

**NYS Department of State
Office for New Americans
ONA Opportunity Center Grant**

Request for Applications #21-ONA-50

The responses to questions included herein are the official responses by the State to questions submitted by potential applicants and are hereby incorporated into RFA # 21-ONA-50 issued on January 3, 2022. In the event of any conflict between the RFA and these responses, the requirements or information contained in these responses will prevail.

Section V. Community Workshops, paragraph 8 is amended to read:

Workshops funded by another funding source or initiated by other institutions cannot be counted toward fulfilling the requirements of this grant.

Section IX Evaluating the Application, A. Experience, #1 is amended to read:

1. Applicant fully described the organization's experience working with new American populations. Applicant indicated whether or not they have five or more years providing naturalization application service within the proposed service region. Applicant provided data showing whether they have completed at least 100 applications (any combination of N400, N600, N648 - Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions, TPS – Temporary Protected Status, DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Renewal, DED - Deferred Enforced Departure, Green Cards – Permanent Resident Card) in the last year.

Appendix C: Regional Identification Sheet, which is to be submitted with the application as Attachment 2, is revised to delete the Total line at the bottom of the table. Please see revised Application Forms document and RFA.

Questions and Answers

Q1: I want to know if it's okay for an organization that provides a tremendous amount of wrap around services to immigrants and only refers them to legal organizations for completing naturalization applications can apply for funding (RFA#21-ONA-50), if the organization has not completed 100 applications?

A1: Completing 100 applications in the past year is not a requirement for an organization to be eligible to apply for this grant, however, as noted in Section IX. A, completing 100 applications in the past year will be one of the criteria used to score applications.

Q2:

(a) In regard to the formatting requirements. In past years this was the requirement: “The narrative portions of the application should be typed, double-spaced, using Times New Roman font size 12, and margins no narrower than .75/right-left, and .5/top-bottom.” Is this still to be followed? I cannot see new guidelines in this year's RFP.

(b) Are there any page limits or font or spacing requirements for the application?

(c) Whether applications are submitted in-person, by mail, or electronically, are there word or character limits to replies to the questions found in Parts C, D, and E on pages 11 to 13 of the RFA?

A2: There are no formatting requirements in this RFA.

Q3: I am reaching out on behalf of an organization that is not DOJ recognized and certified due to the fact that they use attorneys only in all court settings. The DOJ website explains that this is not required when this is the case. Therefore, does this organization require this DOJ certification to be eligible for this funding opportunity?

A3: As stated in the RFA Section III Applicant Eligibility, and as required of ONA Opportunity Centers in previous opportunities, applicants must be DOJ recognized and in active status at the time of submission to be eligible to apply.

Q4: We are reviewing the RFA for the legal Opportunity Centers and note that it states you cannot have 2 opportunity centers in the same zipcode. However, I note that The Center in Oneida has both an ESOL Opportunity Center and legal Opportunity Center. Is there any chance you can confirm whether an organization is able to hold two different Opportunity Centers (1 ESOL and 1 legal) in the same building / zip code?

A4: The RFA states that multiple ONA Opportunity Centers cannot be in the same zip code. ESOL Opportunity Centers are funded under a separate grant and are not the same as an ONA Opportunity Center. Both ESOL Opportunity Centers and ONA Opportunity Centers may be held in the same building/zip code.

Q5: I just want to verify if this a new RFP for the continuation of the existing ONA program and we should apply? As you know our award was continued until April 30th this year and it seems a bit early for a new application.

A5: This RFA will replace current ONA Opportunity Center contracts that are set to end on 4/30/2022.

Q6: Would you please indicate whether hiring an attorney as the program coordinator would be permissible under the terms of the grant?

A6: Yes, salaries and associated fringe for employees directly providing services described in the RFA are eligible expenses. The applicant should include in the budget narrative a description clearly linking the costs to specific proposed services and activities and justifying how the proposed costs will directly support activities under this grant.

