

Planning Your AoA Hotline Proposal

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This is a guide for organizations planning to submit a proposal for an AoA Hotline grant in 2000. *Some of the tips and tools may be very basic for experienced grant writers. Use what is helpful and disregard the result.* It is based on the Request for Proposals from 1999. The tone is sometimes conversational and casual to demonstrate a point.

The Idea

A key component of any grant proposal is a good idea. To get ideas or to make sure your idea isn't already being done, you can check the internet at www.povertylaw.org for three recent proposals and to order older ones. Looking at this site can also be used in your narrative to detail your knowledge of Hotlines in general. You can also check the "Profiles" link at www.equaljustice.org/hotline1 for senior hotline models from many states.

TIP: You can actually write in your proposal that you visited the sites during the planning of your grant. Referencing the AARP's Legal Hotline Quarterly is another good source to mention and a good way to learn how hotlines operate and what seems to work.

For the AoA grants, the idea needs to be something that can be demonstrated or tested in a three year period. This may seem basic, but a lot times it is forgotten.

Proposals can create a "model" for addressing some set of circumstances that occur in your state and that might also be found elsewhere (i.e. replicable). If your situation is very unique, spend some time thinking about how your procedures or protocols might be used to address some other problem or circumstance to make the case that you are not testing something that only applies in one state and is so narrow that no one will learn anything from your experience.

If your state does not yet have a hotline, then it is a little easier. You will be testing, among other things, whether or not a hotline is an effective delivery system for legal services in your state. Collaboration and coordination are very important, as is choosing/creating a model of a hotline that will work with your situation. For example a state with a small population but a large land mass is very different from a state with a large population and mix of large urban and rural areas. You may be able to come up with a new model and that would be excellent. You will need to know what works and what doesn't because AoA isn't likely to fund an idea that has been tried and didn't work.

If you are an existing hotline, what you propose should be something new or different, not just to your program, but among all Hotlines.

Target populations: Your proposal will be much more sympathetic if you are targeting the poorest or most vulnerable seniors. You may also be serving a traditionally under

served population (explain why they are under served and how you help them). AoA is looking for ways to help minorities, seniors in rural areas, and those in the greatest social and economic need.

Innovation is a critical issue. Don't forget to tell the reviewers **why** your program is innovative. It is also important to demonstrate that it is feasible—that you have the resources, knowledge and the cooperation to make it happen.

Research is very important to all the issues raised above.

TIP: It can be very helpful to start with a two page description of what you are thinking about proposing. This can be used to get feedback from others, especially stakeholders, and to begin to build support in your state. The description should include at a minimum: the need for the project, the numbers to be served, the design of the solution (how the hotline will work), the expected outcomes, and partners (proposed to be) involved.

Stakeholders: You need the Title III B programs and the LSC programs to be supportive. (If they are not giving or sharing funds or resources, it may be sufficient to indicate in the proposal that they are in favor of the project—or at least not opposed. **It would be best if they had a specific role in the proposal to demonstrate coordination/collaboration.**)

You will also need the state bar and the state unit on aging.

It is great if you can incorporate “constituent input.” For example if seniors in your state want the program based on survey data, or comments to a legislators office or a suggestion box, etc...Any way that you can indicate that seniors not only need the program but also want it, will help your proposal.

TIP: You will need letters of support from your state unit on aging and your state bar. Start this process early. Let them know you are planning a proposal. Ask for their support. They may be able to provide in-kind or cash match. They may also help you in other ways...you won't know until you ask.

TIP: Your letters of support should include, if at all possible, some tangible contribution to the project. It may be the loan of conference rooms, help with outreach, anything, in addition to words of praise and support. Praise alone is not worth as much as praise plus actual contributions.

TIP: On letters of support in general—don't waste pages on letters that don't include contributions of a tangible nature (except the 2 required ones). The only exception might be a letter from the LSC program(s) or the Title IIIB program(s) expressing support/cooperation, if not resources.

