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Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Grants: Announcement Overview

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May 30, 2006

The fiscal year 2006 federal budget bill—known as the “Deficit Reduction Act of 2005” (DRA)—provides \$100 million per year for five years to fund healthy marriage promotion efforts, and \$50 million per year over five years for responsible fatherhood programs. The money is to be distributed through a competitive grants process.

On May 16, 2006, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announced the availability of funds for healthy marriage programs, specifically Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants and a National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC). Applicants for these funds must submit their applications by June 30, 2006. The full details are available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/index.html>

The announcement of funds for the responsible fatherhood programs was released on May 18, 2006. Applicants for these funds must submit their proposals by July 3, 2006. The full details are available at www.acf.hhs.gov/grants/open/HHS-2006-ACF-OFA-FR-0130.

Below is a brief description of each of the funds.

National Healthy Marriage Resource Center

A National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) already exists and currently operates a website that serves as a national repository and clearinghouse for information and research relating to healthy marriage. The funding described in the May 16, 2006 announcement is to support the continuation of this work as well and to expand the NHMRC’s technical support activities.

The list of eligible applicants is broad and includes nonprofits and for-profits. It also includes (1) state and local governments; (2) private, public and state-controlled institutions of higher education; (3) Native American tribal governments; and (4) small businesses. Faith- and community-based organizations that meet the statutory eligibility requirements may also apply. One grant will be awarded and the successful applicant will receive \$2 million annually for five years. The grantee must provide a match of at least 10 percent of the total approved cost of the project. The match may be met by cash or in-kind contributions, although applicants are encouraged to meet their match requirements through cash contributions.

The successful applicant will be responsible for the activities listed below, in addition to other activities:

1. Developing healthy marriage resource materials;
2. Providing a forum for dissemination of healthy marriage research;
3. Developing and maintaining a database of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)-funded healthy marriage program and research contacts; and
4. Providing training and technical assistance to States and other programs operating healthy marriage programs.

Applicants must “describe how the proposed programs and activities will address, as appropriate, issues of domestic violence; and contain a commitment to consult with experts in domestic violence or relevant community domestic violence coalitions.... In addition applicants must ensure that programs eligible for and seeking technical assistance, meet this requirement.”

Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants

State and local governments, nonprofits, for-profits, as well as faith- and community-based organizations may apply for Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grants. HHS anticipates funding about 125 such programs. Successful applicants must provide a match of at least 10 percent of the total approved cost of the project. The match may be met by cash or in-kind contributions.

Healthy Marriage Demonstration Grant funds may be used to support projects that promote healthy marriages through a variety of allowable activities including:

1. Public advertising campaigns on the value of marriage and the skills needed to increase marital stability and health;
2. Education in high schools on the value of marriage, relationship skills, and budgeting;
3. Marriage education, marriage skills, and relationship skills programs that may include parenting skills, financial management, conflict resolution, and job and career advancement for non-married pregnant women and non-married expectant fathers;
4. Pre-marital education and marriage skills training for engaged couples and for couples or persons interested in marriage;
5. Marriage enhancement and marriage skills training programs for married couples.
6. Divorce reduction programs that teach relationship skills;
7. Marriage mentoring programs, which use married couples as role models and mentors in at-risk communities; and
8. Programs to reduce the disincentives to marriage in means-tested aid programs if offered in conjunction with any of the other seven activities.

Eligible applicants may submit one or more applications in any of the following priority areas.

