# **Work Incentives Planning and Assistance**

# **Request for Application Informational Webinar**

# **Questions and answers from 3-25-2021**

# 1. Can the position of Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC) be a full time job?

Of course, the CWIC may be a full-time position. The 16 hours per week for a CWIC and 10 hours for a Project Director serve as minimum time commitments, not caps.

# 2. What is Social Security looking for with suitability?

Another part of the agency handles these evaluations. They look at credit history, criminal history, and they evaluate responses to the questions applicants answer. Applicants must submit fingerprints and complete an online form to make the request. It is critical that the person making the request for suitability completes everything fully and uses the same signature throughout. For example, if your name is Sarah Smith, the application would be sent back if you sign Sally instead of Sarah in one form, and Sara in another.

# 3. Does someone need to do the CWIC training if they are a benefits counselor for an Employment Network (EN)?

In most cases, yes. A person who has very recently completed CWIC training through our contract with Virginia Commonwealth University may be able to use that certification for the Community Work Incentives Coordinator position. Otherwise, regardless of other training and experience, we require that all CWICs successfully complete the initial training and certification, and retain that certification with ongoing training. We will give new projects time to hire and train new staff to meet this requirement.

# 4. Is using new cloud storage options required?

No. A Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) awardee may use the thumb drives we provide as the means of securely storing beneficiary information. The Project Officer and Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program (FedRAMP) approved cloud provider storage is an option a project may elect to use in addition to, or instead of, the thumb drives.

# 5. The RFA says that each project must have a Community Work Incentives Coordinator (CWIC), but can that person be a Community Partner Work Incentives Counselor (CPWIC) also?

A work incentives counselor who works for a WIPA program is a CWIC. It is possible for a CPWIC to work as a CWIC, but he or she may need to attend training again, depending on how recently his or her certification occurred. The big difference in the titles is the nature of the employer. The CWIC title is specific to WIPA.

# 6. There was not much mention in the announcement about letters of support except to say they do not count in the total page count. Is there a desire to see multiple letters of support?

Yes. Letters of support show that you have developed relationships in the proposed service area, which demonstrates your ability to partner effectively with other agencies.

# 7. Is this program the same as Ticket to Work (TTW)?

No. WIPA is a separate program authorized under the same legislation.

# 8. Is there a way to find out how many individuals are typically referred annually in a service area/counties?

We do not have current data we can share regarding the number of referrals for a particular project or area.

# 9. The application says we need letters of support from Federal, State, and local providers. Can you please tell us examples of who we would request those letters from?

Examples include State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, Medicaid agencies, Employment Networks (ENs), or other rehabilitation providers in the area. Any organization with which your agency has a strong relationship and has services that would intersect what a beneficiary may need would provide evidence of your ability to comply with the requirements of this solicitation.

# 10. Is a physical site required for audits?

No.

# 11. Does the requirement to perform outreach for the first 6-months of the cooperative agreement apply to existing WIPA programs as well?”

Yes, existing WIPA projects may conduct outreach within the first six months.

# 12. What is considered "direct service" hours?

Direct Services occur when you are working with a beneficiary, working on a beneficiary’s behalf, documenting work with a beneficiary, or tracking the services you provided. Direct service hours are a total of the hours spent on all of these activities.

# 13. How do billable services work under this grant? As far as, is it a one-time billing service once counseling is provided or are different parts of this service billable at different points of the process?

Social Security sets WIPA funding for a given project at the time of the award. It is not a per-service type of funding. Successful applicants will receive more information on how to request the funding at the time of the award.

# 14. With the remote expectation of the WIPA service, perhaps across states, is it expected that projects will reduce or eliminate occupancy and travel expenses?

We do anticipate lower travel budgets, since the vast majority of services should occur via distance methods.

# 15. Can an agency subcontract out some of the benefits coordination to independent qualified CWIC counselors?

An agency may have a subcontract with an individual to provide benefits coordination (work incentives counseling) but that individual must meet all requirements for training, certification, and time spent on WIPA in order to be a subcontractor.

# 16. Are rental expenses for office space allowed for CWICs?

Rent is an allowable cost under the cooperative agreement budget in most circumstances.

# 17. How would the WIPA project work with VR?

Many WIPA projects work with State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies to provide services. In some cases, that work is on a fee basis. If a WIPA agency has an agreement with the State VR agency, the agreement could continue as long as the time spent providing services under WIPA is not also billed to the State VR agency. The same person can provide the services, just not at the same moment. Even if a WIPA awardee does not have a financial relationship with a state VR agency, the WIPA organization should remember that the state VR agencies are important potential partners and referral sources for the WIPA programs.

