MENTEE APPLICATION

Writing Tips

This tip sheet aims to help potential mentee applicants for the 2022-2023 Reducing Overdose through Community Approaches (ROCA) Mentorship Program build successful proposals for this funding opportunity. However, following the steps in this tip sheet does not guarantee selection.

Getting Started

You’ve found this funding opportunity and the goals and activities of this program are of interest. What next? How do you get started?

☐ 1. Re-read the Mentee Request for Proposals (RFP) from start to finish. Pay close attention to the eligibility criteria as well as the program requirements and expectations. If you have additional questions, email IVP@naccho.org

☐ 2. Share a copy of the RFA for a similar review with anyone else within your department/agency whom you think would be interested in participating and/or whose buy-in would be needed to proceed.

☐ 3. Provide a copy of NACCHO’s standard contract to the individual with signing authority for the LHD (or entity that would be contracting with NACCHO, e.g., city government), including any relevant financial or legal offices for advanced consideration.
   • Note: a signed contract is not needed with the application. The purpose of this step is to ensure your health department will be able to agree to the contract language.

☐ 4. Create a timeline to put together each piece of the application. When building your timeline, start with the end date and work backwards. Factor in draft and final deadlines to develop content for the application narrative, as well as dates by which you will ask other departments, leadership, and/or partners to return additional required forms and documentation. Prioritize getting signatures, letters of support, etc. that may take more time.

☐ 5. Access the online application portal to start your application, creating an account if you do not already have one.

Planning Your Project

Preparation and discussion before you start writing will help you craft a clear, concise argument as to why your agency should be funded. Consider the following steps as part of the planning process. It’s recommended that these conversations and decisions happen collaboratively as a team. For change to be meaningful and effective, you can’t rely on top-down decision making or a singular champion.
1. Start by asking yourselves “what is the data telling us we need?” This “data” can come in many forms—ranging from more formal public health surveillance such as mortality, risk factor, or syndromic surveillance, to Community Needs Assessments or Community Health Assessments, to other data sources from the LHD and community partners, including qualitative information.

2. Consider how this project would or would not align with your organization’s strategic priorities, possibly informed by formal strategic plans or Community Health Improvement Plans.

3. Review the key strategy areas for overdose prevention and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) prevention listed in Section III of the RFA to see which align with your identified needs.

4. Before writing, think and jot down notes about the following questions:
   - What are our agency’s strengths and needs we want to highlight in this application?
   - What opportunities exist within the agency or community that we could try to leverage?
   - What are we hoping to achieve with this mentorship project?

Writing Your Application

After confirming you would like to pursue this opportunity and considering what key strategies to focus on, it’s time to start writing your application. The recommendations that follow are structured around the key sections of the narrative portion of your application. Remember, there are other parts of the application, including contact information, selection of program track and key strategies, jurisdictional characteristics, and additional documentation that are not described in greater detail in this tip sheet but are required for a complete application.

1. **Statement of Need (40%)**. For this section, the goal is to make a convincing argument that demonstrates the need to strengthen capacity in the specific areas selected, clearly connecting why you chose them with the local context and community needs.
   - Ask yourself—what is your problem statement? What is the thesis of your argument as to why your health department should be selected for this program?
   - Tell a story anchored with facts and data, as identified in the planning process above. If your agency is struggling with collecting, accessing, or analyzing local data, perhaps that’s not something to hide or ignore. Rather, be upfront in your application about where gaps exist and perhaps highlight data and surveillance as need and key strategy for your proposed program. Always be sure to specify sources for any data included.

2. **Our Work (20%)**. Thoroughly describe any recent or current work that your LHD has done related to the key strategy areas specified.
   - Start planning your response to this section by jotting down a list of relevant programs, services, and initiatives currently underway or implemented in recent years related to overdose or ACEs prevention. Ask yourself, which are most relevant to each of the selected key strategy areas to which you’re applying? Then craft a narrative response around those you would like to highlight, connecting them to the key strategy areas.
If there is a lot of work underway with a key strategy area, be sure to clarify what barriers or challenges your agency has experienced in this area to highlight the need for additional mentorship.

If there is little to no work underway with a key strategy area, describe what you have done related to overdose and/or ACE prevention work. Then, explain what has impeded progress or efforts in this specific key strategy area thus far and why you believe this is the next direction needed of your current work.