Q7: Under Section IV. Application Procedures, the RFA states that both electronic and mailed or hand delivered applications will be accepted. Do we need to submit both electronically and by mail or hand delivery, or can we submit by email only?

A7: Applications may be submitted either by email or mail/hand delivery. Applications that are submitted by email do not require submission of a hard copy by mail/hand delivery.

Q8: Are electronic signatures acceptable, or do we need to get original signatures?

A8: No, application forms must be signed in hard copy and scanned into a .pdf for submission.

Q9: What does conducting fee assistance lotteries on a quarterly basis entail?

A9: Once per quarter, grantees will use a lottery system to randomly select clients whose application fees will be paid using funds made available under this grant. Grantees should screen all applicants they assist to determine interest in the lottery. Clients who have completed their applications with the grantee and are interested in fee assistance will be entered into the next lottery. The grantee should develop a randomized system for selecting clients which may include drawing names or software that randomly selects people.

Q10: Are partnership letters required for employment partners?

A10: No.

Q11: Under Program Description, question 10 asks us to describe staff who will attend monthly webinars. Does “staff” refer to ONA staff or ONA Opportunity Center staff?

A11: Staff refers to grantee staff funded under this grant.

Q12: We have recently submitted our DOJ renewal certification application, but we have not received the certification yet. Can we submit previous approval letters, recent email confirmation of application receipt as proof of DOJ certification, and/or a letter from USCIS recommending our application for approval?

A12: As stated in the RFA Section III Applicant Eligibility, and as required of ONA Opportunity Centers in previous opportunities, applicants must be DOJ recognized and in active status at the time of submission.

Q13:

(a) For the Workforce Coordination Assistance requirement, what outcomes does the state want us to provide? Does the state want referrals only, or placements also?

(b) Will grant awardees be expected to track any workforce development-related outcomes, i.e., ONA Center participants placed in jobs, employment skills training programs, or post-secondary education efforts?

A13: Only referrals must be tracked for this grant.

Q14: For the Citizenship Preparation Classes tracking requirement, how long does the state want us to follow students if they take longer to go through the interview and citizenship test? For example, an individual who we helped apply in January 2020 still has not heard when his interview will be. Do we continue to track that student?

A14: Grantees should track clients for the duration of the contract.

Q15: For the Citizenship Preparation Classes, can the state confirm that a status of “pending” is acceptable?

A15: ONA recognizes that some students who have completed the citizenship preparation classes may still be waiting for their naturalization interview date to be scheduled. Those students can be reported as pending for that specific deliverable.

Q16: Does the state have a preference for the breakout of the number of community workshops versus legal policy workshops as in the past?

A16: There is no preference.

Q17: Most of our community members are low-income and quality for assistance with filing fees. Can we use the \$12,000 fee assistance funding for anything else?

A17: This funding can only be provided to cover the cost of submitting applications, including biometrics when necessary.

Q18: On the Attachment 2: Regional Identification Form, there's a total field at the bottom of the chart. What do we put in that total field?

A18: The Regional Identification Sheet in Appendix C (which is to be submitted as Attachment 2) has been modified to remove the "Total" line at the bottom. Please see revised RFA and Application Forms documents for the revised form.

Q19: Section D. Capacity, question 1, states, "Indicate whether applicant has at least two DOJ accredited staff members or an immigration attorney on staff." We plan to submit two applications for two different programs. To clarify, does this mean we must have at least two DOJ accredited staff members per contract, or two total for the agency?

A19: Applicants are expected to have sufficient staffing, including DOJ accredited staff and/or an immigrant attorney, in place in order to meet the required deliverables under this grant and to ensure that there is no gap in services.

When applying for more than one region, and DOJ accredited staff will be providing services in more than one region, applicants must submit a separate, complete application for each region and should clearly demonstrate in each separate application how their proposed staffing structure will meet the deliverables under each grant contract. Grantees must maintain timesheets and payment records that clearly indicate the time worked on the different grants and provide those when vouchering.