The Need

To make a compelling case to get the grant, it helps to have **some specific problem(s) that your proposal will solve**. Document the problem in concrete terms. “Currently, it takes 2 weeks for a senior to get an appointment to meet with a lawyer.” “Staff spend 40% of their time traveling to meet with seniors in rural areas, leaving only 60% of their time to do actual case work or advice.”

Also focus on any special populations and their particular legal needs that you plan to serve. You may want to specify areas of law that will be your priorities, especially if there is a shortage of knowledgeable public and/or private attorneys in your geographic area (i.e. Medicaid).

Evaluation

Once you come up with an idea, ask yourself, “how will I evaluate the project?” You will need to be able to measure, test, or demonstrate how your project improved some aspect of service delivery via your hotline.

TIP: You may want to gather some bench mark data prior to the implementation of the new program or service so that you can then measure the improvements the program or project made.

Remember to ask “how will I prove that my project is a success?” and come up with an answer. Specific outcomes need to be proposed. For example, “expand the number of seniors receiving legal advice by 25%,” or “decreases the waiting period to get legal advice by 30%,” etc.

The AoA also expects projects to specify how many:

- Seniors served relative to the number in the state. (Sample: there are 500,000 seniors age 60 and older in X state and 270,000 have incomes below 125% of the federal poverty level. The project will serve 2500 annually or 5% of the senior population)
- cases and calls to be handled each year. You can get help estimating these by checking the “Senior Legal Hotline Annual Report” link at www.equaljustice.org/hotline1 for productivity and cost statistics for the senior hotlines for 1999. Older reports are available at www.povertylaw. If you are starting from scratch, estimate low for the first year and increase the numbers for year 2 and 3.
- calls and cases to be handled by experienced attorneys. It is good to include why you think they can handle the number mentioned. It may be because they already have worked on a hotline or handled a large part of their previous practice over the telephone, etc...)
- Average cost per call and average number of calls per case. (The cost should equal your total budget.)

Budget

This can be challenging, but don't leave it to the last minute. Estimate your **total** costs for the project, including the value of in-kind goods/services. (This is everything, not just the AoA funds.) Multiply the total project cost by .25 (or 25%). This is how much of project needs to come from somewhere other than AoA.

Remember, if you have a small number of seniors in your state, you need to request less federal funds than a big state.

TIP: make a spread sheet with a column indicating your budget line items and columns representing various funders (AoA, State, Inkind, Your Organization, etc.) and plot out how much is coming from where and for which line items. This will help you complete the AoA budget forms. You may even want to use their line items...see the forms in the RFP packet.

TIP: Each quarter you will be required to submit reports and copies (3) of grant products. At the end of the three year period you will need to submit a large number of copies of a final report and products from the grant (14 copies). Be sure to build in time and money for these expenses.

Structure of the Grant Proposal

The AoA wants the narrative portion of the proposal in four main parts. Each part is worth 25 points, so it is important to answer each section as fully as possible. Winning proposals will have the most points.

TIP: Clearly answer each of the major questions the AoA wants addressed in the appropriate section.

Below is a draft list of some of the questions to answer in the sections of the narrative. **(Don't neglect to carefully read the RFP when it is available!!!)** This list may be revised once the 2000 RFP is actually available. It is not exhaustive, but the many of the main issues should be dealt with for each of the major categories. As you write, address/incorporate the questions and answers.

TIP: It is a really good idea to have someone who knows very little about your program or services read the RFP and then your proposal to see if you have addressed the issues requested. You also should have someone other than the author read your narrative for grammar issues.

Purpose and Need for Assistance:

- What is the problem/need for a statewide senior hotline? Start with the problem(s) to be solved in your state. (Include the size and characteristics of your state and number of people potentially impacted by the problem.)
- How will it be solved (how will a hotline with your features solve the problem)?

What method, protocol, service are you testing? How do you anticipate that it will solve the problem? Briefly layout how a client will be served and what areas of the law you will specialize in and why. List any special populations you will be targeting. Briefly explain what your broad expected outcomes are and the benefits to seniors in your state.