# 18. If you want to cover two states, how do you apply for both states?

See pages 18 and 19 of the Request for Application (RFA).

# 19. Do currently certified CWICs who will be working on the new award have to undergo initial CWIC training again?

Current CWICs with current certification would not be required to go through initial training again.

# 20. What is the page limit for letters of support?

Letters of support do not count towards the page limits.

# 21. Are CWIC homes considered to be "secure work environments” for WIPA services?

Social Security would make that decision on a case-by-case basis. The CWIC would need to request, and a Project Officer would have to approve the space as appropriate for WIPA services. The CWIC must be able to ensure the privacy of both the communication with beneficiaries and any information about beneficiaries in order to receive approval. We will provide additional information to successful applicants upon award.

# 22. In relation to the firewall issue you previously mentioned. One of our EN sites is considering hiring a staff member to provide Ticket services but the individual is also seeking WIPA funding to operate an independent business as a CWIC. Is this a conflict?

Yes. The same person cannot provide EN and WIPA services to beneficiaries. That said, an individual cannot receive a WIPA cooperative agreement as an individual. We only accept applications from organizations.

# 23. What are the benefits to our long-standing referral organizations to refer their consumers to the Help Line first vs. referring to our WIPA program directly?

Long-time referral sources may not see it as a benefit. Instead, the benefit of referring to the Help Line is to the WIPA program. If a beneficiary is not eligible for WIPA services, he or she may receive general information and referral to agencies to assist them without taking the time of an experienced CWIC to provide the same information. Also, the Help Line can provide immediate initial verification of the type of benefit the person receives. Although the CWIC will still need to request a Benefits Planning Query (BPQY) prior to intensive individualized counseling, the CWIC can, at the initial contact, provide general information and fact sheets to help the beneficiary begin to understand the concepts that he or she will later need to understand in detail.

# 24. This RFA has an increased emphasis of follow-up services, what is the balance?

The prior RFA also required follow-up. This is not a change. In fact, we intend to simplify and clarify the proactive follow-up requirements in the rollout of the new grantees.

# 25. As a state agency, do we have to complete the Pre-Risk Award Assessment?

Yes.

# 26. Do you have a scoring sheet we can see?

We do not have one to share, but we base scores on the criteria listed in the RFA, beginning on page 29.

# 27. Can you please clarify what you mean when you say the “highest score?” Does this mean for all applicants for a specific territory or highest scores across all applicants?

Because of the flexibility built into the requests for service areas in this RFA, it could mean either a given service area or the highest overall points for an applicant willing to serve anywhere in the country.

# 28. How are you defining "outreach"?

We will provide training on outreach and outreach limitations to successful applicants. In short, outreach is advertising or presenting to other agencies in order to encourage additional business.

# 29. Services provided must be in person or can they also be virtual?

We strongly encourage maximizing virtual services.

# 30. Should applicants complete the budget justification/narrative on a Word document?

Yes.

# 31. Regarding indirect rate Sec 200.414 - if a nonprofit organization HAS a federally-negotiated rate, may it choose to use the de minimis rate (or other lower rate) instead?

It may choose to use a lower rate, but it may not use the de minimis rate. That rate is specific to organizations without an agreement.

# 32. Am I correct in understanding that a CWIC cannot apply for SSA benefits on behalf of a Client?

Correct, though a CWIC may assist a client to apply for other programs. The restriction is specific to SSA benefits, since a person must already be a beneficiary to be eligible for WIPA services.

# 33. With all the changes to territories, has there been thought on how the transitions will take place on July 1?

Yes. We will provide direction to successful applicants and to current awardees at the time of transition.

# 34. Please confirm: are the organizations submitting an application required to be non-profits?

That is not correct. An organization may apply if they are a governmental organization, a university, or even a for profit organization. If the applicant is a for profit company, however, the organization must not use any of the cooperative agreement funding as profit. That part of the business must function as if it were a not-for-profit organization, and the applicant must demonstrate that no WIPA funding will become profit.

# 35. When you say approved cost allocation plan, could you please explain how that happens?

We will accept a cost allocation plan, but it must describe the methods and procedures that an organization uses to allocate costs. For an indirect cost rate, see [2CFR200.414](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/08/13/2020-17468/guidance-for-grants-and-agreements).

# 36. If we do not use a cost allocation plan, but a 10% de minimis, do we submit a statement in lieu of the cost allocation plan?

Yes, we will require a statement.

# 37. Are we allowed to include a pooled admin cost in personnel for ED, CFO, Secretary, etc.?  What about an “Other Administrative” for any other costs not listed (such as bank fees)?

You must break out costs as a percentage of the work performed under the grant. We prefer you give separate details for each item.