Q20:

(a) On the bottom of page 4, the RFA states "It is recommended that each organization have at least two DOJ accredited representatives on staff during the duration of the grant." Is it recommended that these staff members both be full-time employees? If so, what do you think is a reasonable salary to pay them, given the cost of living in NYS?

(b) On the bottom of page 4, the RFA states "It is recommended that each organization have at least two DOJ accredited representatives on staff during the duration of the grant." Is it recommended that these staff be charged at 100% to the grant contract?

A20: It is not required that both of these staff members be full time employees or be charged 100% to the grant contract. Staffing levels and salaries are at the discretion of the applicant.

Q21: Do undergraduate college interns or law school students count as volunteers? Are volunteers who assist with the preparations for the citizenship exam required to have any credentials (i.e., a teaching license, ESOL certification, or adult education certification)? Please see pages 3 and 4 of the RFA.

A21: There are no set requirements or credentials for who can be a volunteer as long as grantees adhere to the specific deliverable, training, and reporting requirements for volunteers as outlined in the RFA.

Per Section V, Citizenship Preparation Classes : “Classes should be taught by highly qualified individuals who have had at least two years of demonstrated experience teaching civics to new Americans, either paid or volunteer and should also include time for practice for the citizenship interview. A highly qualified individual is an individual knowledgeable about the Citizenship test and its contents to the extent that they can provide the target population with proper information and preparation. Instructors do not need to be a NYS certified teacher, and the curriculum does not need to be certified by the Department of Education.”

Q22: Are persons who enroll in ONA Center-sponsored citizenship preparation classes also required to receive legal counseling from the ONA center affiliated attorney? (Please see pages 5 through 7 of the RFA.)

A22: No.

Q23: If an organization has its own workforce development department or division, is it required to make workforce development referrals to ONA-approved workforce development programs? Please see page 7 of the RFA.

A23: No, organizations with their own workforce development department or division may make referrals to their own department/division. The grantee should, however, be aware of the services available from the ONA network in case there are services available that their own in-house department does not offer.

Q24: With regards to Citizenship Preparation classes, is the primary target population of this RFA individuals who are English Language Learners (ELLs) or non-English Language Learners? Are ONA Centers to target persons enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes or should the focus be limited to participants who are English language proficient who wish to prepare for the citizenship exam? Please see pages 6 and 7 of the RFA.

A24: There is no language requirement for who can be enrolled in the citizenship preparation class.

Q25: With regards to the community workshops (see pages 5 and 6 of the RFA), are ONA-contracted organizations expected to organize 15 workshops as a sponsoring organization or can they participate in workshops initiated by other institutions, i.e., a local college or university or the office of a locally elected official?

A25: Grantees must organize their own workshops, however, they may partner with other organizations to host these workshops. Participation only in workshops initiated by other institutions would not count towards the community workshop deliverable.

Q26: For "Workforce Coordination Assistance (p. 7), what does "connecting to workforce opportunities" entail? And will there be a target number of workforce referrals that contractors will be required to report on?

A26: Connecting to workforce opportunities means providing clients with referrals as needed. There is no set number of workforce referrals required, grantees are expected to provide these referrals as requested by clients.

Q27: Are organizations that receive ONA Center funding expected to have additional resources to complement the activities that will be supported by ONA funding? The \$100,000 in funding available for expenses other than citizenship application fees may be sufficient to support one full-time position and a part-time position or perhaps three part-time positions, but nothing more. (Please see pages 14 and 15 of the RFA.)

A27: Grantees are expected to provide the deliverables detailed in the RFA with the RFA funding. If organizations feel that additional funding is needed to provide the deliverables, additional funds may be used to supplement the grant. It should be noted that full time positions are not required under this grant.

Q28: In calculating administrative expenses, do we include the \$12,000 for application fees? If so, with a 10% rate we have \$10,080 allowed for administrative costs. If not, with a 10% rate we have \$9,100 allowed for administrative costs. (Please see pages 7 through 9 and 16 of the RFA.)

