

WIPA

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

We appreciate your willingness to resume WIPA services for our beneficiaries. The following information responds to the many questions we received since we announced the new awards. Please refer to your application package and the Terms and Conditions (T&C) for specifics and the requirements for the WIPA cooperative agreement.

Please feel free to send any unanswered questions to your Project Officer.

1. Why isn't SSA holding a competition for these grants?

The 2013 Continuing Resolution (PL 113-6) fully funded WIPA, and required us to restart the program in fiscal year (FY) 2013. Sequestration did not affect award amounts. We are renewing the former WIPA grants because we did not have sufficient time to hold a competition and issue new awards in FY 2013.

2. Can you clarify Information about the grant application?

- A. The application is due May 14, 2013, and the budget and performance period is August 1, 2013 through July 31, 2014. We anticipate a second year of funding, pending budget availability and satisfactory performance.
- B. We expect projects to receive a response to their applications on or before August 1, 2013.
- C. For your application, we will require a brief narrative and a budget similar to earlier extension applications. All the information you will need to submit is included in the application package. Please include resumes for all staff your project intends to pay under the

WIPA cooperative agreement. In addition, please include copies of suitability letters for staff cleared under your prior award if you have them.

- D. The narrative you submit with your application should be brief. You should follow the instructions in the grant application. You may include a brief explanation of how you sustained your program since the end of the earlier award, as well as any new initiatives you have undertaken.
- E. If you have questions about what to include in your budget, please refer to your prior approved budgets or review appropriate cost principles for your organization by viewing the following link on our website: [Regulations](#).
- F. You may charge the cost of fingerprinting cooperative agreement staff to the grant award when requesting suitability determinations. If you have questions as to other costs, please contact the Grants Management Specialist assigned to your award.
- G. Although we are only able to fund prior WIPA projects, this is a new award and will have a new grant award number.
- H. You will serve the same areas as you did under your most recent award. The only changes to coverage will involve those projects that we have communicated with and have agreed to serve an area where the former WIPA has declined funding.
- I. Grantees are subject to all financial requirements from the earlier awards, including the \$300,000.00 cap and five percent match. Note that the \$300,000.00 restrictions include any subcontracts for services from other WIPA grantees. No WIPA may receive more than \$300,000. including subcontracts from other WIPAs.
- J. The Terms and Conditions (T&C) are very similar to the 2011 WIPA award– there are some minor changes, primarily involving suitability and data security. We will discuss suitability elsewhere in this document.
- K. If necessary, you may start staff later than August 1, 2013, in order to compensate for the costs associated with restarting a project and restocking an office closed at the end of the prior WIPA award. Although we prefer that projects start serving beneficiaries as soon as possible, we will permit limited delays to cover reasonable costs involved in startup. We will permit reasonable and allowable costs for training - using non-Federal funds - as a means to meet the 5% matching requirement prior to the August 1 start-up of the grants. These costs include allowable and reasonable costs for training, such as staff time, transportation, hotel and per diem. For example, if a grantee wants to pay the salary for an employee out of non-federal funds, to attend a CWIC training, prior to the WIPA award, may be considered cost share. Typically, expenses that would be permitted as part of an approved budget are expenses that can be applied as cost share. If a grantee wished to use the cost of recruitment efforts as cost share, that too is permissible. Cost share might include rent, supplies, in-kind services from management not charged to the grant, travel, utilities, etc. The primary issue regarding cost share is that the funds are other than Federal funds.

3. Can we do anything to prepare before the August 1, 2013 start date?

- A. Several projects asked about starting outreach, hiring, or serving clients prior to August 1. You may not bill expenditures to WIPA funds prior to August 1, 2013. If you engage in WIPA activities prior to receiving your award notification, you do so at your own risk. In other words, such activities may not be billable as pre award costs.
- B. We are working with VCU to develop training on braided funding and cultivating other funding resources prior to the August 1, 2013, start-up of the WIPA grants. We will provide further information.