- Why is a senior hotline needed, not a general hotline for all ages?
- Demonstrate your knowledge of other hotlines (that you researched them on the web, participated in conference calls, called other programs etc.). Be sure you explain the relationship between your project and the LSC and Title IIIB funded programs in your state. If you don't know what LSC and Title IIIB are, be sure you find out. Also VOCA projects or other private programs providing legal services may be operating in your state. You may want to coordinate with them and mention them as well. Mention the Legal Hotline Technical Assistance Project operated by AARP Foundation and their quarterly newsletter.
- How will you fund the project at the end of the grant period?

Approach/Method-Work Plan and Activities

- How/why is your project innovative? (different, new, etc) What hypothesis (service, protocol) are you testing? What problem are you solving and how are you doing it?
- Can your program (or elements of) be replicated? Who would benefit from replicating it and why?
- Create a step by step work plan/timeline for proposed project activities (a chart). Mention in general terms how you will set up your project and accomplish your goals. Indicate that you have the resources and knowledge to make it happen (why you can accomplish your goals). Indicate that there is consensus/cooperation to make your project work among stakeholders.
- Make sure your tasks are in a logical order (i.e. hire staff before you train them).
- Who will do what? Assign specific tasks to specific job titles or people. (You will be reporting on these quarterly.) Be sure to indicate who will do reports for AoA, who is in charge, etc. (save their qualifications for last section.)
- List your collaborations/partners here.

Anticipated Outcomes and Dissemination

- Who are you helping (rural, non-English speaking, etc)? How many will be helped? How will they be better off? How will you measure the improvement? How will you evaluate your program? What will you do if you encounter a problem and need to change the design of the project? It is advisable to include some measure of customer satisfaction.
- List your planned number of calls and cases, average number of cases per attorney, etc...
- List your planned outcomes. Why are they realistic and why/how are they significant/important? (You will be reporting on these quarterly.)

- How will the project continue after AoA funding?
- How will you disseminate the results of your project? How will you inform the legal community and other legal service providers of what you are doing and how it is working out? It needs to be timely and targeted to an audience who would have an interest. Dissemination should be happening during and at the end of the project. (include these activities on the timeline).
- Is your project replicable? Could other states use your model?

Level of Effort

- Explain the skills and talents of **key** staff. Why they will be able to do the tasks planned. Brag about accomplishments and skills. Estimate time for the proposed tasks and include enough of their time in the grant (link to budget).
- Do you have enough resources to carryout the proposed plan? Explain why you do. Make sure that all the costs related to the tasks listed previously are provided for—in cash or in-kind.
- Have your letters of support detailing their contributions.

Resources for Title IV Grant-writing

- Kate White will provide consultation for planning and writing your grant. She will also review your plans, outlines, and proposal and offer suggestions. Please call her at 517-485-9164 or email her at [**kwhite@mianet.net**](mailto:kwhite@mianet.net).
- 1999 Request for Proposal can be downloaded at [**www.aoa.gov/t4/fy1999**](http://www.aoa.gov/t4/fy1999). The 2000 RFP will also be posted there sometime in May/June.
- Census information for the older population of your state can be found at: [**www.aoa.gov/aoa/stats/98pop/**](http://www.aoa.gov/aoa/stats/98pop/)
- The Legal Hotline Technical Assistance Project Homepage [**www.legalhotlines.org**](http://www.legalhotlines.org). Get hotline profiles, productivity and cost statistics for senior hotlines, post inquiries to the interactive web board.
- The Legal Hotline Technical Assistance Online Library at [**www.povertylaw.org**](http://www.povertylaw.org) Download the 1999 Title IV winning hotline proposals, order older winning proposals, order pre-1999 productivity and cost statistics, download Best Practice Tips Guide, order Legal Hotlines: A How-to Manual.
- The Legal Hotline Technical Assistance Project- you can call or Shoshanna Ehrlich to ask questions or find resources. 954-472-0997;

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