A28: Administrative costs are allowable up to 10% of direct costs. Application fees are a direct cost therefore the funding for application fees may be included in the calculation of the administrative costs.

Q29: Are organizations required to provide proof of site control as part of the application submission package? (Please see pages 14 and 15 of the RFA.)

A29: No, organizations are not required to provide proof of site control as part of the application however organizations should specify the location where services will be held under Completing the Application, D. Capacity, #5.

Q30: Are organizations permitted to purchase COVID-19 screening software, hand-held thermometers, or wall-mounted thermometers with grant funds? Are Plexiglas partitions and anti-bacterial or anti-viral cleaning materials considered to be eligible expenses? (Please see pages 7 through 9 of the RFA.)

A30: Yes, these would be considered eligible expenses under “10. Personal protective equipment (PPE) for clients and staff necessary for safety of in person activities charged under this grant.”, however these costs must be properly allocated across programs.

Q31: Are costs related to videoconferencing systems like Teams or Zoom eligible expenses? (Please see pages 7 through 9 of the RFA.)

A31: These costs are eligible, but they must be properly allocated across programs.

Q32: Can an ONA Center include a case manager or a benefits/entitlements specialist as part of its staffing? Does this staff person have to be fully supported by funds from this grant? (Please see page 14 of the RFA.)

A32: The grantee may fund any additional staff under this grant that are directly providing services described in the RFA and under required activities in the workplan of the contract. There is no requirement for staff funded under this grant to be fully supported by funds from the grant.

Q33: Is there a checklist that identifies all the items that make up the application? (Please see pages 2 and 3 of the RFA.)

A33: No, however the components that must be included in the application for the submission to be complete are outlined in Section VIII Completing the Application.

Q34: Are there PDFs or Word versions of application questions that are contained in the procurement portal? (Please see pages 2 and 3 of the RFA.)

A34: A Word document with the application questions in Section VIII parts C-F has been created and posted to the website.

Q35: If a hand-delivered or mailed application package is prepared, do responses to the questions in the Experience (Part C), Capacity (Part D), and Program Description (Part E) constitute the proposal narrative? (Please see pages 11 through 13 of the RFA.)

A35: Yes, the proposal narrative consists of responses to Section VIII letters C – E. Please note, all Attachments detailed in Section VIII will also be required for the application to be considered complete.

Q36: Page 5, Legal Consultation Days – how many appointments do you expect the OC to schedule for each of the 20 legal consultation days?

A36: ONA expects the number of appointments to be based on the need in the community; there is no required number of appointments that must be scheduled for each consultation day.

Q37: Is there a minimum number of applicants required for each lottery, and if so, what is that number?

A37: There is no minimum number of applications required for each lottery. Grantees should screen all applicants they assist to determine interest in the lottery. Clients who have completed their applications with the agency and are interested in fee assistance will be entered into the next lottery.

Q38: Is the second DOJ-certified person required to be on site? Can this second person be remote?

A38: The second DOJ-certified staff person can be remote.

Q39: We are not a DOJ approved agency nor have completed naturalization, TPS and DACA applications. That being said, we are planning to subcontract with a legal partner who meets all the eligible requirements to apply for the grant.

- a) **Can the experience of the subcontractor count for our experience to meet the eligibility criteria?**
- b) **Will it be acceptable for the DOJ certified person to be a contract worker until the agency is certified or while application is pending for certification?**

A39: There are no eligibility requirements in regard to experience however, as stated in the RFA Section III Applicant Eligibility, and as required of ONA Opportunity Centers in previous opportunities, applicant organizations must be DOJ recognized and in active status at the time of submission.

Q40: Will ONA impose any particular rules around programs delivering services in person vs. remotely? What kind of flexibility will there be as programs respond to the continuing COVID crisis?

A40: There are no set rules or requirements around in person vs. remote programming, however, ONA reserves the right to request that grantees provide a justification for the need for virtual services at any time.