- **Community Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement Multiple Allowable Activities:** up to 30 grants at funding levels from \$450 thousand to \$5 million per year will be awarded. Applicants must involve stakeholders from diverse community sectors and reach as many interested participants as possible. They must implement five or more of the eight activities listed above. There is no specific requirement that low-income populations be served.
- **Healthy Marriage Grants to Serve Low Income Married Couples:** up to 30 grants at funding levels from \$225 thousand to \$450 thousand will be awarded. These projects will have as their primary target audience low-income married couples as described in activity #5. Some of the successful applicants may be selected to become Supporting Healthy Marriages (SHM) federal demonstration program sites.
- **Healthy Marriage Grants to Serve Low-Income Unwed Expectant or New Parents:** up to 30 grants at funding levels from \$450 thousand to \$1.1 million will be awarded. These projects will have as their primary target audience low-income unwed expectant or new parents as described in activity #3. Some of the successful applicants may be selected to become Building Strong Families (BSF) federal demonstration program sites.
- **Healthy Marriage Grants to Implement Any Allowable Activity:** up to 45 grants of between \$450 thousand and \$550 thousand will be awarded. These projects will select one or two of the eight activities and focus on a primary target audience. Both the activities and the target audience will be selected by the applicant. There is no specific requirement that these funds be used to serve low-income populations.

This is a flexible category and funds may be targeted on special populations served in a variety of service sectors. For example, it could include schools, youth serving agencies or teen pregnancy prevention orgs, a Head Start or Child Care program, a social service or health agency that provides services to families in situations that place stress on a marital/co-parenting relationship (serious illness of a child, just arrived immigrant or refugee families, families who are adopting special needs children, prisoner re-entry programs) who want to integrate a relationship education, marriage strengthening component to services they already provide families.

Regardless of the category, all applicants must be prepared to attend periodic grantee meetings, receive technical assistance from HHS or its contractors, and participate in quantitative and qualitative evaluations. In addition, all applicants must:

1. Describe what they will do to ensure that participation is voluntary and how they will inform program participants that the program is voluntary;
2. Include evidence that they have a commitment to consult with experts in domestic violence prevention or with domestic violence coalitions in developing activities and materials, and describe how the proposed programs/activities will address domestic violence issues;

3. Provide a commitment that funds will be used only for the purposes listed in the legislation; and
4. Agree not to discriminate on the basis of race, age, gender, disability or religion.

Applications in each priority area will be evaluated against the criteria set forth in the funding announcement.

Responsible Fatherhood Grants

States, territories, counties, cities, townships, independent school districts, public and state-controlled institutions of higher education, Native American tribes and tribal organizations, and public housing authorities are all eligible to apply for these funds. In addition nonprofits (including faith-based organizations) may apply. Applicants with demonstrated experience in implementing fatherhood programs and services can receive extra evaluation points.

A total of \$50 million per year for five years is available for Responsible Fatherhood endeavors. HHS anticipates funding about 90 such programs. Successful applicants must provide a match of at least 10 percent of the total approved cost of the project. The non-Federal share may be met by cash or in-kind contributions.

Responsible Fatherhood grants may be used for three main purposes: promote and sustain healthy marriages; foster responsible parenting; and provide economic stability. The announcement lists several specific activities that could be included under these headings:

Purpose 1. Promote and Sustain Healthy Marriage: this includes activities such as:

- Skill-based marriage education;
- Marriage preparation programs;
- Marital inventories;
- Premarital counseling;
- Relationship skill education with a special focus on how good relationships help to prepare men and women for healthy marriages;
- Counseling, mentoring, and information dissemination about the benefits of marriage and two-parent involvement for children;
- Education regarding how to control aggressive behavior within the context of marriage, with a special focus on reducing and eliminating aggressive behavior and how it can contribute to healthy marriages; and
- Divorce education and reduction programs, including medication and counseling.

Purpose 2. Foster Responsible Parenting: this includes activities such as:

- Skill-based parenting education;
- Disseminating information about good parenting practices;
- Counseling, mentoring and mediation;

- Disseminating information about the causes of domestic violence and child abuse; and
- Encouraging child support payments.