Remember that the goal of this application is to demonstrate need for mentorship, not current capacity, so be sure to share what challenges you may have experienced, and, if applicable, strategies you have taken to try and overcome them.

In your response, be sure to note your (the mentee’s) role in these efforts or the larger agency’s role in each program/service/initiative if part of cross-sector, collaborative efforts with other community partners.

☐ **3. Goals & Interest (20%).** Use this section to connect the statement of need to your interest in the funding opportunity.

- Describe your motivation to apply for this opportunity, including how mentorship will help meet the areas identified as needs above.
- Specify what goals you might have related to strengthening your capacity across the key strategy areas selected. Remember to be realistic given the time, design of the program, and funds provided. Highlight any:
  - Competencies or capacities you would like to develop or strengthen
  - Programs and services you would like to plan or implement
  - Clearly describe the short- (within 12 months) and longer-term outcomes (within three to five years) you anticipate as a result of this proposed work. Remember, even for those focusing on ACE prevention strategies, the ultimate goal is to have an impact on substance use and overdose in your community.
  - When thinking about the overall narrative that you are crafting, there should be a logical connection and progression from the statement of need to the goals and anticipated outcomes. When developing your goals, consider how you could specifically address the needs of disproportionately affected or vulnerable populations in your community as it relates to overdose prevention and response.

☐ **4. Staffing Plan (20%).** The purpose of the staffing plan is to demonstrate that you are prepared to implement your proposed program, specifying who will be participating in the mentorship program from your agency and their anticipated roles and responsibilities.

- When considering this section, it’s important to demonstrate that your organization has the capacity to participate in the described program activities and to build your prevention and response efforts in the identified key strategy areas. While at least one mentee participant is required, we strongly suggest including additional members on your mentee team. Champions for change are important but demonstrating buy-in and participation from leadership or other members of your agency will be important to build lasting capacity.
- In your response, be sure to cover each element asked for in the application instructions. Use clear and concise language to describe your staffing plan.
- Be sure to reflect to any proposed members on your team in your budget as well.
5. **Budget Justification (Not Scored).** There are two components of the budget justification—submission using the templates provided for 1) an excel budget and 2) a narrative explaining the cost breakdown for each line item and relevance to the project. The purpose of the budget justification is to demonstrate how you plan to use the funds to accomplish the project deliverables and that you’ve thought carefully about what the work might entail. Ultimately, this is a firm-fixed price contract, meaning payment will be disbursed based on NACCHO’s receipt of satisfactory deliverables, not cost reimbursement of expenses incurred.

- While you will work with your mentor to develop a specific work plan around the key strategy areas identified, you likely have some ideas in mind as to what you would like to accomplish, as described by the “Goals & Interest” section. If your final work plan sparks the need for revision or reallocation of funds in your budget later, that is okay so long as they are allowable expenses under the terms of NACCHO’s award from CDC.
- First, be sure your budget covers all of the time and expenses required to participate in the program. The budget justification cannot include in-kind contributions, either in labor or materials, as it would indicate the deliverables have been priced inappropriately.
- Then, incorporate possible expenses that could support strengthening capacity in those key strategy areas. Refer to the list of possible uses of funds in the “Application Format and Instructions” within the RFA.
- When developing your budget, review “Appendix A – List of Unallowable Costs” of the RFA to ensure none of those are included as line items in your budget.

### Submitting Your Application

NACCHO requires use of our online portal to submit all mentee applications. This will require providing responses in text fields as well as uploading required documentation.

- **1.** Before submitting, cross-reference your answers for each section of the application with the instructions provided in the RFA. Double check that each bullet specified is addressed in your responses.
- **2.** Check for grammatical errors and typos, particularly for narrative responses that were crafted inside the online portal rather than a word processing program. Make sure that any acronyms are fully spelled out during their first use and abbreviated subsequently.
- **3.** Make sure that you’ve attached all required documentation and that you are submitting versions that have signatures (where required).
- **4.** Don’t wait to submit your application until the last minute—we recommend submitting at least 48 hours before the deadline so NACCHO can help troubleshoot any last-minute issues or challenges encountered.

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**Do you have additional questions about this funding opportunity? Please refer to our Frequently Asked Questions.** If your question was not addressed or you would like to provide feedback on this tip sheet, please reach out to NACCHO’s Overdose, Injury, and Violence Prevention Team at **IVP@naccho.org**.