



## Frequently Asked Questions about the

Benefits Enrollment Center Sustainability Grant Opportunity  
Released June 2021

For any questions not addressed in this document, please contact email  
[BECproposals@ncoa.org](mailto:BECproposals@ncoa.org).

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## **Application Process and Proposal Details**

**Q: My organization did not submit a notice of intent by the deadline. Are we still eligible to apply for the BEC grant opportunity?**

A: Yes. We ask that you still submit the notice of intent even after the suggested due date since it contains the background information on your agency and it is the only process to receive the link to the application. To submit a notice of intent, visit [https://webportalapp.com/sp/22\\_ncoa\\_bec](https://webportalapp.com/sp/22_ncoa_bec).

**Q: My letter of intent was sent to your office by email. Do I need to send the notice of intent through WizeHive?**

A: Yes. Only organizations that submit letters of intent through the appropriate web link will receive the link to submit the application.

**Q: If a notice of intent is submitted, is confirmation sent?**

A: Yes. All received notice of intents should automatically be sent a confirmation email within 30 minutes of submission. If you do not receive one, you may verify notice of intent submission by sending an email to [becproposals@ncoa.org](mailto:becproposals@ncoa.org).

**Q: Are applicants required to submit their letters of commitment with their application?**

A: No. Applicants must submit their partners' email addresses while filling out their notice of intent. Partners will receive an email with a link to electronically submit their letters of commitment. *Note: Letters of commitment are required for applicants who propose to utilize partners in their proposed BEC model.*

**Q: Are spaces included in the character count on the online application form?**

A: Spaces are included in the character count on the electronic submission form.

**Q: Can I save my work while filling out the application?**

A: We strongly recommend that you draft your responses first in a word processing document and then copy and paste the responses to the online form. If you must step away from the application unexpectedly, then you can save the application to complete at a later time. Remember to use the save button as frequently as possible.

**Q: When attempting to submit a pdf attachment, I received an error saying that the file is too big. How do I reduce the size of the file?**

A: Please follow the instructions on how to compress a PDF: <http://www.wikihow.com/Compress-a-PDF-File>.

**Q: Do we have to identify all personnel who will contribute in any way to this grant?**

A: No. Staff members at your organization who will be providing only administrative or budgeting support to this grant do not need to be identified. We are interested in the staff who will be carrying out or supervising the activities you propose in your application.

## Eligibility

### **Q: Can national organizations apply?**

A: National organizations are welcome to submit a proposal. However, much of this work is done locally and requires local and state relationships to make sure that the process is as seamless as possible. Please include how you will navigate this as a national organization in your proposal.

### **Q: Can agencies or organizations serving people in U.S. territories apply for this grant?**

A: Residents of U.S. territories are not eligible for most of the core benefits mentioned in the RFP. If you are interested in serving residents of U.S. territories as your target population, please contact us to discuss which benefits you would provide assistance with and if the model fits the BEC program.

### **Q: Is an organization that serves people who are ineligible for one of the core benefits (e.g., a subsidized housing provider serving residents who are ineligible for LIHEAP) eligible to apply for a BEC grant?**

A: We would need to evaluate this on a case-by-case basis. Please contact us at [becproposals@ncoa.org](mailto:becproposals@ncoa.org) if this situation applies to you.

### **Q: Can an organization currently receiving MIPPA funding apply for this grant opportunity?**

A: Yes, an organization receiving MIPPA funds through an alternative source may receive funding from NCOA. It is essential that the client served through MIPPA funding are “unduplicated” meaning each client served is only associated with one grant.

## Quantitative Objectives

### **Q: What kind of assistance must be provided to a client to count that individual toward the total number of clients assisted? Will screening a client for eligibility count?**

A: To count a client toward your BEC work, the BEC must assist clients with completing and submitting applications for the core and any additional benefits for which those individuals screen eligible. BECs should also assist clients with recertifying for these core benefits when necessary. Screening individuals without assisting them in enrollment does not count toward this total and is not the goal of the BEC.

### **Q: What if a client is screened but does not appear to be eligible for any of the core benefits, would they count toward our BEC’s goal?**

A: A client who is not eligible to apply for any of the core benefits would count toward the total number of clients assisted if they were assisted with an optional benefit outside the five core benefits. We anticipate that every grantee will screen some individuals who are ineligible or choose not to apply for benefits. It is important that grantees screen clients who may not be eligible for any core benefits.

**Q: If you help an individual apply for 3 or 4 different public benefits, does that count as 3 or 4 toward the client goal, or just 1?**

A: Our primary metric is the number of individuals assisted with completing applications for all of the benefits for which the client is eligible.