4. How will SSA evaluate WIPA projects? Will we use the benchmarks?

- A. We have attached the benchmarks to your T&C. You should consider the Benchmarks as guidance and suggested targets. Later this year, we will provide additional guidance on performance indicators, and measuring progress and outcomes.
- B. Several projects expressed concerns about how we would evaluate successful performance to determine a second year of funding in view of the time needed to restart the project. We recognize that projects had to let many qualified staff go at the end of the prior award period. We understand and we will take start up time into consideration when assessing performance.

5. How does this award affect projects with approved no-cost extensions?

The no-cost extension was an opportunity to close down prior activities. Even if you are currently operating under a no-cost extension, you may not take new clients until August 1, 2013. You are still required to destroy any beneficiary information at the end of your no-cost extension.

6. How will projects collect data? If we use ETO, how will it work?

- A. We will use Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) for data collection. We intend to have ETO available on August 1, 2013. We will provide additional instructions about data collection if ETO is not available until after August 1, 2013.

- B. Even though we are using ETO, projects will not have access to their earlier data and prior beneficiary information.
- C. Although we received many excellent suggestions about changes to ETO, we are unable to make those changes in advance of the start-up of the new WIPA funding. We will discuss future changes to ETO including additional reporting applications with our contractors after the startup of the WIPA program. Currently, ETO will not permit you to track the benchmarks. We will be discussing enhancements with the contractor that will enable you to manage benchmarks or other performance indicators. We will seek your input on these changes and enhancements.
- D. During the former WIPA program, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), our technical assistance contractor, developed an excellent document providing guidance on managing the benchmarks. We will update and redistribute that document.

7. On the conference call, OESP mentioned specified laptops that Social Security would provide WIPA projects. What additional information do you have about these laptops?

- A. We will provide laptop computers for each project to access the ETO system because of more stringent security requirements. We anticipate distributing these computers at the time we award the Cooperative Agreements.
- B. We plan to distribute laptops equitably to all projects to maximize project efficiency.
- C. These laptops will use Internet Explorer to access ETO because other web browsers do not offer full functionality at this time.
- D. Staff will be able to access ETO only through government issued laptops.
- E. Projects will not be able to load any additional software on these machines.
- F. It is possible that staff will require a separate desktop computer or laptop computer for other tasks in addition to the ETO laptops.
- G. These laptops will have wireless internet capability; they will not however include webcams. We will not provide printers, scanners, fax machines or other hardware.
- H. You will not be able to use thumb or jump drives on these computers.
- I. Prior to issuing the laptops, we will need to determine what adaptive software and assistive technology projects require to accommodate employees with disabilities. We will load the software on the systems before we distribute laptops.
- J. We will provide clarification as to the other software will be available on the systems as soon as we finalize the arrangements and we will provide any necessary training.
- K. You will be required to use a two-factor authentication process to log in to ETO. This two-factor authentication includes an ID Client Certificate, which we will install

on each laptop computer, and ETO Login name/password for the second level of authentication. We will provide detailed guidance and instructions on SSA provided laptops and security protocols.

- L. We are in the process of negotiating the contract to provide these laptops. We are not yet certain of the number we can provide to each project. We will make every effort to meet each project's needs within available funding. We will provide additional clarification as we have it.

8. How will this award affect fee-for-service agreements?

- A. A fee-for-service agreement is separate from WIPA funding, and outside our purview. We encourage you to work closely with agencies with which you have a fee-for-service agreement, explaining to them the need for all possible resources as the demand for services is expanding.
- B. On the teleconference on April 26, 2013, Bob Williams stated that he would contact State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Directors to encourage them to continue to fund fee-for-service benefits counseling. We believe the need for benefits counseling services far outweighs the WIPA funding available, and we strongly encourage projects to work with state VR agencies to augment WIPA.
- C. VCU will offer additional guidance and supplemental training on strategies for working with our VR partners.

