purchase of
classroom supplies, building purchase, licensing, background checks, etc. Approval of start-up costs is not guaranteed; they are negotiated at the time of award and are based on reasonableness, necessity, and the availability of funds."

Q: If we get funding, will it be for the amount we requested?

Page 41 of the FOA states, "Applications may be funded in whole or in part. Successful applicants may be funded at an amount lower than that requested. ACF reserves the right to consider preferences to fund organizations serving emerging, unserved, or under-served populations, including those populations located in pockets of poverty. ACF will also consider the geographic distribution of federal funds in its award decisions."

Q: What happens if my application is approved but not funded?

Page 42 of the FOA states, "Applications recommended for approval that were not funded under the competition because of the lack of available funds may be held over by ACF and reconsidered in a subsequent review cycle if a future competition under the program area is planned. These applications will be held over for a period of up to one year and will be re-competed for funding with all other competing applications in the next available review cycle. For those applications that have been deemed as approved but unfunded, notice will be given of such determination by postal mail."

Q: What are ACF’s priorities?

The FOA spells out ACF’s priorities on page 42, including:

- applications that propose to provide at least 50 percent of its slots through an EHS-CC Partnership
- applicants that propose to serve children in zip codes with high or concentrated poverty
- applicants proposing to serve substantial numbers of children residing in a federally designated Promise Zone
- applicants that propose to create a seamless continuum of care and education for children from birth to age 5
- EHS-CC Partnership applications that demonstrate an ability to serve more than 25 percent of children with a child care subsidy while maintaining financial stability and providing a high level of continuity of care for children
- applicants that can show evidence of broad-scale impact through changes in state policies, including licensing that supports higher quality infant and toddler care or reduces the likelihood of families losing subsidies when family conditions change by partnering with businesses, foundations, or non-profits to leverage funds; or by partnering with higher education to produce a highly qualified infant and toddler workforce community-wide or statewide

Q: What content and criteria will applications be asked to address?

See the pages below for descriptions and requirements of the major sections of the application.

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<td>Project Budget and Budget Justification</td>
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Q: What bonus points are available?

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<th>Number of Points</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Applicants that propose services in areas of high poverty identified by the zip codes listed in the Appendix of this FOA will receive 5 points under the Criteria listed in Section V.1 of this FOA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ACF will prioritize applicants proposing EHS-CC Partnerships. Entities applying to operate 100 percent of their program through EHS-CC Partnerships will be awarded 10 priority points under the Criteria listed in Section V.1 of this FOA.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Applicants that propose to serve children that reside within a federally designated Promise Zone, and that serves a substantial share of children within that Zone, will receive 3 points under the Criteria listed in Section V.1 of this FOA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Applicants that propose a plan to ensure that at all times greater than 40 percent of the total number of Early Head Start eligible children served by this grant will also have child care subsidies will receive 3 points under the Criteria listed in Section V.1 of this FOA.</td>
<td>27</td>
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Q: Can we apply to expand our existing Early Head Start program?

Yes. Page 2 of the FOA states, "New entities or existing Head Start and EHS grantees can also apply to expand the number of center based slots in traditional Early Head Start programs through expansion (Non-Partnership Early Head Start Expansion)."

Q: Can we apply for Early Head Start expansion if we've only offered Head Start in the past?

Yes. Page 2 of the FOA states, "New entities or existing Head Start and EHS grantees can also apply to expand the number of center based slots in traditional Early Head Start programs through expansion (Non-Partnership Early Head Start Expansion)."

Q: Can we apply if we plan to partner but don't have contracts yet?

Yes. Page 26 of the FOA states, "EHS-CC Partnership applicants must discuss how partnerships have been, or will be, developed, maintained, and utilized to support the EHS-CC Partnership project goals. If the applicant has not identified all partner sites, then it must provide a detailed plan, timeline, and criteria for identifying partners."

Q: Can we apply to provide home-based services?