Purpose 3. Provide Economic Stability: this includes activities such as:

- Helping fathers improve their economic status by providing activities such as Work First services, job search, job training, subsidized employment, job retention and enhancement, and encouraging education (including career advancement education);
- Coordinating with existing employment services, such as welfare-to-work programs, and referrals to local employment training initiatives;
- Disseminating employment materials; and
- Offering financial planning seminars, including those that improve a family's ability to effectively manage family business affairs through education, counseling, or mentoring on matters related to family finances, including household management, budgeting, banking and handling of financial transactions and home maintenance.

HHS anticipates funding projects of varying sizes with broad and narrow focuses. Therefore, it has divided the money into five categories as described below. Eligible applicants may submit one or more applications in any of the five categories:

Responsible Fatherhood Multiple Activity Grants, Level 1: up to 3 grants of up to \$1 million will be awarded. Applicants for this money must undertake activities in at least two of the three propose areas listed above. Programs funded in this category must involve stakeholders from diverse community sectors—for example, government, schools, faith-based organizations, businesses, healthcare—and reach as many interested participants from across the community as possible. Applicants may target their services broadly or target a specific population. They may (but are not required to) target low-income populations.

Responsible Fatherhood Multiple Activity Grants, Level 2: up to 14 grants of up to \$500 thousand will awarded. Applicants for this money must also undertake activities in at least two of the three purpose areas. Programs funded in this category must also involve stakeholders from diverse community sectors—for example, government, schools, faith-based organizations, businesses, healthcare—and reach as many interested participants from across the community as possible. Applicants may target their services broadly or target a specific population.

Responsible Fatherhood Single Activity Grants, Level 1: up to 52 grants of up to \$250 thousand dollars will be awarded. Applicants for this money can focus on just one of the purposes. Applicants can opt to focus on a single population such as youth or low-income families. Fathers may live in or outside the home. HHS anticipates that these projects will involve a select group of stakeholders.

Responsible Fatherhood Single Activity Grants, Level 2: up to 10 grants of up to \$500 thousand will be awarded. Applicants for this money can also focus on a single purpose and a single population. Fathers may live in or outside the home. HHS anticipates that these projects will involve a select group of stakeholders.

Responsible Fatherhood, Marriage, and Family Strengthening Grants for Incarcerated Fathers and their Partners: up to 10 grants of up to \$400 thousand will be awarded. Applicants for this money should focus on marriage promotion or strengthening activities. They may also provide services to improve parenting or promote economic stability, but this is not required. The focus of these grants is fathers who are currently incarcerated or very recently under criminal justice supervision. Applicants must involve stakeholders from the criminal justice system as well as other community sectors. They must also address how they will help participants access mental health and substance abuse services. In addition, they must consider issues of couples separated by geography, the continuity of services between prison and community, integration of the new services with other prison re-entry programs, linkages to programs already serving families with an incarcerated member, and risk factors such as domestic violence.

Regardless of the category, all applicants must be prepared to attend periodic grantee meetings, receive technical assistance from HHS or its contractors, and participate in quantitative and qualitative evaluations. In addition, they must:

1. Describe what they will do to ensure that participation is voluntary and how they will inform program participants that the program is voluntary;
2. Include evidence that they have a commitment to consult with experts in domestic violence prevention or with domestic violence coalitions in developing activities and materials, and describe how the proposed programs/activities will address domestic violence issues;
3. Provide a commitment that funds will be used only for the purposes listed in the legislation; and
4. Agree not to discriminate on the basis of race, age, gender, disability or religion.

States that have elected to participate in the Executive Order 12372 process must submit their applications (except those in Category 5) to their State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) entity. Specific details about the content of the application as well as the evaluation criteria are contained in the announcement.

For more information related to healthy marriage programs, please contact: Theodora Ooms (e-mail: tooms@clasp.org phone: 202-906-8010) or Paula Roberts (e-mail: proberts@clasp.org phone: 202-906-8021) at CLASP.

For more information about the provisions in the DRA, see the brief, *The Marriage and Fatherhood Provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005* by Paula Roberts, available at: http://clasp.org/publications/marriage_conference.pdf.