9. What are the changes to suitability determinations?

- A. The most significant changes in requirements for the current award involve suitability and security. All WIPA staff must request new suitability determinations at a higher clearance level. Former CWICs and other staff employed by a WIPA through June of 2012 may work with beneficiaries while awaiting a decision regarding their new suitability application. CWICs and other staff that have favorable suitability determinations under the prior award should provide copies of their letter along with the WIPA application if they have them. If projects do not have suitability letters, please let your Project Officer know. You will apply for upgraded suitability determination electronically. We will provide additional instructions and guidance.
- B. The section of the Security attachment that refers to appearing at a Regional Office or Headquarters does not pertain to WIPAs. WIPAs do not have need for credentialing.

10. What are the requirements for training and certification?

- A. VCU will provide training and technical support to all WIPA projects. If you have previously certified CWICs, the certification is still active. New hires must, of course, attend training and receive certification as soon as possible. Former CWICS may receive some refresher training through VCU and are strongly encouraged to take advantage of supplemental training offered by VCU. We recommend that supervisors attend training, but we do not require it.
- B. Currently, VCU has several training classes scheduled for the remainder of FY 2013. VCU will give priority to new WIPA staff for these trainings. Please check www.vcu-ntc.org for the most current information about training locations, dates, and availability. Please advise your project officer when you have staff you would like to send to upcoming VCU trainings.
- C. The initial training is classroom based and will require you to budget for travel and accommodations. There is no charge for the initial classroom based CWIC training. VCU will also offer web based supplemental and refresher training at no cost to WIPAs.
- D. We anticipate that programs will need to send new staff to training using WIPA funds after August 1, 2013. You may use your own non-Federal funding to train CWICS, prior to the August 1 startup date and you may count that expenditure towards the 5% matching requirement. We have no oversight in how you spend funds provided from other sources.

11. What are the requirements for outreach?

- A. WIPA projects are not required to schedule WISE events. The Beneficiary Access and Support Services (BASS) contract conducts WISE webinars. We value WIPA participation in these webinars, and we encourage WIPA directors to support staff when invited to present.
- B. WIPA staff should work with local Area Work Incentives Coordinators (AWICs) and community partners on events focused on beneficiary outreach. The T&Cs of the award require that grantees spend no more than ten percent (10%) of their resources on outreach. The majority of resources should target direct services to beneficiaries in particular, transition age youth.
- C. While we encourage planning, your startup date is August 1, 2013; therefore you may not charge any outreach activities to the cooperative agreement until that time.

- D. We recognize that immediately following receipt of the new WIPA award, many projects will engage in outreach to notify their region of the WIPA's availability. This means there could be front loaded expenditures focused on outreach. If you are concerned you may obligate more than ten percent (10%) to outreach contact your Project Officer.
- E. During the recent teleconference, a question arose about how we will assist projects with outreach. Social Security conducts significant outreach for the work incentives programs through the BASS. Some of the BASS outreach activities include WISE webinars, Ticket Call Center (TCC) and our various social media outlets. We will continue to include Work Incentives planning and assistance in our outreach efforts.
- F. We will provide a list of AWICs across the country around the time we issue the awards.
- G. We will work with VCU to provide training and technical support about how to conduct outreach to transition aged youth.

12. What are the rules about subcontracting?

Only former WIPA projects and primary award recipients that provided services under the 2011 WIPA program may apply and provide services as the primary grantee. These primary grantees may subcontract to other entities, including State VR agencies. WIPA projects awarded the grants may structure their programs however they wish with their Project Officer's and Grants Management Specialist's approval. The relationship between the awardee and any subcontractor is up to the primary recipient.

13. Can you tell us anything about future funding?

Pending appropriations and successful performance for the first year, we plan to award a second year of funding. We intend to hold a full and open competition for the WIPA program in 2015. Prior to that time, we plan to gather input from our constituents, including WIPA projects.