**Q: We receive funding from other sources to do benefits enrollment work (for example, MIPPA funding). Can we count the people we serve under those sources toward this grant's total goal of individuals assisted?**

A: No, we expect that this project will serve additional clients over and above the number of people you would otherwise reach under your current activities, as BECs will be expressly working to create more seamless systems of benefits access. We are interested in proposals that leverage other benefits access work already underway.

**Q: Are BECs required to provide personally identifiable data about clients in the monthly reporting? Some immigrant clients are concerned with this information being shared with Federal agencies.**

A: Grantees are required to report data in the aggregate. We do not ask for client-specific data.

## **Target Area**

**Q: How large or small should our target area be?**

A: You have broad discretion in defining the area you would like to serve. Your target area can be a city (or even a part of a city), a county, multiple cities or counties, or a state. Since eligibility for a number of benefits is determined at the state level, if you intend to serve more than one state we expect to see how you will handle working with multiple government agencies determining eligibility in your proposal. As with other aspects of the proposal review, we will be looking for both how reasonable your proposal is and how large of an impact it would have.

**Q: Will you consider funding a new BEC in an area where there is currently a BEC operating? Will you consider funding two new BECs in the same state?**

A: We are looking to expand our network of BECs through this grant, which means we are not likely to fund agencies where there is already a BEC. However, if your agency is located in an area that currently has a BEC but is serving an unique population, then it will be considered.

**Q: Where are the current BECs located? Do most of the current BECs serve entire states or smaller areas, such as multiple counties or a metropolitan area?**

A: A list of the current BECs and the areas they serve can be found at <https://www.ncoa.org/article/meet-our-benefits-enrollment-centers>. Some of the current projects are statewide while others target a smaller area.

**Q: Can an existing BECs expand its geographic area service area?**

A: NCOA encourages organizations to increase the number of clients served over time and we do not limit partners from assisting clients that need help. Please be mindful if expansion conflicts with another BEC and keep NCOA updated.

**Q: My organization serves all listed target populations, should I check all of the boxes on the application?**

A: Although an organization may serve all eligible clients seeking services, NCOA would like applicants to highlight targeted strategies that are unique to each of the checked special populations.

**Q: How does NCOA define persons of disabilities for the purpose of this grant opportunity?**

A: Client's eligibility to be counted toward this grant must meet the criteria of a Medicare beneficiary.

## **Use of Grant Funding**

**Q: Can we use some of these grant funds to pay for outreach activities?**

A: Yes, you can use some of these grant funds for outreach. However, keep in mind that the primary goal of these grants is enrollment, not outreach. Outreach is an ancillary activity that generates enrollment. Please explain in your proposal how any non-enrollment activities you intend to undertake, such as outreach and education, will contribute to the primary goal of enrolling individuals in these benefits programs.

**Q: Is there a maximum percentage of the grant that we can use for technology?**

A: We don't have a specific cut-off in mind for funds used on technology purchases. The key guideline here, as in the case of outreach, is that the grant is focused on enrollment. If you choose to budget for technological purchases, please be clear about how those purchases will contribute to the "bottom line" of increasing enrollments.

**Q: Can we use some of the grant funding to pay for training for our staff or for staff members at partner organizations on the details of benefits eligibility and enrollment processes?**

A: Yes. Since the training is ancillary (like outreach), it should be tied to the changes you propose to improve the benefits access system in your target area.

**Q: Would it be inappropriate to use some of the grant funds to create a new staff position, or to pay the salaries of existing staff members?**

A: Paying a portion of staff salaries is a valid use of the grant funds. Since grant activities are being supported by specific staff time, you should be clear in your proposal about how your project will be sustainable in terms of the proposed system to reduce barriers and make benefits access more sustainable beyond the funding period.

**Q: May some of the grant funds be used to support an AmeriCorps VISTA?**

A: Yes.

**Q: Is it possible to split the funding awarded via a subcontract with a local partner?**

A: Yes. We encourage BECs to partner with local community organizations to provide person-centered benefits enrollment. If you choose to include a local partner in your efforts, please clearly define the designated role the partner will serve and plans to

execute the agreement. It is requested that the applicant submit a letter of commitment from the partner that explains the role the partner will play in the project with the agency's proposal. See "Partnerships" section for more details.

**Q: Is there a listing of eligible costs under this grant?**

A: Yes. All funds provided by this grant program are federal funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living. As such, all current federal rules apply and must be adhered to by grantees. The full grants policy can be found here: <http://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/grants/grants/policies-regulations/hhsqps107.pdf>

## **Project Activities**

**Q: Does a Benefits Enrollment Center need to be brick-and-mortar physical location, or can it take other forms?**

A: A BEC does not need to be a physical location. Applicants have broad discretion in devising the strategies and activities that they believe will be most effective. Applicants must provide justification for why this model is well suited to establishing a seamless system of benefits enrollment.

