Module 4 Summary: The Application Review, Approval, and Award Process

This module provided additional information about the application review, approval, and award process, focusing primarily on the role of the project officer. You learned to:

- Identify project officer roles and responsibilities during the application process.
- Identify the purpose of requesting a Letter of Intent (LOI) from applicants.
- Describe project officer tasks during the application review.
- List three factors that influence the decision to award an FOA.
- Define the roles of project officer and grants management specialist (GMS) when discussing the budget with a prospective recipient.
- Describe responsibilities of the project officer and the grantee after issuance of the NoA.

Lesson 1: The Project Officer’s Role in the Application Process

Application Process

Once an FOA is published, eligible applicants can decide if they want to apply. During the time the FOA is open, project officers may be called upon to review an applicant’s Letter of Intent (LOI) and/or answer questions from potential applicants about the FOA.

Letter of Intent

The purpose of an LOI is to gauge applicant interest for the funding opportunity. The level of interest helps CDC to plan the application review. Each LOI indicates the core activities and projects of the organizations applying for the grant.

Remember, not all applications require an LOI. If an LOA is required, any interested applicant who fails to submit the LOI on time is precluded from submitting a full application.
Answering Questions About the FOA

Potential applicants may contact you with questions about a published FOA. Remember, you can discuss only the following topics about an FOA:

- Information contained in the FOA, such as font and format, other submission guidelines, programmatic requirements, and the application process.
- Clarification of the technical evaluation and funding criteria.

Other questions are deferred to the Grants Management Officer (GMO) and the point of contact (POC) to ensure that all applicants receive the same, accurate information.

FOA Conference Call

It is common for CDC programs to convene a conference call to present highlights of the FOA and offer applicants an opportunity to ask questions. A Procurement and Grants Office (PGO) representative provides clarification about specific inquiries.

The program then sends or posts a summary of the call that includes a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) after the conference call, along with the slideshow presenting the highlights of the FOA.

Lesson 2: The Project Officer’s Role in the Application Review

Application Review

As a project officer, you may be asked to perform any of the following tasks related to application review:

- Prepare needed review forms.
- Find and coordinate reviewers.
- Reserve meeting space for the review.
- Make applications and other relevant materials available in advance of the scheduled meeting.
- Ensure that reviewers understand the process, their role, and the criteria for application evaluation prior to the review.
- Serve as a programmatic point of contact for receipt of the application.
- Screen the application to determine eligibility.
- Explain the role of the GMO, GMS, recorder, and other CIO staff in attendance.
- Collaborate with the GMO to ensure consistency of reviews.
- Participate as a technical resource to the review panel and answer questions at the review meeting.
- Safeguard the review process.

Remember, you cannot participate in the discussion or vote on an application.
Lesson 3: Selection and Budget Discussion

Influencing Factors in Award Decision

The decision to award an FOA is based on several factors.

Information Submitted to GMO

After the review process is completed, the program submits the following information to the GMO:

- The ranking list of applications for review and approval.
- The applications’ order of approval for funding, which may differ from the ranking list based on programmatic priorities and eligibility requirements.
- A funding memorandum that includes acknowledgement of the documents listed in the Checklist for Funding Packages.
- Any special conditions to be considered for inclusion in the award such as unallowable expenditures.

Budget Discussion

Once the Checklist for Funding Package has been sent to the GMS, the GMS initiates the funding discussion and award process with the potential recipient.

The GMS and the project officer discuss the findings of the objective review panel before the project or budget is approved. If programmatic and/or budget changes are required, the GMS will discuss them during a call with the potential recipient and may share the findings of the objective review panel at this time.

The GMS is responsible for leading the discussion, providing clarification, and ensuring mutual understanding of requirements and expectations. This is particularly important if you did not attend the objective review panel discussion.
Lesson 4: The Award Process

Project Officer Roles and Responsibilities in the Award Process

During the award process, project officers are responsible for:

- Evaluating the scientific or technical aspects of the project in relation to the proposed budget.
- Making certain the budget is adequate and appropriate to carry out the proposed project.

When an application is approved for funding, the potential recipient receives an NoA with a summary statement from PGO.

Award

After CDC awards a cooperative agreement, the terms and conditions of the award govern the recipient’s expenditure of funds. A recipient indicates acceptance of the award and its associated terms and conditions by drawing down funds from the designated HHS payment system.

CDC may require the recipient to formally accept the award by signing and returning the NoA or a separate document. If the recipient cannot accept the award, including the legal obligation to perform in accordance with award terms and conditions, the program should notify the GMO immediately upon receipt of the NoA. If resolution cannot be reached, the GMO will terminate the cooperative agreement. Termination is not subject to appeal by the recipient.

Once the terms of the NoA are accepted by the recipient—who is now called the grantee—the contents of the NoA are binding unless the GMO revises the NoA.

Post-Award Responsibilities

You should conduct a site visit within two to three months following the NoA to:

- Verify that the approved work plan is realistic and likely to produce the stated objectives.
- Assist the grantee to develop their responses to weaknesses noted in the summary statement.
- Begin building a collaborative partnership between the grantee and CDC to develop a successful program outcome.
Module 4 Resources

1. **Example: Letter of Intent for a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement**
   
   This document provides an example of a Letter of Intent submitted by Georgetown University for the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Tuberculosis Prevention, Public Health Conference Support, CDC-RFA-PS13-1305.

2. **Checklist for Funding Packages**
   
   This document provides a list of information to be submitted to PGO.

3. **Example: Summary Statement**
   

Note that this list is not all-inclusive; you should check with your center, division, or branch for additional resources that may be available.

Check the Project Officer Portal for the documents listed above: [http://intranet.cdc.gov/ostlts/projectofficerportal/](http://intranet.cdc.gov/ostlts/projectofficerportal/).