Page 5 of the FOA states, "All grantees funded through this FOA must provide high-quality, comprehensive, and continuous early care and education for infants and toddlers in centers and/or family child care homes. Funding under these grants may not be used to provide services using the Early Head Start home-based program option as defined in 45 CFR § 1306.3(j)."

Q: Can we submit separate partnership and expansion applications for the same service area?

Page 2 of the FOA states, "applicant entities may submit only one application per service area, regardless of how they choose to apply. ACF will review only one application for a service area from any applicant."
Q: Should budgets be written for one year or five? Is the state allocation in the back of the FOA for one year or five?

Page 11 of the FOA states, "Applicants must submit an annual (12-month) budget. The funding amount listed on Line 18a (Federal) of the SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance, must reflect a full 12 months of funding." The state allocation represents one year of base funding.

Q: Do all the funds in a partnership grant go to the child care partners?

Page 29 of the FOA states both, "EHS-CC Partnership applicants' budgets must clearly indicate that a significant portion of funding will be directed to its child care partners to ensure high-quality early learning experiences and must describe how they use the funding to make quality improvements in their partner(s)" and "ACF recognizes that EHS-CC Partnership grantees will need to retain some portion of the federal funds to ensure adequate oversight of the progress partners are making towards implementation and over time sustaining high-quality, comprehensive education services." No exact figure is offered for "significant."

Q: How many children in the partnership must be receiving child care subsidies?

Page 10 of the FOA states, "Not all children identified as Early Head Start eligible and served through the EHS-CC Partnerships are required to have a child care subsidy funded by CCDF or another source (e.g., Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Social Services Block Grant, or private funding). However, at all times the EHS-CC Partnership grantee must ensure that at least 25 percent of the total numbers of slots being filled by the Early Head Start eligible children in the partnership sites are also funded with a child care subsidy."

Q: What happens if a child loses their subsidy?

Page 29 of the FOA states, "EHS-CC Partnership applicants must describe their plan to ensure that children whose families lose child care subsidy eligibility will continue to be served" but specifics for how to implement this are left to the grantee to describe.

Q: What's the minimum number of slots we can apply for?

Page 5 of the FOA states, "Grantees must serve a sufficient number of infants and toddlers and their families, so that the funding level is adequate to support the full array of staffing and infrastructure for successful implementation. Although ACF is not setting a minimum number of participant slots for which applicants must apply, ACF recommends applicants propose no less than 72 slots, which can be allocated across multiple child care center and/or family child care home partner sites. ACF recognizes that applicants in rural communities, or organizations with existing infrastructure to support the necessary services, may propose fewer than 72 slots."

Q: Do we have to meet all the Head Start Program Performance Standards immediately?

Page 6 of the FOA states, "All EHS-CC Partnership grantees and any child care partners will be required to implement all Head Start Program Performance Standards for the children funded through this FOA and will be given 18 months to ensure they can meet the full set of standards." Page 8 further explains, "Grantees must meet basic requirements, such as ratios and health and safety requirements, immediately. Beginning after 18 months of operation, ACF will assess whether partnerships have met the full set of Head Start Program Performance Standards."

Q: What ages of children can be served with these grants?

Page 9 of the FOA states, "Early Head Start provides services for low-income children from birth to 36 months. All grantees can serve children in center-based settings from birth to 36 months. Additionally, EHS-CC Partnership grantees can serve children in family child care settings from birth to 48 months."
Q: What credential is required for Early Head Start teachers?

Page 27 of the FOA states, "The applicant must provide evidence that after 18 months of operation, all teachers funded by this grant will have an Infant Toddler or Family Child Care Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, or state certificate that is comparable to those CDAs, and will have been trained (or have equivalent coursework) in early childhood development with an infant and toddler focus."

Q: What are the required ratios and group sizes for Early Head Start?