**Q: Are we required to provide screening and enrollment assistance for all five core benefits, or can we choose only some of the benefits on that list?**

A: All BEC grantees must provide screening and enrollment assistance for all five core benefits (LIS, MSPs, Medicaid, SNAP, and LIHEAP) at a minimum.

**Q: If a beneficiary declines to apply for some of the benefits for which they are eligible, are we penalized?**

A: The final decision about whether to submit an application for a particular benefit always belongs to the individual beneficiary. Grantees are expected to respect the beneficiary's final decision for enrolling in benefits. BECs are responsible for educating beneficiaries about all of the benefits they may be eligible for in order to make a fully informed decision.

**Q: How many clients should our BEC expect to serve during the grant period?**

A: NCOA notified each organization of their grant goal by email. If you did not receive your goal, please email [becproposals@ncoa.org](mailto:becproposals@ncoa.org).

**Q: Why did my organization received a higher goal than the previous grant cycle?**

A: NCOA determines goals based on past performance and encourages ongoing growth each year. This grant opportunity is for a 24-month period and the goal covers the entire grant.

**Q: What is the planning period allowed for the grant?**

A: The initial month of your grant is designated for planning and implementation of your BEC. As a new grantee you will receive a grace period of the first three months to fully implement the BEC and to begin working with clients. This time period is already built into the grant.



**Q: Is there a difference between clients screened for benefits and clients assisted?**

A: For the purpose of this grant, clients assisted is number of clients who submitted at least one application.

**Q: Can an applicant plan to reapply for another BEC grant after the grant period is over?**

A: In general, BEC grants are designed to establish seamless systems for benefits access. During the grant period, applicants are expected to build capacity to sustain the BEC program through diverse funding sources. Applicants demonstrating strong performance and remain in compliance are encouraged to reapply for sustainability funding from NCOA at the conclusion of the grant period.

**Q: Is training and technical assistance provided during the grant period? If so, what does it entail?**

A: Yes. Training and technical assistance is provided over the grant period. Training and technical assistance includes access to best practices, monthly support calls, peer learning sessions, and webinars. All funded organizations will send at least one staff member to NCOA's annual Age+Action conference.

**Q: Can an Executive Director serve as the program director for the is grant opportunity?**

A: The RFP states that the program director should not be a C-Suite level staff person.

## **BenefitsCheckUp® (BCU)**

**Q: Are we required to use the National Council on Aging's BenefitsCheckUp® ([www.BenefitsCheckUp.org](http://www.BenefitsCheckUp.org)) tool as our online screening tool under this grant?**

A: Yes, however, if you are serving an area where access to the internet is unreliable, you may also choose to use a screening tool that is not web-based. Please be sure to justify that choice as well.

**Q: Our agency uses another screening tool. Is it okay if we don't use BenefitsCheckUp®?**

A: If your organization doesn't use BenefitsCheckUp®, then please explain what tool you use and why in your proposal.

## **Partnerships**

**Q: Are partnerships required as part of the Benefits Enrollment Center?**

A: We expect all successful proposals to describe how they intend to work with the government agencies determining eligibility for the core benefits in their area. We do not require specific partnerships, but since these grants are focused on the creation of a seamless person-centered system of benefits assistance and enrollment, we strongly

encourage all applicants to think about how other organizations could best contribute to that system.

**Q: What is required from intended partners in the proposal?**

A: You should explain clearly what role each of your designated partners will serve. Proposed partners are required to submit an electronic letter of commitment agreeing to serve and explain that specific role in the BEC. The letter of commitment can be addressed to NCOA or the applicant organization. Applicants can submit up to five email addresses within their notice of intent of references who will complete an electronic letter of commitment. The role of the supporting agency and the reason they are supporting the application must be clear. A large number of generic letters of support are unnecessary and discouraged.

## **Budget**

**Q: Are you reviewing an organization's total operating budget? If so, what will you be looking for?**

A: We will review an applicant's proposal to determine if the grant award amount does not exceed 10% of the organization's total operating budget.

**Q: Will we receive start-up funds at the beginning of the grant period?**

A: Yes, you will receive a portion of the grant award at the very beginning of the grant period.

**Q: What is the limit of the indirect/administrative rate that may be charged under this grant?**

A: We do not have a specific indirect rate. You are welcome to allocate a reasonable percentage of the funds to indirect/administrative costs. Please explain your indirect costs in your budget narrative.

**Q: Does NCOA require match funding of any kind?**

A: No, NCOA does not ask for organizations to match grant funds for this opportunity.

**Q: Who should be listed as top 5 financial supporters? Does it need to be 5 funders?**

A: An applicant should list the funding streams that support the BEC program. This may be different from your organizations top 5.