14. How will the WIPA projects work with Employment Success Advisers (ESAs) and referrals from the BASS call center?

- A. Effective April 1, 2013, the BASS is providing benefits counseling using ESAs. VCU hired twenty ESAs as part of a subcontract under the primary BASS contractor, Booz

Allen Hamilton. ESAs provide long-distance intensive benefits counseling services for beneficiaries referred by the TCC. This initiative will continue, as it is part of the BASS contract. We will provide additional information on the TCC and how the TCC will triage beneficiary calls. We will continue to offer benefits counseling services through the BASS via the ESA in addition to the WIPA projects.

- B. We will have a similar referral protocol under the BASS to that which we had under the prior WIPA program. TCC will refer eligible beneficiaries to WIPAs as needed. We are still finalizing the referral protocol between the TCC, the new WIPA grantees, and the ESAs.

15. How does this affect Beneficiary Offset National Demonstration (BOND) projects, or the recent PROMISE grant applications?

A. WIPA projects comprise a unique, independent award program distinct from BOND and from the recently announced PROMISE grants. We always encourage partnerships with entities or programs providing similar or complimentary services.

B. Government issued computers for the BOND and for the WIPA program must remain separate and may not be shared as they are designed for different purposes and will be used to access different data bases.

C. Data security for WIPA is similar to the BOND but they are separate and distinct. Follow the guidance and directives provided for each. All WIPA employees will require a higher level of clearance as they currently do for the BOND. Once an employee has secured the higher level of clearance that individual is cleared for any SSA grant or contract requiring this level of clearance. We will provide additional guidance on the suitability determination process.

D. There is one prohibition. A EWIC may not also work as CWIC for a WIPA program. For example if a WIPA is also a BOND site and a particular EWIC is a part time employee under the BOND, that individual may not also work, at the same time, for the WIPA. A part time WIC however, may also work for the WIPA as a CWIC. The issue is contamination of data. If you have any specific questions, contact your BOND site liaison or your WIPA project officer.

The Office of Program Development (oversight for BOND) and the Office of Employment Support Programs will host a teleconference for sites that sponsor WIPA and BOND if there are additional questions, issues or concerns.

16. May we use technology like Skype to provide services?

We encourage WIPA projects to maximize efficiency by using technology to provide long-distance services as long as you serve beneficiaries completely, accessibly, and in a timely manner, regardless of their distance from your location. The Government issued laptop however will not come equipped with a webcam.

17. How should we prioritize services?

- A. As with prior awards, we expect WIPA projects to prioritize according to beneficiaries with the most pressing needs including those that are working or about to accept a job offer. The T&C of the award will direct projects to focus on outreach services to transition-aged youth.
- B. One questioner asked if the project could triage services based on whether or not individuals could access benefits counseling from other sources, such as fee-for-service agreements with the state VR agencies. As long as you agree to the WIPA T&C, and beneficiaries can receive cost free services, in view of WIPA limited resources, we agree that additional prioritization is at the discretion of the individual WIPA. We hope to provide additional guidance and training on prioritization and triage strategies.

18. What is the effect of this award on Employment Networks (EN) and Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) that also house a WIPA project?

- A. The requirement for a firewall between EN and WIPA staff remains in effect. Direct service staff or supervisors should not work on both the WIPA and the EN staff within the same agency to minimize any appearance of conflict of interest. However, in view of limited resources and the need to maximize available staff, we recognize that, on occasion, the same individual may supervise the WIPA and the EN staff members. If this is the case, contact your Project Officer for guidance.
- B. Under the last PABSS grant and WIPA cooperative agreement awards, we did permit shared staffing between the WIPA and PABSS on a case-by-case basis. Projects that wish to share staff must make the formal request to their Project Officer with a written justification of why you require the same person on both projects, and an explanation of how you will prevent conflicts of interest in the case of a complaint against the WIPA project. We require this even if you had permission previously to share staff across

projects. This is a new award, and we must document the arrangements specific to this award.