Ratios and group sizes are addressed in section 1306 of the Head Start Program Performance Standards, which are accessible in full at the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center. In addition, the "Partnership Responsibilities" section of the Office of Head Start's partnership toolkit states, "Group Ratios: Early Head Start ratios for center-based programs require one qualified teacher for every four infants/toddlers. The maximum group size is eight infants/toddlers, with two teachers. Whenever possible, there should be a third person in the classroom who is a volunteer. For the family child care option, the maximum group size for one qualified teacher is six young children, with no more than two under the age of two. The maximum group size is 12 young children, with no more than two younger than 18 months, cared for by two teachers. For the family child care option, whenever present, the child care provider's own children under the age of six must be included in the count. Additional assistance or smaller group size may be necessary when serving children with special needs who require additional care."

Q: What does Early Head Start mean by "full-day full-year"?

Page 2 of the FOA states, "Given the need for continuity of care for very young age children, the Office of Head Start (OHS) expects that applicants will propose serving children in a full-day, full-year model with a minimum of 48 weeks." The Early Head Start Tip Sheet no. 4 2014 revision states, "The Office of Head Start understands full day, full year to mean 6 hours a day or more, and for Early Head Start Programs at least 48 weeks per year." The tip sheet is accessible at the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center.

Q: How do we know if we're serving a high poverty zip code?

Pages 56-60 of the FOA contain a list of the high poverty zip codes relevant to this grant opportunity. The Office of Head Start has updated this list since the FOA was originally posted; we encourage you to download the most up-to-date version before reviewing the zip code lists.

Q: What is a Promise Zone?

The Promise Zones Initiative, led by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development is intended to "designate a number of high-poverty urban, rural and tribal communities as Promise Zones, where the federal government will partner with and invest in communities to create jobs, leverage private investment, increase economic activity, expand educational opportunities, and improve public safety." Read more about the initiative here. Promise Zones established so far are Philadelphia, San Antonio, Los Angeles, Kentucky Highlands, and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.

Q: What is non-federal share? Can we get a waiver?

Page 12 of the FOA states, "Grantees must provide at least 20 percent of the total approved cost of the project. The total approved cost of the project is the sum of the ACF (federal) share and the non-federal share. The non-federal share may be met by cash or in-kind contributions, although applicants are encouraged to meet their match requirements through cash contributions. For example, in order to meet the match requirements, a project requesting $54,933,590.00 in ACF (federal) funds must provide a non-federal share of the approved total project cost of at least $13,733,398.00, which is 20 percent of total approved project cost of $68,666,988." Regarding waivers, page 13 of the FOA states, "To receive a waiver or a reduction in the required non-federal share, the applicant must provide ACF with written documentation of need. This request must identify which of the five waiver criteria found at Section 640(b)(1-5) of the Head Start Act it believes to be relevant. It may be submitted with the grant proposal document or during the budget negotiation period. Approval of the waiver request cannot be assumed by the applicant without written notice from ACF. Waiver requests will not result in a deduction of points in the evaluation of the application. In light of the current economic climate, ACF will be
receptive to reasonable arguments based on the grounds recognized in the statute for such waivers.” Resources on non-federal share are available from the National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations.

Q: Can we mail in a paper application?

Page 14 of the FOA states, “ACF requires electronic submission of applications at www.Grants.gov. Paper applications received from applicants that have not been approved for an exemption from required electronic submission will be disqualified from competitive review and from funding under this announcement. Applicants that do not have an Internet connection or sufficient computing capacity to upload large documents to the Internet may contact ACF for an exemption that will allow the applicant to submit applications in paper format. Information and the requirements for requesting an exemption from required electronic application submission are found in “Request an Exemption from Electronic Application Submission” in Section IV.2. Content and Form of Application Submission.”

Q: What happens if my application is too long? Are appendices separate from the page limit?

Pages 15-20 of the FOA lay out exactly how to prepare an application for submission, including font sizes, borders, and document formats. We urge you to read these carefully. On page 19, the FOA states, “Applications are limited to a total of 75 pages, which may be distributed across two files. The combined number of pages in both files must not exceed 75 pages. ACF will remove all pages over the 75-page limit from the end of the second file and exclude those pages from competitive review.” The two files are described as the Application Narrative and the Appendices.